THE SEEMING MIDDLE GROUND: CONCESSIONS OF A REALIST

LAURA ELIZABETH KINGSTON

BOGAZİÇİ UNIVERSITY

2010

THE SEEMING MIDDLE GROUND: CONCESSIONS OF A REALIST

Thesis submitted to the

Institute for Graduate Studies in the Social Sciences

in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

Master of Arts

in

Philosophy

by

Laura Elizabeth Kingston

Boğaziçi University

2010

Thesis Abstract

Laura Elizabeth Kingston, “The Seeming Middle Ground: Concessions of a Realist”.

This project scrutinizes philosophical positions that have both realistic and relativistic tendencies in order to show how the precarious relationship between truth and reality can be stabilised through an endorsement of a particular brand of realism, which arises from a stance that I call the middle ground. The middle ground is a position that situates itself between traditional metaphysical realism and a particular version of antirealism that stems out of this tradition. The middle ground is characterised first by its rejection the traditional metaphysical realist’s notion of a God’s-eye view on reality converging on a single and absolute reference point, and second by its acceptance, as a given, that interpretation plays a significant role in our conceptions of both truth and world. Key in this project is the concern for the roll of limiting radical differences in our accounts of reality. I examine how it is that Michael Lynch, Bernard Williams, and Frank Farrell put forth their explanations of how we can philosophically account for, and explain, differing accounts of reality. The particular brand of realism that arises from this stance toward the middle ground is metaphysically, ontologically, and semantically dependent on subjective input, but not entirely. There is no one particular picture that accounts for this novel and generically nameless brand of realism. Numerous pictures can describe this stance towards truth, world, and subjectivity. It is my claim that Lynch, Williams, and Farrell are exemplary advocates of this brand of realism that aims to situate itself in the middle ground.

Tez Özeti

Laura Elizabeth Kingston, “Görünürdeki Orta Yol: Bir Realistin Verdiği Ödünler”.

Bu proje, hem realist (gerçekçi) hem de relativist (görececi) eğilimleri olan felsefe duruşlarını derinlemesine tartışıyor ve realizmin özel bir hali olarak önerilen “orta yol” duruşunu irdeleyerek, “doğru” ile “gerçeklik” kavramları arasındaki tartışmalı ilişkiyi, bu orta yol sayesinde yapılandırmaya çalısıyor. Sözü edilen orta yol, geleneksel matafizik gerçekçilik ile bu gelenekten yola çıkarak türemiş özel bir anti-gerçekçilik konumu arasında bir duruş olarak tanımlanıyor. Önerilen orta yolun önemli iki özelliğinden biri, geleneksel metafizik gerçekçiliğin “Tanrı’nın bakışı” diye de sözü edilen, tek ve değişmez referans noktasını reddetmesidir. Diğeri ise algının doğru-gerçek ilişkisinin kurulmasında çok önemli bir rol oynadığını baştan kabul etmesidir. Bu projedeki anahtar nokta, olası gerçeklik resimleri arasındaki farkları azaltma çabası üzerinde yoğunlaşıyor. Michael Lynch, Bernard Williams ve Frank Farrel'in önemli eserlerinde, farklı gerçekler problemine nasıl yaklaşıldığı araştırılıyor. Orta yol olarak önerilen felsefi duruş metafizik, ontolojik ve semantik olarak, en azından kısmen öznenin verilerine bağlı olarak ortaya çıkıyor. Bu yeni, ve jenerik bir isimden yoksun realizmi oluşturan belirli, özel bir resim yok. Gerçeklik, nesne ve öznel kaynaklı oluşabilen çok çeşitli resimler, bu felsefi duruşu destekleyebilir. Bu tezin önerisi o ki Lynch, Williams ve Farrel da burada tartışılan, ve orta yol olarak tanımlanan gerçekçilik türünün savunucuları durumundalar.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am fortunate to be able to send my gratitude out to a whole team of support, whom without, my world would be a different place indeed.

I would like to thank my parents, Patrick and Virginia, for their unyielding loving support, for it has always been they who have afforded me the opportunity to follow my passions, and it is they who are always there when I need them, even when my pursuits put an ocean, and a whole continent and a half between us (no matter which side of the Bosporus I am on). Without their love, I would be lost in a world that so often bears its constraints upon me.

I would like to thank my best friend in the entire world, Kevin Chipman, who fills my life, and for whom I could not imagine a world without. Together we embark on our journeys oh so far from everything we thought we had always known, and together we will always remain.

I am most grateful to my boys, Mehmet and Jasper, who just change everything. It is with love that I thank my Mehmet for his resolute encouragement, and sweet, loving support. It is he who is beside me and it is he who makes sure I am never without; and it is my Jasper who keeps me company, as it is he who never misses the opportunity to take a nap alongside me while I work. Wherever they are, is where home is.

Thank you Pelin Ayerden who is my kindred spirit. Together we laugh and remind each other of just how much more work always needs to be done. She is my go-to gal who always comes up with the goods.

Thank you AMG (Ali Murat Gök), my good friend, translator, bureaucratic and foreign affairs master, who is always on call, and who never ceases to make the impossible possible. Thank you over, and over again.

And to special thanks to Dr. Karim Dharamsi, Dr. Jane Forsey, and Dr. Brian Keenan from the University of Winnipeg who have no idea how much of their influence I have taken away with me.

I especially express gratitude to my supervisor Dr. Murat Baç, who it is a privilege to work alongside of, my committee members, Dr. Stephen Voss, for his extra care and special attention in editing my work and providing valuable feedback, and Dr. Aydan Turanlı, who became a part of this project upon my specific request. I would consider it an opportunity to work with either of them again. I would also like to extend my acknowledgements to Boğaziçi University and the Department of Philosophy for providing the resources.

CONTENTS

PREFACE

This project has brought me halfway around the world and its completion is the culmination an experience much greater than what lies between these covers. I came to Istanbul to with a project in mind and a goal in sight. For some time before setting down to write this essay I had been thinking about various contemporary accounts of realism and how it meaningfully relates to traditional metaphysical conceptions. When I first encountered Bernard Williams' *Truth and Truthfulness* I was immediately impressed with his brilliant characterisation of the relationship between truth and truthfulness. The problem of truth has been a particular internist of mine and Williams' answer has become one of my most unforgettable. It was very much the same experience with Frank Farrell's *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World*. I was introduced to his book in an honours seminar and had been eager to approach the work again. I knew there was something more that I wanted to say about these two books and the views they put forth. I was waiting for this opportunity.

Specifically, I was intrigued with Williams' conception of truthfulness and what he develops out of that notion, and Farrell's articulation of how, in our plethora of responses to the problem of truth, we have not managed to step out of a system characterised of medieval conceptualisations. As Farrell sees it, we continue to do exactly what the medievals setup for the moderns. Contemporary philosophy is no exception no mat-

ter how radical we think we have been; just like the moderns we continue to take it piecemeal and apply it to our philosophy.

It was not until I came to Istanbul form Canada and began working with Murat Baç, my thesis advisor, that I was able formulate my interests into a thesis. It was through his introduction to Michael Lynch's *Truth in Context*, and our discussions of that work, that I was able to combine these works with my own, and endorse what I think is some of the most innovative, intelligent, and interesting responses to some of the most pressing concerns about truth, world, and reality of our time.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In this project I aim to scrutinise the philosophical pictures propounded in the works of Michael Lynch's *Truth in Context: An Essay on Pluralism and Objectivity* (1998), Bernard Williams' *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy* (2002), and Frank Farrell's *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World* (1994). Regarding these particular theories, that have both realistic and relativistic tendencies, my specific aim is to hone in on these accounts in order to show which of these positions is most plausible regarding the precarious relationship between truth and reality; and furthermore, to determine whether any of their positions are, in effect doing justice to their purported claim. This so-called *middle ground*, I contend, is the domain in which these three philosophers, (and other philosophers alike) are attempting to legitimise philosophical positions that attempt to provide a positive picture for philosophy in their expressed dissatisfaction with traditional metaphysical realism, and in disdain for Richard Rorty's menacing narrative. In this sense, the commonality of this middle ground is both an acceptance of the milieu from which Rorty's work stems, namely, the mistrust of traditional metaphysical realism, and the rejection of Rorty's notions of reality and truth (or, rather, lack thereof), and the loss of the world, so to speak. The particular brand of realism that arises from this stance toward the middle ground is not only anti-metaphysical, in the sense that there is no 'absolute' vantage point from which to view reality, but also, to put it more positively, it is a realism that is metaphysically, ontologi-

cally, and semantically dependent on subjective input, but not entirely. This is a realism that maintains that both truth and world are real. Real in the sense that neither truth nor world is a construct of the imagination, but rather, is a constriction put forth upon our will; and true in the sense that a description of how the world really is could *not be otherwise*. There is no one particular picture that accounts for this brand of realism, for as we will see, numerous pictures can describe this stance toward truth, world, and subjectivity, as Lynch, Williams, and Farrell are fine exemplars of this generically nameless brand of realism that aims to situate itself in the middle ground.

CHAPTER 2

THE MILIEU OF MISTRUST

Traditionally, metaphysical realism is the notion that reality is ontologically independent, and likewise, consists of independent objects, which are what they are, together with their properties and the relations they enter into, in spite of what the perceiving and knowing mind may think of them. As metaphysical realism concerns itself with the possibility of objective truth and knowledge, the realist aspires to vindicate our commonsense belief in the reality of the external world. As such, from the metaphysical realist's perspective, there are thus two epistemological possibilities: either a mind-independent reality *can*, or *cannot*, be known for it may be the case that what is *actually* true may be different from what is *thought* to be true. Save this scepticism, what underlies the metaphysical realist's conception of reality is that mind, in one way or the other, accurately conceives of the world as it really is, in itself. Alternatively put, metaphysical realism is the position that maintains truth corresponds to a ready-made reality, as it is, in absence of interpretation.[1]

Typically, metaphysical realists hold that truth consists in a belief's *correspondence* to reality, wherein which, generally truth conditions are not considered as mere propositions, but rather features of the world. Hence, truth is a relation between beliefs

[1] "Interpretation" here, and likewise elsewhere in this essay unless otherwise stated, represents the encompassing notion that due to the fact that the way we see the world as subjects is particular to us, given that the human perspective is not "complete" as per the metaphysical realist's ideal stance, there is no "neutral" way for us to ever view the world. From the metaphysical realists stance interpretation contaminates objectivity.

and the world. Thusly put, it is our true beliefs that accurately portray, or *represent* reality, for what makes beliefs true, is the states of affairs in the world to which they correspond. Were this not the case, despite our ability to ever discover it, or not, objectivity would cease inasmuch as beliefs about the world could not be true, as it is indeed our true beliefs that inform us of how things really are. Beliefs are objective when they are true independently of any such belief or another. On such a view, beliefs about reality *represent* reality correctly when true, and incorrectly, when false. Given this, a belief qualifies as knowledge if it is a true belief, and qualifies, as such, only as an accurate representation of its corresponding state of affairs, that is, in reality.

Several recent analytic philosophers have put to question the entire premise of representationalism. Most amicable, in view of the middle ground stance, is Donald Davidson, whose influence has informed all three of the aforementioned works, as his work provides the steppingstone for maintaining the premise that most of our beliefs must be true. Conversely, most notorious, among those who have put to question the entire premise of representationalism, is Richard Rorty, who, throughout his works, outright dismisses the metaphysical realist's picture as unintelligible. Briefly, in turn, I will discuss Davidson and Rorty's position before moving on to discuss Lynch, Williams, and Farrell's attitude toward Davidson and Rorty's posture against traditional metaphysical realism as it relates to their middle ground positions.

In his rejection of traditional metaphysical realism, Davidson's major concern is to decipher how commonality (or commensurability) among language users is possible, and he has a striking answer. Davidson puts forth a view that holds meaning is not

'fixed' or an 'abstract totality,' nor does it reside in a realm of its own, as the tradition would have us understand it. Accordingly, like W.V.O. Quine and Ludwig Wittgenstein, Davidson maintains that meaning is not an entity, it is not 'ultimate', nor is it anything to be reified. As Davidson considers it, meaning is dynamic and holistic, as it is not private and mental; it is public and shared. Putting forth a different kind of pragmatism, Davidson claims although it is the case that truth arises in language, and communication is a matter of agreement, there is nevertheless, a world that informs us. Resulting from this, it can be said that Davidson is an empiricist who attempts to be a realist with a nonepistemic view of truth, for he claims that in our absence there are objects, but that truth arises in language. This involves some explaining.[2]

In showing there is no major separation between meaning and belief, Davidson's strategy is to embed a formal structure of a theory of meaning, which he develops out of Alfred Tarski's theory of truth and combines it with a more general theory of interpretation, the broad outlines of which he draws from Quine's *Word and Object.*[3] Tarski's theory of truth provides Davidson with a different kind of norm as he puts the Tarskian scheme into natural languages. Full propositions form the basis of communication, and regarding meaning and reference, truth is discursive, as it is what we understand most clearly and directly. Nevertheless, truth is not necessarily justification; it is where there is justification. In language we assume truth, but not as evidential or as verificationist.

---

[2] This view is put forth in Davidson, Donald. *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001). My focus has been on chapters 3, "The Myth of the Subjective" and chapter 14, "Three Varieties of Knowledge", "On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). 183-198, and "The Structure and Content of Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* 87.6 (1990): 31-47.

[3] W.V.O. Quine, *Word and Object*. (Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960).

As meaning and belief are intertwined, beliefs, claims Davidson, are not isolated, but part of a rational system, which entails that the majority of one's belief system simply cannot be false. The majority of our beliefs must be true as it is a necessary requirement for linguistic communication, asserts Davidson. In effect, Davidson answers the traditional sceptic. He answers it with a contemporary response pertaining to how it is we learn a language. The attitude of holding something as true is basic in linguistic communication, for the requirement of having a belief is the ability to interpret a language. For Wittgensteinian reasons, Davidson asserts that in making sense of what others say, we assume that the speaker holds something true. We are able to assume this because of what Davidson calls a 'principle of charity,' which states that we try to make the best sense of an utterance that a speaker is sharing, for when someone is sincere, we take them to be saying something they believe to be true. They may be wrong, nevertheless, this merely points to an epistemological problem and not an ontological one. Interpretation is always occurring, even discourse between interlocutors in one's home language. All interpretation requires the principle of charity, and as for when a person does not understand what another is saying, the benefit of the doubt is given, as the interpreter attempts to understand the speakers' belief and the intention of what it is they are communicating.

As Davidson pictures it, a speaker must therefore be rational because a belief encompasses a holistic and externalist conception of mental content that treats content as necessarily dependant on a tripartite (or triangulation) relation between self, others, and

world.[4] In thus making a connection between having a belief and a holistic structure, Davidson conceives of rationality inasmuch as one must take another to have a serious discursive background to form beliefs. This is a holism, which entails that beliefs are discursive as our language is about the world, and without language, there would be no beliefs. Given this, truth is conceptualised as the totality of this structure.[5] Truth is the basis of any theory of meaning and knowing the meaning of a sentence is a matter of knowing the conditions under which it is true. As such, truth occurs when words correspond to the world correctly, but this is far from the traditional conception of the correspondence theory of truth. Davidson offers not a theory of truth per se, for truth is not world independent; it is simply that which lies at the bottom of any theory of meaning.[6]

There are no radically different conceptions of the world, for in inhabiting the world we all make use of a system of concepts that we could all, inevitably and in due course, come to understand. In his essay *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme*, Davidson argues that we cannot make sense of conceptual relativism, i.e., the position that there could be incommensurably different systems of concepts applicable to a single world. All language according to Davidson is translatable, or it is not language as such. This may be said to imply that at most there is one conceptual scheme, one way of interpreting and representing the world; however this is an empty idea according to Davidson. We all have a commonality to learn any language because all languages can be in-

---

[4] See Davidson, Donald. "Thought and Talk." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* 2nd Edition. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001).
[5] Davidson, Donald. "On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). 16-17.

[6] This is a matter of debate whether Davidson in fact provides a theory of truth, nevertheless it is his contention that he does not.

terpreted by means of our own language. To put it another way, there is no criterion of identity for language that does not imply, or presuppose, the possibility that we interpret another language by the means of our own language. Given this, hindrances are always practical and can be overcome. Moreover, to be sure, there is no distinction between form and content in Davidson's view. As we learn them together they comprise one homogenous field. Therefore, there is no need to understand one's conceptual scheme for there is nothing to infer; the whole field of meaning is extensional, and as such, there is no distinction between what is conceptual and what is not. There are no schemes, for according to Davidson, we are already in touch with the world as truth arises in language.[7]

Now that we have briefly seen how Davidson has amicably put to question the entire premise of representationalism, and how can provide the steppingstone for maintaining the premise that most of our beliefs must be true, before I move on to examine how his influence has informed all three of the aforementioned works, let us turn to Rorty and his outright dismissal of the metaphysical realist's picture.

Rorty, like other postmodernists of this genre, finds no significance in the claim that truth is a matter of a belief's correspondence to a reality independent of this, or that, perspective or viewpoint. According to antirepresentationalists of the postmodern persuasion truth is not a matter of a belief's corresponding to, or representation of, the "actual" state of affairs that obtains outside the mind. When a belief is described as being

[7] See Donald Davidson's "On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." (2001), *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) 185 and "The Structure and Content of Truth" (1990) respectively. *"On the very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme"* in *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association*, 47 (1974): 5-20.

true, it is simply being praised, as such, relative to our standards of rationality. In similar fashion, when we make a claim that something is "absolutely true," we rather mean instead, that in accordance to our given standards its acceptance is so fully justified that we currently cannot imagine any further justification could even be possible. Here is just a sample flavouring of what Rorty has to offer us on the subject:

> Our certainty will be a matter between persons, rather than a matter of interaction with non-human reality. We should not see a difference in kind between 'necessary' and 'contingent' truths. At most, we shall see differences in degree of ease in objectivity to our beliefs. We shall in short, be where the Sophists were before Plato brought his principle to bear and invented 'philosophical thinking': we shall be looking for an airtight case rather than an unshakable foundation.[8]

According to his brand of antirepresentationalism, relativism and subjectivism are products of the outdated representationalist paradigm. This is the explicit theme in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979) and in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (1982), and continues to be more fully elaborated upon in his criticism of the idea of knowledge as representation throughout *Objectivity, Realism, and Truth* (1991). Drawing on both Davidson's rejection of the scheme-content distinction, and his criticism of the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty sustains his rejection of any position that attempts to distinguish between fact and artifact, objective and subjective, and appearance and reality. Rorty rejects these distinctions because, as with anything else, they are applicable only within a particular context and point of interest, which is contingent. Therefore, regarding the relation of these terms to truth, there is nothing to say about them, as "one consequence of antirepresentationalism is the recognition that no description of how

[8] Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979) 157.

things are from a God's-eye point of view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet-to-be-developed science, is going to free us from the contingency of having been acculturated as we were."[9]

As Rorty challenges epistemology and attempts to deconstruct the picture of mind mirroring reality, deeply influenced by continental philosophy and the American pragmatism of William James and John Dewey in particular, Rorty proposes a new task for philosophy. In claiming that truth is not something that needs a theory, under the premise that the philosophical search for "truth" is chimerical, he provides philosophers with the new task of edification.[10] Instead of being systemic philosophers, Rorty wants us to be edified philosophers who aim is to edify others. The "edifying philosopher aims at continuing a conversation rather than discovering truth" and it is as such that he thus urges us to have *conversations* in lieu of inquiry, or to be more precise, in lieu of our formal systemic arguments.[11] The cultural role of the edifying philosopher is to help us see that "knowledge is a matter of conversation and of social practice, rather than as an attempt to mirror nature". If we come to see this, we will realise that there is no likely "metapractice that will be the critique of all possible forms of social practice", that philosophers envisage of their own practice's capability.[12] According to Rorty, philosophers merely assimilate themselves into believing that we are searching for the truth. More-

[9] Rorty, Richard. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*. Volume 1 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991) 13.

[10] For a sustained discussion on this topic see Chapter 8: Philosophy without Mirrors.

[11] Rorty, Richard. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (1979) 373.

[12] Rorty (1979) 171.

over, this supposed 'knowledge' accompanying this search is attained from the considered privileged position of the philosopher, as philosophers themselves, according to Rorty, traditionally believe that it is possible to extend beyond themselves and explain, not only how and what we have come to know, but how and what we have come to know is right in our adherence to our single descriptive vocabularies. In Rortian vocabulary, the traditional picture of metaphysical realism, and hence of systemic philosophy as well, as it epitomises universal commensuration, *is* such a final vocabulary – indeed, *the* final vocabulary.

To be sure, Rorty is saying that our confidence in truth lies in pretence, and that philosophy too, bases itself on self-perpetual contention. Rorty believes that we inherit the perennial problems in traditional philosophy to no avail. There are never, and will never be, agreements about the truth because even if we could find it there is no way of adjudicating complete epistemic closure in the first place. This is due to the inherent problems of representationalism, which, according to Rorty, carries its own seeds of failure, for we can always pose the question: Does this accurately depict reality? History tells us that no stance could ever confirm this position, since no stance can transcend into this privileged perspective. It seems to Rorty, that if there is no way to communicate epistemic closure, how then is it possible for philosophers to make their knowledge claims? It is obvious to Rorty then that if truth can never be fully justified no one should be able to claim knowledge, particularly over another – unless of course, the rules of the language game have allowed them to believe that indeed they do have knowledge of the truth. This is precisely Rorty's point. Epistemology, according to Rorty, is a political

endeavour. Claiming that one 'knows the truth' is the function of the language game of philosophy that functions to assert truth when it is only ever possible to have warranted agreement. Therefore, to put it bluntly, it is only within the rules of the philosophic language game that one could ever claim transcendental truth, because the philosophical community claims for themselves that truth is necessary (even if in some of the most bizarre instances when it is believed to be not possible!). Rorty holds that the only thing to the philosophers' claim to knowledge, either when they tell themselves, or each other, of their subscription to such a notion, is intra-disciplinary agreement to one set of strict rules of philosophical conduct. This notion of one commensurable language used to describe, or attain the truth, is irrational, and we have all been misled into one very narrow way of thinking that is exclusive of other more fruitful ways. Nevertheless, be forewarned, Rorty is not trying to save philosophy from demise.

Moreover, the notion of truth as a final vocabulary, as Rorty points out, has become so irrelevant outside of the discipline of philosophy. Even within the discipline, he claims, the notion has failed, as it has not served us the good it purports to aim to achieve. Viewing "culture as a conversation rather than as a structure erected upon foundations", Rorty is asking us to step outside of the dogmas of the language game that the philosophical tradition is teaching us in our philosophy classes. [13] He is asking us to set aside our adherence to the notion that there is one set of language rules, that is our formal standards of rationality and objectivity, to discover the truth in which we use to discriminate between what is right and wrong. Rorty calls this conformed line of think-

[13] Rorty (1979) 319.

ing a language game, i.e., a dogma that has its own manipulative language. Also accompanying this request, Rorty is asking us to give up on all the transcendental notions of truth also embodied in the philosophical tradition, for a "desire for a theory of knowledge is a desire for constraint".[14] According to Rorty, anything that does not fall within linguistic agreement of the philosophers proper, is thusly considered wrong, or abnormal, contra the accepted norm (of truthful discourse).[15] On the contrary, claims Rorty, conversation is the difference between honesty and conformity, for saying things is very different from saying how things are.[16] Rorty urges us to believe that we should not want to shut out ideas because they do not conform to one set of rules:

> We have to drop the notion of correspondence for sentences as well as for thoughts, and see sentences as connected with other sentences rather than with the world. We have to see the term 'corresponds to how things are' as an automatic compliment paid to normal successful discourse rather than as a relation to be studied and aspired to throughout the rest of discourse.[17]

Therefore, to recognise keeping the conversation going as a sufficient aim of philosophy, to see this as consisting in the ability to sustain a conversation, is to see human beings as generators of new descriptions.[18] Rorty says that "in the end, the pragmatists tell us what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark,

[14] Rorty (1979) 315. This is the claim that Rorty argues for in Chapter III: The Idea of a "Theory of Knowledge".

[15] Rorty (1979) 320.

[16] Rorty (1979) 371. Here Rorty is drawing on the is/ought distinction.

[17] Rorty (1979) 371-72.

[18] Rorty (1979) 378.

not our hope of getting things right".[19] The basic conviction behind Rorty's attack on representational epistemology is his historicists' conviction that any vocabulary is optional.

In view of Rorty's post-philosophical stance, the pragmatic notion of usefulness is key to understanding Rorty and the significance of what he has to offer. He says that because there is no way to make the notion of transcendental truth useful, we should stop wanting it altogether. Instead of disagreeing on whether, or not, what we say corresponds to reality or not, we should instead be concerned with our understanding that agreement, via conversation, is more useful than differences and disagreement that inevitably result from inquiry, and critique, i.e., argumentation. Rorty's commitment to conversation must be distinguished from subjectivism or relativism, as these are the very distinctions he rejects. Agreement amounts to solidarity, and solidarity by way of conversation is useful. Rejecting previous philosophical notions of mind as linguistic, that is, rather than letting language itself take on any metaphysical depth, or subject it to any notions of reification, Rorty maintains that language and social practices simply constitute our world.[20] We can give no useful content to the idea that the world, by its own nature, rationally constrains our choices or vocabulary with which to cope with it.[21]

Social practices are not arbitrary, but are contingent nevertheless. They are arbitrated through licensed and unlicensed actions and behaviours. When we are born, we

[19] Rorty, Richard. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press,1982) 166.
[20] This position is most vigorously defended in the work of Donald Davidson.

[21] Rorty, Richard. *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*. Volume 3 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1998) 40, 148.

are initiated into the social practices that give us our language. Importantly, it must be noted that conversation does not give priority to the subjective over the objective, or to mind's power over the world's constraint, for Rorty denies any other relation to the world other than causally. Solidarity arises from the use of our language through conversation. Nonetheless, language is not arbitrary either, for we cannot dispense with it. Language is a sharable construct, that when broadly used, enables our intelligibility and allows us to be understood. Thus the language that is used becomes quite useful and important for us. As linguistic beings, we humans, according to Rorty's picture, use a language that is caused by our 'environment', and in turn, are ourselves caused to have specific beliefs in relation to that environment. As such, these beliefs are contingently caused through an adaption to our environment wherein beliefs are *habits of useful action*, not representation of reality. We have language not because we have transcendental essence, but rather because we interact with our environment. It is our environment that causes us to use language the way we do, as our environment gives us content – not the past. According to Rorty, we are not trapped minds trying to get in touch with a realer reality – we are animals developing our tools.[22] In addition, it is in this sense that Rorty would have us believe human beings are no different from other creatures, save the fact we are more complex vis-à-vis our use of language. Language is our tool that makes life more helpful. Our vocabulary is contingent. Words meet our purposes, and it is as such, that the world functions as a tool; we are not conceptualising the world, as the tradition would have it, we are just trying to understand our environment.

[22] Rorty, Richard. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*. (1991) 118.

Thus, in light of Rorty's concerns, if the traditional philosophers' language is outdated, it is no longer useful. The philosophers in their adherence to the notion of a single vocabulary, are not only restricting language use, they are restricting conversation. The more we are restricted, the less we are able to accomplish in terms of understanding our environment, which in turn, compromises our solidarity. To be sure, again, Rorty is not offering us another way "to know"; he is offering us another way to cope.[23] Rorty wants to rid us philosophers of the idea that to be a philosopher is to have a "theory of knowledge", and most importantly, Rorty wants to dispense with the notion that action, not based on this so-called notion of truth, is abnormal. What Rorty has been trying to get us to understand is that philosophy has nothing to do with knowledge per se, and that no master vocabulary will ever permit commensurability of all discourses.[24] *Truth* then, for Rorty, if there is ever such a sense of the word, is the thing that is fully accessible to us, and is for us to use for our purposes. Borrowing his pragmatic account of truth from William James, truth, as such, is that which is good for us to believe. Language thus becomes *true* (of course in this same sense), that is, *true* to us, by way of contact with our environment. One technique for coping is by "producing commensurability by finding material equivalencies between sentences drawn from different language-games", but this is merely one technique among others.[25] In order for this option to be available, as Rorty purports, there need be more than one accepted language-game,

[23] Rorty (1979) 269, 286.

[24] Rorty (1979) See "Chapter VII: from Epistemology to Hermeneutics" for a sustained discussion of this claim.

[25] Rorty (1979) 355-56.

or vocabulary. As Rorty sees it, it is more beneficial for humanity to have more than one language-game to draw from and cope with. Because Rorty believes that vocabularies acquire privilege through use, as opposed to their supposed transcendent (i.e., meta-physical) qualities, he wants us philosophers not to use one discriminating vocabulary of the old, but to discover, and use new vocabularies; hence, "[t]he cultural role of the edifying philosopher is to help avoid the self-deception which comes from … knowing a set of objective facts.[26]

Through his pragmatic lens, Rorty has sought to combine North American liberalism with Continental literature. Rorty says, as human beings we have many choices, as opposed to the one that philosophy offers. Truth in the tradition is the normalised result of normalised discourse. Despite this, the more useful way that people have come to see themselves is through uninhibited (or open) discourse, which is through thinking, reading, writing, and conversing with one another. Thus, to limit us into believing that all discourse should be "normal" discourse is to dehumanise human beings, as such, for "[t]o see the aim of philosophy as truth – namely the truth about the terms which provide ultimate commensuration for all human inquiries and activities – is to see human beings as objects rather than subjects, as existing *en-soi* rather than as both *pour-soi*, which entails *en-soi* as both described objects and describing subjects."[27]

Rorty classifies himself as a *romantic*, *bourgeois*, *liberal-ironist* whose directive it was to deepen and widen solidarity. Recognising the contingency of values and vo-

[26] Rorty (1979) 373.

[27] Rorty (1979) 377-78.

cabulary whilst retaining liberal commitments portrays Rorty's liberal-ironist.[28] Liberal ironists are able to combine their awareness of the contingency of their own evaluative vocabulary, with their commitment to reducing cruelty and suffering, in particular, through democracy, wherein freedom, and not truth, matters to the political and the ethical. Given this, liberal ironists promote their cause through their redescriptions (rather than arguments, of course). Creative redescriptions are important to Rorty, because they are important to us as describers, for they account for the way in which we are able to describe our environment, and being able to effectively describe our environment, and thus express our aesthetic experiences, is important because, in turn, this is what enables us to express to others what we mean. Consequently, it is the imaginative re-describer that is vital to social change. Rorty encourages us to take pride in the originality of our descriptions of the world, for it is the creative writers, void of their preoccupation with the truth, who turn our attention in different directions, as they take pride in offering us more than one view point. This is, to be sure, Rorty's romanticised notion of a democracy of options, and unreserved creative licence. Nonetheless, change in belief may be the result of a convincing argument; then again, a change can also be the result of the acquisition of a new vocabulary. Rorty identifies romanticism with the view that it is this latter form of change in belief that is the most significant. Rorty's romantic version of liberalism is also expressed in his distinction between the private and public sector.

[28] Rorty, Richard. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity.* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989) Especially rich on this topic as discussed here is Part I: Contingency, Essay 1: "The Contingency of Language" and Essay 3: "The Contingency of a Liberal Community", Part II: Ironism and Theory: Essay 4: "Private Irony and Liberal Hope" and Part III: Cruelty and Solidarity.

However, Rorty, being true to his own form, draws this distinction differently. Very different from the traditional lines of demarcation between the private and the public domain, the liberal-ironists' conviction is such that we should treat the vocabularies for the deliberation of public welfare, and social and political arrangement, and the vocabularies developed for personal fulfilment and self-creation, as distinct tools.[29] The liberal-ironist understands and affirms the contingency of their explicitly ethnocentric pronouncement, and it is in light of Rorty's version of pragmatism that it is both recognised, and affirmed, that liberalism has no universality, and moreover, that there is no *rational* way to adjudicate conflict, that is, rational in the sense of the metaphysical realist's sense of the term true.[30] A liberal-ironist is one who is able to admit that we have no notion of rational warrant that exceeds, transcends, or even grounds the norms that liberals take to define through conversational discourse (i.e., through description and redescription). When, if at all, a change in mind across differences occurs, or is achieved, it is by way of *unforced agreement* among "us", namely, our culture. As liberal-ironists, we cultivate, promote, and encourage agreement through conversation.

> ... we must work by our own lights. Beliefs suggested by another culture must be tested by trying to weave them together with beliefs we already have. … we can always enlarge the scope of 'us' by regarding other people, or cultures, as members of the same community of inquiry as ourselves – by treating them as part of the group among whom [sic] unforced agreement is to be sought. What we cannot do is to rise [sic] above all human communities, actual and possible. We cannot find a skyhook which lifts us out of mere coherence – mere agreement – to something like 'correspondence with reality as it is in itself'.[31]

[29] Rorty. *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. (1989) xiv, and "Introduction" for more regarding this distinction.

[30] Rorty. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers*. (1991) 13.

[31] Rorty (1991) 38.

Rorty's retort to his critics who think this stance is "relativistic" because it denies the necessity of inquiry's "converge[nce] to a single point – that is truth 'out there,' up in front of us, waiting for us to reach it" is that from where he stands, that is, the pragmatist's position, this seems "an unfortunate attempt to carry a religious view of the world over into an increasingly secular culture."[32] Indeed, Rorty's pragmatist's attitude toward truth is that of a consensus of community in which the pragmatist believes that his views are "better than the realist's"; nonetheless, the pragmatist does not believe that their view corresponds to "the nature of things." The term "true" thusly, is a very flexible word, and as mentioned above, the fact that it is merely an expression of commendation, insures it univocality; truth means the same in all cultures just as equally as other flexible terms such as "here," "there," "good," "bad," "you," and "me" mean the same in all cultures across the board.[33] In realist terms, Rorty's pragmatism has no epistemology; therefore indeed, he is not a relativist about truth; according to Rorty, truth has no ontology. However, in rejecting an ontology of truth, he offers us an ontology for agreement via the constant ongoing of the re-contextualising of our environment that puts pressure on our web-of-beliefs, which to be sure is not something to calibrate or philosophise about. Being sure not to make any explicit claims about what is true, good, or right, Rorty is also correct in saying that in this sense he is not a relativist. Whether he main-

---

[32] Rorty (1991) 38-39.

[33] Rorty's examples. Rorty (1991) 23.

tains this stance implicitly is another question,[34] but even his response to this charge is that we have been so indoctrinated to defend ourselves against him, that it is so difficult for us philosophers to meet him, and begin to understand the significance of what he is saying.

Rorty wants to replace our traditional notions of truth with his notion of solidarity. Rorty thinks that social hope will reconcile fraught disagreement that is so apparent in philosophical endeavours of the metaphysical realist persuasion; that solidarity will reconcile inasmuch as all subscriptions to traditional notions of truth fall out of the picture. Rorty thinks that his program, precisely in spite of not recovering philosophy from this menacing demise, is a hopeful agenda for humanity, and the humanities alike, for as it stands philosophy proper is a hopeless agenda.[35] Rorty wants us all (and for the record Rorty is not merely speaking to the philosophers here), to get along and communicate openly with each other in the absence of the hindrances of truth, in order to promote conversation, for when we all begin to enter conversation, solidarity will follow. Claiming that commonalities are more important than differences, it is by starting with agreement that our cultures weave together social practices. This is a desire for as much inter-subjective agreement as possible in the absence of any extension beyond that of the community.

[34] This question is examined below in light of Williams' position.
[35] By the "humanities", I mean to include what is sometimes termed as the "Social Sciences". To treat Philosophy, Literature, Politics, and History as a Social Science is a misnomer. Philosophy, in my opinion, is not a Social Science; it is a Humanity proper. Correspondingly, there has been a strong movement in the Western English speaking counties to treat it as such.

Nonetheless, despite Rorty's so called hopeful intention, it is my contention, along with Michael Lynch, Bernard Williams, and Frank Farrell that Rorty's agenda is more insidious than it appears. Furthermore, it is my claim that it is the insidiousness of Rorty's notion of agreement that renders it such. Let me now turn toward my elucidation of what Rorty is really offering us, and take a closer examination of where his version of mistrust leads us, and why we ought to reject his agenda. To do this I will solicit the aid of three philosophers, namely Farrell, Williams, and Lynch who, each in his own right, and through their own earnest endeavours, have contributed significantly to contemporary philosophical agendas regarding realism and the examination of the conception of truth, and whom for such insight I consider stalwart luminaries.

CHAPTER 3

THE COUNTER NARRATIVE

Rorty is offering us a narrative, which, stemming from the milieu of mistrust, contends that the notion of truth has fallen into some disrepute. This concerns the entire enterprise of traditional metaphysical realism, and of course, along with this, its precarious relation to its central concepts of both truth and world. However, when pressed, where does Rorty's mistrust lead us? What indeed is Rorty offering us with his guiding premise that philosophy is, in its entirety, thoroughly, and inextricably dogma? What does this notion of solidarity result in? Do we have to go so far when rejecting the metaphysical realist's picture as unintelligible? Is Rorty's postmodernists' stance the be-all and end-all for philosophy?

Granted, there is a certain anxiety and apprehensiveness regarding a sense of pointlessness that results from the seemingly futile and bankrupt efforts of traditional metaphysical realism to hold steadfast to its part-and-parcel conception of an absolute truth and an absolute reality, but Rorty is imprudent, not to mention misleading and wrong, for there is something at stake that extends itself beyond 'communal agreement' and 'consciences of community'; something to be right, or wrong, about that is not necessarily 'indoctrinated'. Nevertheless, duly noted, up to a point, Rorty has a point, and a crucial point at that. As we have already begun to see in Davidson, this point is not entirely his own concern, but is one that may be attributed to the milieu wherein his anxiety stems, which encompasses both: (a) the rejection of the realist's notion of a God's-

eye view on reality that converges on a single and absolute reference point (or the view from nowhere, a skyhook view, the external point of view, cosmic exile, Archimedean standpoint, and so forth), and (b) the acceptance, as a given, that interpretation is inevitable considering it is nigh impossible to maintain that subjectivity does not play a role in our conceptions of both truth and world. Rorty seems to be correct; too many people do not seem to care about truth, and seem content to carry on without the philosophers' concern.

There is an apparent shift in how truth is being treated, and this shift is not only evident in our popular culture, but also can be observed, albeit used with much more subtly and restraint, in recent work of epistemologists, metaphysicians, and the ontologists alike, who, when pressed, seem to have resigned the conceptualisation of truth as "absolute" in the strictest sense, in light of seemingly more palatable notions of justification theory, or even still, a "hypothetical" notion of metaphysical reality. All this despite the fact they might not explicitly claim to be doing so.

Still, Rorty's imprudence lies in his full conviction of philosophy as entirely dogmatic. Rorty's version of historicism, which leads him to believe that any of our claims are not that far from our own situation; i.e., that nothing is beyond the norm of discourse, also entices his historicist scepticism toward transcending ambitions of epistemology, and, as well, his claim that because the problems we have inherited are optional, or 'contingent', so too is epistemology and philosophy. To use an apropos idiom, Rorty throws out the baby with the bathwater, as he allies himself with the nonsensical

wiles of the postmodernist persuasion, which entails a full rejection of realism, and truth, and a full-bodied notion of purely subjective interpretation.

The postmodern thinker gains prestige through its emancipation of both world and subject. According to the postmodernist, the metaphysical realist's aspiration of a more objective account of reality and ethical relations is a foolish one. From this it is typical of postmodern thought to suppose that we must therefore assume that belief formation is a matter of mere rhetoric and power once we recognise the unattainableness of a pure objectivity untainted by bias. For if rational practices must occur in the nexus of power and taken for granted biases, which they do, reality and the self alike, it will then be said, are solely manufactured images, and as such, it can no longer make sense to measure our beliefs against how matters really stand in the world. The triumph of the postmodernists' conception occurs when it stops being labelled as antirealist and stands forth in it own right, for it is maintained, this is now a post-metaphysical age in which the postmodernist addresses their perspective from beyond all that jargon. The very distinctions between reality and a simulation of it, between truth and fiction, and between objectivity and rhetorical manipulation have all broken down, so goes the narrative. Moreover, a standard move occurs so frequently in the work that is called postmodern that it can be considered its signature. This is a move wherein the role of cultural practices is so radically inflated that, in effect, the world and self virtually disappear as con-

straints on these practices, or even as measures of their success. What is more, this move tends to spread throughout all areas, across the board.[36]

It seems that what can be said to motivate this extreme stance of the postmodern position is that its advocates maintain that this mode of thought radically rethinks the metaphysical realist's position as the postmodern self acknowledges its humility over against cultural and hermeneutic practices, which in turn, ushers in a renewed sense of determinacy as the postmodern critic, or interpreter, gains a readily assumed power as it takes up a creative (or even demiurgic) role toward the world, especially as articulated in the mind, and in the texts of others. This 'loss of the world,' so to speak, earns the post-modern subject its rightful place. What the postmodern thinkers say of discourse is that the pressure of testing beliefs against the world, and the pressure of evaluating the infer-ential validity is very much diminished as discourse is enabled to operate more freely.[37] We can see this is an evident aspect in Rorty's articulation of this emancipation. Another trademark assumption of the postmodern persuasion, which may be considered best ar-ticulated in the work of literary theorist Stanley Fish, is the idea that once there is a need for introducing subjectivity at all, as in the need for an interpreter to bring to bear a background of beliefs and assumptions, then meaning cannot be objective either, bar none. As per Rorty's account, meaning is reference to what "society lets us say", namely

[36] Here and in the paragraph below, I concur with, and take a lead from, Farrell's caricature of the post-modernist. See Chapter 8: "Postmodernism". Farrell, Frank. *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism.* (Cambridge: State University of New York at Purchase, 1996) 149, 255.

[37] As I discuss in the section "Modern Medieval Preoccupation," Farrell argues that this is more often than not particular of their own discourse and not to discourse in general.

with reference to that which is useful, for the only constraint on Rorty's pragmatic version of knowledge is limited conversation.[38]

Despite Rorty's imprudent contention, there is a viable option that stems from, and takes heed to, the same milieu wherein Rorty's anxious agenda stems, and moreover, which still encompasses both: (a) the rejection of the realist's notion of a God's-eye view on reality that converges on a single and absolute reference point, and (b) the acceptance, as a given, that interpretation plays a role in our conceptions of both truth and world. This viable option, in its concern for the state of contemporary philosophy, attempts to vindicate the position that interpretation is not merely subjective, and in purporting to do such, holds on to the traditional notions of both truth and world, inasmuch as meanings and beliefs are (really) about the (real) world. Similarly, emerging from this conviction is the adherence to both a realist conception about the world, and an objective conception of truth. This option is what I have termed the 'middle ground', for it is a position that straddles, in one attempted way or another (in this project I examine three attempts), the traditional metaphysical realist's notion of objectivity with that of the postmodernists' role of subjectivity. From the point of view of the middle ground, postmodern thought is not all for naught, as indeed the postmodern thinker performs a valuable service for us in showing us that we do not directly confront a 'raw reality', as indeed our beliefs are significantly shaped by intra-discursive factors. As a result, in attempt to mind a concern for truth, these straddle positions all have a role for interpretation. Neither Lynch, Williams, nor Farrell denies it, nor in claiming this middle ground do they

[38] Rorty. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (1979) 174.

purport to a relativity of truth either, for in claiming a stake in this middle ground, it could hardly be concluded, as the postmodernist thinker would have us believe, that the denial of an 'absolute reality', is a denial of reality itself.

In effect, the middle ground, in recuperating from what it sees of the dying philosophical agendas of either side it straddles, in countering Rorty's narrative, by rejecting certain unnecessary metaphysical impediments, and through the adoption of what could be said to be a postmodernist claim toward subjectivity, instils a new sense of hope for philosophy proper. All three luminaries, Michael Lynch, Bernard Williams, and Frank Farrell achieve something worth commending. Each of these luminaries, in their attempt to establish the middle ground as a viable position, sets up a positive agenda for philosophy. This remarkable achievement can never be taken for granted, for each position not only criticises the problems at hand, but makes an earnest effort to stand back and address the broader issues, by not only proposing, but also in demonstrating alternative long-term solutions to our contemporary philosophical woes. To be sure, philosophers often dismantle, and sometimes destroy; nevertheless the real arduousness of the philosophers' task lies in the insightfulness in setting up a positive story. This, I contend, is exactly what all three luminaries have ventured to achieve, in their respective works as mentioned above, for Lynch, Williams, and Farrell, not only explicitly set out to counter Rorty's narrative, but also have powerful intuitions in their own right, both as individuals and as a collective.

In my view, Lynch, Williams, and Farrell aim to show why Rorty's recommendations for philosophy are wrong, and why we ought to be encouraged toward the mid-

dle ground. All three contend that Rorty is wrong about where the mistrust of metaphysical realism leads us, for his conception of agreement, that is, of his aspirations for social hope in solidarity, supports the claim that it is better (more useful) to conciliate, appease, mollify, assuage, etc, (anything of the like) than to have disagreements about the truth. Rorty's pragmatic notion of social hope may seem diverse in its supposed cultivation of plethoric opinion, but this notion of agreement without the constraint of truth is deceptively homogenous, more so than Rorty would surreptitiously have us believe. Disagreement about the truth is where philosophy ends for Rorty, but it is the setting of a new stage for these luminaries, for (as contrasted with Rorty's conception of 'agreement), not only is disagreement not something for philosophers to disparage, but also, disagreement is the substance of philosophy, for it is that which provides its fodder, and as such, ought to be seen as an instillation of hope, not as a demand for more 'solidarity' as such.

Disagreement, when not contrasted with Rorty's conceptualisation of solidarity, inherently relates itself to truth as that which enables us to get beyond the mindset of truth as merely 'agreeing to disagree'. Rorty's conceptualisation of agreement is superficial, and contrary to Rorty's stance, our concept of truth is what drives us to 'cultivate,' 'promote,' and 'encourage' agreement, as it is that standard with allows us to push through superficial ascriptions of agreement. Perhaps Rorty is correct. It may seem as though there is more agreement among community members given his perspective on the conception; however Rorty misses the point, as truth is not a matter of quantity; truth is a matter of quality, and hence, of qualification. Yes, regarding the recent milieu, dis-

agreements about truth have produced some undesirable effects. However, as this project intends to show, contrary to Rorty's narrative, the hopeful answer to our milieu of mistrust, is not to diminish disagreement altogether, but to diminish it for the right reasons, that is to agree on something because it is the truth, that is, because it is an accurate description of the way the world is.

As it happens, Rorty is partly correct, inasmuch as philosophers of recent have segregated themselves. However, to be sure, this is occurring in other disciplines as well.[39] Partly, this is symptomatic of the notion of specialisation that occurs today; moreover though, this segregation is also partly due to the homogenising effects of Rorty's utopian notion of agreement that have already been in effect in our current milieu, before he articulated it as such. If Rorty gets one thing right it is an accurate depiction of popular culture. The homogenising effects of Rorty's utopian idea of agreement have lead to segregation because of our inability (or even lack of desire for that matter) to discriminate and judge. I will argue below, that this is due to what Williams refers to as our deep-felt attraction to liberalism. As these luminaries have helped me to see, even though none says it explicitly, we have become victims of our own ideology, for when speaking of diversity, we are really speaking of homogeneity. Within all disciplines, most notably in the humanities, the tendency is to become uni-disciplinary, as opposed to inter-disciplinary, as we are reluctant to push our subscription to the truth forward. In our effort to become politically correct, agreeable members of society, we refrain (so as

[39] Many philosophers of many persuasions have noted this notion of segregation as a concern. Most notably among them regarding this essay is Bernard Williams' view of the "crisis in the Humanities", which is particularly addressed in *Truth and Truthfulness*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

to not breach the communal code of conduct) from instances of discrimination and judgement, which only seem to impose our agenda over someone else's.

Consequently, it has become adequate to relate to standards of judgement and discrimination in their most derogatory form. This homogeneity plays itself out as we '*a-historicise'* all experience into our own, as we talk about the past in the very same way.[40] We domesticate the past into our own values and vocabulary. Accurately put, this is the consequence of a lack of historical perspective.[41] If Rorty is correct, from the stance of the middle ground, there is no past worth looking for in its own sake, for all is eternal present, as there is no useful way to transcend beyond our own contingency other than to serve our own immediate interests, if ever there is a need, but even then, the past is only ever in our own terms, seen from the perspective of our own inescapable biases. However, as the middle ground position purports, or at least as the three luminaries maintain the position, historical perspective is imperative, for if we cannot even recognise the past as something different from us, and as such, a matter to get right, everything becomes the same, for everything is put into our own terms, our own point-of-

[40] In the sense under discussion, '*a-historicise'* or for that matter, 'a-historical,' as it is also referred to throughout this paper, involves not an outright rejection of historical account or its use altogether (it would be a mistake to describe Rorty as such for he considers himself an advocate of some of Nietzsche's historical tenets), rather, I intend this term to describe the fact, in striking contrast to Williams (and to Lynch and Farrell to a somewhat lesser degree) Rorty does not maintain that history concerns matters of 'fact,' that is, matters of fact inasmuch as *truth* is at stake when accounting for such historical facts. As an anti-realist, Rorty does not dispense with the idea of history altogether, he just maintains that there is nothing to be certain about beyond 'normative justification'; to put it in his vernacular, there is no 'truth' beyond my community (that is 'truth' only inasmuch as it amounts to normative justification). See "The Milieu of Mistrust." Page 8-9 above.

[41] To be sure, this is '*historical*' in the strict sense of the term, which entails that history is a matter for truth insofar as there is something at stake when accounting for historical facts. See "The Spirit of Enlightenment Critique." Page 76 below.

view. This homogenisation treats everything on par as being equal in its treatment of the past.

As a direct result of our milieu, which is apt to treat the philosopher's notion of truth as irrelevant, there has been a loss of trust in authority, that is, in being able to assert one's beliefs as true, and argue for them in the case of opposition. Rorty, as we have seen, thinks this is a good thing, but for the contender of the middle ground this is lamentable indeed. This segregation, however, is also partly due to the very nature of philosophy itself. For better or for worse, philosophy is locked in a struggle with itself. It is locked in an internal debate as it self-reflective, for it criticises that which it creates. Philosophy, along with the other disciplines needs its theorists. Slowly, without our ability to discern and discriminate, the humanities have lost their theorists. This is particularly the case in respect to history, and philosophy is in danger of this as well, especially if we accept Rorty's agenda.[42] Philosophers are doing something worthwhile in their own right, we have the ability to adjudicate, not because we are privileged, but because in our recognition that not everything is equal, and the same, we are able to understand the value of adjudication, discernment, and discrimination, and as such are able to make claims that we stand behind. Nevertheless, there is common ground between us and other disciplines too, for to be sure, we are all speaking in terms of the same world, for as the middle position aspires to show, it is reality that guides and constrains our beliefs. Although it is true one cannot describe the world's constraints from an absolute stand-

[42] I assert that this is especially the case in history from my own experience as a trained historian. Especially since the mid-twentieth century, there is a significant lack of theoretical reflection and an increasing sensitivity to political-correctness.

point, not even the philosopher, the middle ground position aims to articulate just how an account of our beliefs being about a world includes an historical perspective proper.[43]

In countering Rorty, and in claiming their stake in the middle ground, each luminaries provides a different picture of how it is we can account for our beliefs about a world that both guides and constrains our accounts of it, whilst understanding the importance of an historical understanding, especially regarding the history of our concepts and ideas. As such, each finds new ways to talk about the traditional metaphysical realist's notion of world, and the concept of truth, whilst accounting for the admitted role of subjectivity. Truth, these luminaries adamantly maintain, is not relative indeed; however certain aspects of the former metaphysical realist's position are, as the role of the subject has been incorporated, certain concessions have had to be been made. Once again, each luminary in his own way, and following his agenda, has different answers as to which of these other aspects ought to be subjected to the middle ground's innocuous brand of relativisation.

[43] This is reminiscent of what Nietzsche meant as he said, "Lack of an historical sense is the hereditary defect of philosophers… So what is needed from now on is *historical philosophizing*, and with it the virtue of modesty." Nietzsche, Friedrich. *Human, All Too Human*. Trans. G. Handwerk (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995) 13-14.

CHAPTER 4

A MISTAKEN INFERENCE

Michael Lynch in his *Truth in Context: an Essay on Pluralism and Objectivity* endeavours to counter Rorty's narrative by defending his claim that the pluralist need not renounce the traditional notion of representation, as per Rorty's profession. It is Lynch's contention that Rorty, like many a pluralist, makes a mistaken inference in the supposition that thought can only be compared to thought, and not to the world itself.[44] His goal is to show how a robust pluralism is consistent with a nonepistemic theory of truth. In his adherence to the middle ground, Lynch presents a version of correspondence theory that puts *representation* theory in a new light.

According to Lynch, despite our inability to acknowledge the world as it presents itself to us, our thoughts are about the world, for the denial of traditional metaphysical realism does not entail an outright denial of reality.[45] In Lynch's view, the relation between thought and world is, without exception, irreducible to epistemic notions of justification and warrant, for a proposition is true when the world is as that proposition states it is.[46] A staunch pluralist himself, Lynch defends what he considers a full-bodied notion of metaphysical pluralism, asserting that there are incompatible, yet equally correct

[44] Lynch, Michael. *Truth in Context* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2001) 28, 146-47.

[45] Lynch. *Truth in Context*. (2001) 156-57.

[46] Lynch (2001) 139.

truths in all types of discourse.[47] For Lynch there is "more than one true story of the world", for indeed it is perfectly reasonable to have incompatible, yet "equally acceptable accounts" of metaphysics, ethics, physics, history, for instance.[48]

Additionally, unlike most other contemporary metaphysical pluralists, Lynch affirms a pluralism that maintains a connection between both conceptual and metaphysical pluralism, whereas most usually only admit the former, to the exclusion of the latter.[49] However, for Lynch, metaphysical concepts, and truth, are "interwoven into the fabric of our conceptual schemes at a very basic level".[50] This is part of what enables Lynch to admit one can be a pluralist without having any allegiance to verificationism. Although the metaphysical pluralist and the verificationist hold the same belief that metaphysical debates in any traditional sense are irresolvable, unlike the verificationist, who claims that unverified claims are meaningless, Lynch's pluralist instead admits there can be more than one true, and hence, meaningful answer to a single question.[51]

At this juncture, perhaps because it is widely known that pluralist philosophies, either implicitly or explicitly, concede that metaphysical pluralism is incompatible with a realist theory of truth, it may be surprising to learn that in Lynch's certitude regarding

---

[47] There are several continua along which one can be a metaphysical pluralist (that is regarding the facts about what exists). Lynch's position in that "there are incompatible but equally correct truths in any type of discourse" has been formally termed *horizontal-global pluralism*, as opposed to *vertical and/or local* pluralism. More to the point, as metaphysical pluralism plausibly implies global pluralism, the metaphysical pluralist "thinks globally while thinking locally" Lynch, 8. See Appendix A.

[48] Lynch (2001) 1, 6-7.

[49] Lynch (2001) 5, 155-57.

[50] Lynch (2001) 8.

[51] Lynch (2001) 19-20.

his stake in the middle ground, or the 'middle path' as he puts it, he sustains a notion of a fixed correspondence, all the while insisting that there are "no absolute facts".[52] Yet assuredly, Lynch undertakes a delicate balance as he strives to show that metaphysical pluralism, and objectivity, is equally consistent without entailing that any statement can be true.[53] Believing himself to have solved the pluralists' conundrum of "allowing for *different* truths without slipping into the mistaken nihilistic position that there is no truth at all", it is no secret that Lynch is a *realist about truth* and a *pluralist about the world*, for as stated by Lynch himself, metaphysical pluralism concerns the nature of reality, despite the fact that all propositions and facts are relative to a worldview or conceptual scheme.[54] Hence, in Lynch's conception, the metaphysical pluralist adheres to the idea that there can be more than one true metaphysic, inasmuch as there can be a plurality of equally acceptable, yet incompatible conceptual schemes. Conceptual schemes, without exception, are *our* ways of categorising and dividing up reality, and since, given the pluralists' standpoint the world does not dictate necessarily which of these ways of categorising is "the best", "the most correct", or "the way the word really is in itself", the pluralist, as such, denies that there are absolute facts per se, in that facts themselves unavoidably reflect our conceptual points of view.[55] However, realism about truth, or *alethic realism*, consists in the view that truth is a relation between thought (via proposi-

[52] Lynch (2001) 1, 28, 124.

[53] Lynch (2001) 3, 97.

[54] Lynch (2001) 1.

[55] Lynch (2001) 10-11.

tions) and the world, for to be sure, as mentioned above, truth is a matter that concerns the way the world is, not merely a product of our thought.[56]

Lynch's concern relates to one of the most pressing social and political issues of our time, how to account for, and incorporate the multitudinous viewpoints into one culture, or the other way around, one culture into multitudinous viewpoints. As Lynch bears in mind, the difficulty in his metaphysical realist position, as in all middle ground stakes, lies not in convincing us of its attractiveness, but rather in explaining how it can be stabilised as a viable position. Given that truth is the foremost problem for any pluralism in general, the obvious problem for metaphysical pluralism is its threat to objectivity, for it would seem that if a plurality of equally correct perspectives are permissible, it should seem equally impermissible to deem another as incorrect, or dare anyone say, even false. For seemingly, if the facts about the nature of reality are internal to one among many possible conceptual schemes, that is to say *relative to conceptualisation*, truth must be similarly relative.[57] However, as Lynch argues, this is most certainly not the case his view. Drawing heavily on Kant, Wittgenstein, and Putman, Lynch presents a novel theory regarding our notion of conceptual schemes, which is the crux of his position. Prior to laying this position down, some background information will be most helpful.

Lynch's notion of conceptual schemes stems from the general contemporary notion of metaphysical pluralism, which commonly claims to trace one of its roots back to

[56] Lynch (2001) 13.

[57] Lynch (2001) 3, 12, 28.

Kant.[58] The contemporary rendition of the Kantian view is a type of *internalism*. According to the Kantian view, to perceive an object is to conceptualise experience in a certain way. For in Kant's terminology, it is the forms of intuition, along with the categories, that shape our raw sensory experience. According to Kant, an object cannot be perceived independently of conceptualisation, for objects can only be considered as they appear to us via our conceptualisation. Most importantly, for Kant, to maintain a sense of objectivity, there is one set of categories, nor one set of concepts, which together form all possible experience. In the contemporary vernacular, partly modified to account for the twentieth century's emphasis on semantic theory, it is our picture of a *conceptual scheme* that conceptualises our experience. The contemporary metaphysical pluralist, Lynch among them, in turn, accepts the Kantian idea that all experience, including thoughts and speech acts, is perspectival in character, and then carries through to incorporate the pluralistic notion that there can be more than one such perspective, for it is maintained by the pluralist that, contrary to Kant's view, there is no necessary set of unique concepts that we use to think and talk about the world. As Lynch contends, this applied to the additional pluralistic modification of the pluralists' basic metaphysical premise that there can be more than one true account of reality, and the result is metaphysical pluralism.[59] Accepting as fact that there is thusly no 'neutral' or 'unconceptualised' ground on which to adjudicate the apparent intractability of metaphysical disputes, when confronted with such indetermination, the pluralist intuition is not to insist on the

[58] Although, to be sure, Kant was not a pluralist.

[59] Lynch (2001) 11.

traditional metaphysical realist's conception of truth, but rather to admit more than one internally consistent point of view; consistent, that is, with how the world is according to our particular conceptualisation of it.

Particular to Lynch's view, this combined result of metaphysical pluralism with the conception of alethic truth results in what he refers to as *Relativistic Kantianism*, a term he uses to refer to his own position. [60] It is as such that in denying traditional metaphysical absolutism, all thought is internal to one among a possible plurality of conceptual schemes, yet truth itself is an absolute relation between thought and the world. What is more, as Lynch contends, in admitting realism about truth, it does not follow that one be a realist about everything, for there "is no requirement that one be an absolutist about everything".[61] In this way, Lynch's view is *anti-metaphysical* insofar as metaphysics is taken as search for ultimate absolute truth as per the traditional metaphysical realist's notion of "absolute". As specified by Lynch, there is more than one sense in which truth can be *absolute*. Truths, he claims, "can also 'be ultimate' by being basic, and metaphysics can be seen as the search for, and creation of, these first principles". Hence, it is in this sense that Lynch further admits Relativistic Kantianism as a stout metaphysical view.[62] Evidently, Lynch does not view this as a concession.

Although undeniably influenced by Putnam, the most prominent contemporary pluralist, and by his later work in particular, Lynch aims to undermine Putnam's well-

[60] Relativistic Kantianism, as noted by Lynch, is a term used by William Alston to describe Hilary Putnam's position in *Reason, Truth, and History*. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981). Lynch (2001) 4-5.

[61] Lynch (2001) 16.

[62] Lynch (2001) 9, 13.

known denial that metaphysical pluralism is consistent with a realist view.[63] Unlike Lynch, the antirealist's intuition is that it is our notion of metaphysical concepts themselves that is supposedly responsible for the suspicion of there being no absolute way to resolve disagreements. Lynch however thinks otherwise. He thinks it is "the *nature of the disagreement*" itself, and not the metaphysical concepts themselves, that misguidedly spawn the antirealist's false intuition of relativism.[64] Furthermore, the recognition of equally correct metaphysical views in Lynch's pluralism does not entail that metaphysical inquiry should not cease altogether. This is the case for a number of reasons. First, to recommend that metaphysics cease in lieu of, let's say, something more useful, for example, merely reveals, according to Lynch, that one is still engaged in the traditional metaphysical notion of 'ultimate absolute' truth. Second, most cleverly put forth by Lynch, is his claim that to outright deny a metaphysical endeavour altogether is wrong, for pluralism in his view is not merely concerned with metaphysics – it is metaphysics. Thus, in telling us that there is no absolute truth about the nature of reality, the Relativistic Kantian *is* in effect telling us something about reality.[65]

Lynch's metaphysical pluralism is committed to a relativity of both fact and content. Content relativism holds that since there are no scheme-independent facts that determine interpretations, all interpretations are relative to a particular conceptual scheme.

[63] Hilary Putnam regularly refers to metaphysical realism using the alias "conceptual relativity", as noted by Lynch (2001) 5.

[64] Lynch (2001) 19.

[65] Lynch (2001) 155-56.

The two dominant models of conceptual schemes that consider content relativism are, as Lynch refers to them, the Kantian model, and the Quineian model as delineated below:

Kantian Model:

(1) The primary components of a conceptual scheme are mental.
(2) The criteria of identity for schemes lie with their categorical and formal concepts.
(3) Conceptual schemes involve a commitment to the analytic/synthetic distinction.
(4) Schemes have a foundationalist structure.[66]

Quineian Model:

(1) Conceptual schemes are "languages"; they are composed of sentences accepted as true.
(2) The criterion for identity is intertranslatability.
(3) The notion of a conceptual scheme does not entail the analytic/synthetic distinction.
(4) The structure of the scheme is "coherentist" in nature. This entails a holistic notion of conceptual schemes.[67]

In judiciously putting forth his own model, turning to Strawson,[68] which, for better or for worse, he chooses to call the Wittgensteinian Model, Lynch asserts that a middle path, between the two models above, provides "a third way of understanding conceptual schemes that helps to fill in the details of the pluralist picture in a new and more powerful way," as put forth below: [69]

Wittgensteinian Model:

(1) Conceptual schemes are schemes of concepts.
(2) Schemes differ to the degree that they do not share basic concepts.
(3) Conceptual schemes are consistent with non-sharp, fuzzy analytic/synthetic and related distinctions.

---

[66] Lynch (2001) 32-35.

[67] Lynch (2001) 35-41.

[68] Strawson, P.F. *Analysis and Metaphysics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992) 23-24. Lynch (2001) 44.

[69] Lynch (2001) 32.

(4) Schemes are only structurally foundationalist.

Let us very briefly consider these premises in turn. According to the first premise, the conception 'concept' that is employed is a functional one, as concepts are whatever composes the propositional content of our assertions and beliefs. The second premise requires a distinction between form (concept) and content (belief), for the Wittgensteinian model holds that a scheme is a framework of concepts that we employ to frame our beliefs; thus, it must be possible to discuss concepts and beliefs separately. As premise three indicates, basic concepts are not absolutely basic; they are contextually basic (most basic concepts float free of competing metaphysical pictures). Regarding premise four, because contextually basic concepts are basic for a set of general and specific concepts within a context, within a certain historical context that is, certain concepts of ours will be foundational, but only in the sense that they are widely presupposed by other concepts. Occurring over time, we can acknowledge a change in which concepts are basic, or in which the nature of our concepts changes. Taken together, as Lynch contends, these premises provide a substantial theory of conceptual schemes, which entails the possibility of more than one set of basic concepts. Basic concepts being, in the most general sense, those presupposed when more specific concepts are applied.[70]

Although metaphysical pluralism does not seem to put forth a definite philosophical position in its own right, for the Wittgensteinian model makes allowances for a range of pluralist views, it does put forth a particular account of metaphysical investiga-

[70] Lynch (2001) 45-47.

tion.[71] Influenced by R.G. Collingwood, Lynch holds that upon this model metaphysics is "the investigation of presuppositions of one's contextual situation in the world".[72] This conception of the metaphysical enterprise, as noted by Lynch, is similar to that suggested by Strawson, Wittgenstein, and in turn, the metaphysical pluralist in general, for on such a view

> the metaphysician will naturally look towards what [Lynch calls] *contextually basic* concepts, those concepts that, as Collingwood implies, are 'absolute' not in the sense of being fixed for every thinker but in the sense of being presupposed by the lion's share of one's thought in a particular historical circumstance.[73]

Yet, this is not the entire picture. For Lynch metaphysical investigations not only purport to describe our concepts, they extend them as well. Granted that conceptual schemes are "networks of concepts", as opposed to "sets of declarative sentences", Lynch can emphasise that our conceptual scheme is only one element of what he calls a *worldview*.[74] A worldview is an organic whole one of whose parts is what Lynch calls a conceptual scheme. Conceptual schemes are properly understood only in relation to their function as part of that whole. Conceptual schemes are informed by worldviews, which is a structured network that not only takes into account beliefs, concepts and language, but also

---

[71] Namely, Actual Pluralism (there is more than one conceptual scheme, i.e., Lynch's brand of pluralism), modal pluralism (it is possible for there to be more than one conceptual scheme), Strong Modal Pluralism (it is physically possible that there is more than one conceptual scheme), and Weak Modal Pluralism (it is only logically possible that there is more than one conceptual scheme). Lynch (2001) 47-8.

[72] As Collingwood states in *An Essay on Metaphysics*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940) 47, "Metaphysics is the attempt to find out what absolute presuppositions have been made by this or that person or group of persons, on this or that occasion or group of occasions, in the course of this or that thinking"; as noted by Lynch (2001) 48.

[73] Lynch (2001) 48.

[74] Unlike Putnam for instance, who opposed metaphysical realism wholesale because of its dependency on the notion of a fixed correspondence.

behaviour, tools, and action. Furthermore, as such, a person's worldview comprises all of one's concepts at a particular time. This linkage of conceptual scheme with a broader, more encompassing, perspective of our lives is reminiscent of Wittgenstein's idea of "form of life".[75] Subsequently, upon Lynch's notion of a worldview, there are *no* separate moral, epistemological, or aesthetic conceptual schemes, for instance, but separate moral, epistemological, and aesthetic *concepts*.

This puts Lynch in a position where he rejects Davidson's argument against conceptual schemes, based on their lack of a criterion of identity, for as Lynch puts forth, the Wittgensteinian model renders conceptual schemes *incommensurable* only insofar as that they do not share basic concepts.[76] Unlike Davidson, who identifies conceptual schemes with language itself, Lynch, with his conception of a worldview, argues that all that is needed for commensuration is the truism that language necessarily reflects or expresses one's conceptual scheme.[77] From this point of view, Lynch sees Davidson's argument as resting on the verificationist assumption, (i.e., the very same assumption Davidson claims to reject), as it dismisses the notion of a conceptual scheme based on the claim that the existence of another could never be verified.[78]

In further adding to his claims that one can be a pluralist without having any allegiance to verificationism, Lynch asserts the pluralist need not rely solely on anti-

---

[75] See §19, 23, and 241 in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations*. (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001).

[76] See page 7-8 above.

[77] Lynch (2001) 132.

[78] Lynch (2001) 2, 54.

verificationism to ensure the robustness of the metaphysical pluralists' agenda. Additionally, and most importantly, one can conceive of different conceptual schemes through the extrapolation of our experiences. Lynch claims that his point is simple and involves not too much of a stretch of the imagination, and is one that involves an historical perspective. Based on our past experience, we can understand that concepts continuously come into and go out of use, as they are either forgotten or no longer relevant. With this, we can understand that things are different from our own perspective, for with this one can assume that many of the concepts that we take for granted, or consider basic, may not, or most probably will not, be thus considered by users in the past and future.[79]

Moreover, it is because of these basic concepts, as the Wittgensteinian model implies, that individual concepts themselves cannot be always be determinate, but are instead open to change and alteration, inasmuch as they are *flexible* and *fluid*.[80] In taking concepts as flexible and fluid, the pluralist is not suggesting that concepts never have a fixed, or determinate use; rather, the pluralist simply claims that some concepts may be perfectly determinate in *actual situations*, but not in *all possible situations*".[81] Given this, a fluid concept can be extended in more than one appropriate, yet incompatible direction, inasmuch as one can reach different, but equally true answers regarding the very same question without employing different concepts, hence, the seemingly irresolvable

[79] Lynch (2001) 53.

[80] Lynch (2001) 60-61.

[81] Lynch (2001) 61.

disagreements over how to apply certain concepts. [82] Even the concepts "object" and "existence" are fluid according to Lynch.[83] Given this conception, concepts can be either minimal or robust.[84] Minimal concepts may be enriched, and may thus become more robust.[85] It is in these different trajectories that one is able to conceive of different conceptualisations, and as such, of differing, thus, alternative conceptual schemes.

In accordance to the Wittgensteinian model, as adherents to different schemes need not be intelligible to one other across the board, it is Lynch's observation that as distinct concepts can overlap and be extended in different directions, so too can conceptual schemes.[86] As one concept, and by implication, one proposition can be employed or used in more than one correct way, two schemes of concepts can fill out the same minimally interpreted proposition differently. Minimally speaking, the same concept or proposition can be considered relative to more than one scheme; robustly speaking, it cannot.[87] Whether a concept or proposition is understood minimally or robustly is not

[82] Furthermore, while the pluralist is not admitting that concepts are confusing as such, they may admit them as vague or even flexible. Vague concepts are examples of fluid concepts, but not all fluid concepts are vague, whereas flexible concepts are subject to possible extension in unprecedented circumstances. Lynch (2001) 61.

[83] Lynch identifies Putnam as having made the same point although he is often misunderstood to be speaking of an ambiguity rather than of fluidity. Lynch (2001) 80.

[84] Lynch provides a helpful illustration as he says if we think of minimal concepts as describing a function; just think of robust concepts as the ways in which those particular functions are instantiated.

[85] Take, for example, the concept "game", or" mind", or "epistemic justification", when there are disagreements "[i]t would be more true to our conceptual practice to say that we share one very fluid concept of game rather than many very distinct concepts". This is Wittgenstein's point, according to Lynch, in §532 of *Philosophical Investigations*. (2001) Our concept of game is flexible. However, flexible concepts do not imply pluralism but Lynch's pluralism requires flexible and fluid concepts. Lynch (2001) 65.

[86] Lynch (2001) 53.

[87] Lynch (2001) 94.

fixed in the absolute sense of the traditional metaphysical realism. However, it is fixed in the sense that it is determined by the overall context in which it is being expressed and employed. These distinctions are comparative and are a matter of degree, and their employment depends on how a particular assertion is used within a given context. Nonetheless, independently of this shifting context, there is no fact of the matter, per se.[88] However, with that being said, Lynch is also careful to discern that concepts and worldviews are not "conventional" or "invented", that is to say, mere constructs as Rorty would maintain, for most certainly indeed, our concepts are not products of the will.[89] This point will become important when considering Bernard Williams' view on this particular matter.

Pivotally, in similar fashion, Lynch argues that minimal concepts of 'world' and 'truth' are fluid in just the same way. Minimally speaking, he says, our concept of reality, or world *impinges on all of us* – there is one world we all share because there is the underlying supposition that we all experience our lives in a reality larger than us all.[90] Despite the fact that everything we claim is still internal to our conceptual scheme, the metaphysical pluralist does not deny reality; the pluralist only denies its description from the traditional metaphysical realist's ideal standpoint. This denial, according to Lynch's

---

[88] Lynch (2001) 71-72.

[89] On this point Lynch is in agreement with Stanley Cavell. Lynch (2001) 75.

[90] Here despite Putnam's own struggles, Lynch believes himself to have solved the consistency, or many worlds problem, for he maintains that interpreted robustly, disagreements on facts of the matter are due to the interlocutor's employment of the same minimal concept, i.e., shared notion that has merely been "explicitly extended" in incompatible directions.

metaphysical realist, in effect, affirms its constraints, which serve to permit these diverse descriptions of reality. In fact, it is consistent with pluralism, contends Lynch, to acknowledge that, relative to one's scheme, the world would still exists despite the fact that this modal fact is as relative as any other metaphysical fact, given that "within a certain conceptual scheme, the facts are what they are, independent of any of our particular beliefs".[91] What is more, "some aspects of objective reality must be a certain way… for the truth of a proposition hinges on the world alone, not our thought about the world".[92] According to Lynch, disagreements of the sort that Rorty is concerned with, that is, disagreements of states of affairs and matters about the world occur as interlocutors interpret their shared reality differently. Given our different conceptual categories, this one world, this *minimal world,* presents itself to us language bearers in radically distinct and incompatible ways.[93] Nevertheless, how is Lynch able to make such a claim about different schemes representing the world from this seemingly independent standpoint? His response is to say that sometimes this standpoint is possible, and sometimes not, depending on our ability to conceive otherwise, for as our concept of a single world implies, such a standpoint is always possible, at least in the abstract sense as we call on our ability to discern just how different concepts have arisen in these differing (historical) contexts, which share our basic concepts.[94]

[91] Lynch (2001) 98.

[92] Lynch (2001) 101.

[93] Lynch (2001) 95.

[94] Lynch (2001) 96.

This feature of Lynch's position has brought us full circle. Now we are in a position to confront Lynch's accusation regarding Rorty's supposed mistaken inference directly. As specified by Lynch, minimally speaking, a proposition is true in the realist sense when the world is as that proposition states it is, for otherwise, the proposition is false. Ergo, realism about truth *minimally implies* two commitments:

(1) Truth is an authentic property that some propositions have and others lack.

(2) The concept of truth is nonepistemic in as much as the truth of a proposition (in most cases) does not depend on beliefs or knowledge.[95]

Resultantly, minimal realism "lacks the specific metaphysical implications of its more robust cousin, the correspondence theory", which as discussed above in "The Milieu of Mistrust," is usually taken to entail absolute, fixed, and determinate structural relationships between propositions and scheme-independent facts. Conversely, according to Lynch, "minimal realism remains neutral on the main metaphysical questions regarding truth".[96] What is more, it is the minimal characteristic of concepts that enables them to be shared across conceptual schemes, enabling them further to carry out their robust extensions. Truth, according to the metaphysical pluralist, can, and should, most certainly, be considered in the same way; hence, a minimal concept of truth is a *metaphysically thin concept of truth*.[97]

---

[95] Here Lynch's employment of the term 'nonepistemic' is admittedly (and intentionally) akin to Putnam's notion of 'radically nonepistemic' in *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (New York: Routledge, 1978) 125; Lynch (2001) 101.

[96] Lynch (2001) 126.

[97] Lynch (2001) 127.

In effect, this entails further that a "minimalist conception of truth requires minimalist concepts of proposition, and fact, as well".[98] Thus, as the minimalist remains neutral on the ontological status of facts, through adhering to a minimalist view of facts, a minimal realist can thereby simply accept that statements are rendered true by facts, without any commitment to any specific ontology of facts. As a result, metaphysical pluralism, via the minimalist conception of basic concepts of proposition and fact, "floats free" of rival alternative metaphysical pictures as it indeed, it too, remains neutral about truth. Or, to put it more accurately, remains neutral about the *property* of truth. According to Lynch, although truth is never epistemic (in any sense of the term), minimal realism can maintain that there is only one *concept* of truth, yet nevertheless allow for the possibility that there may be more than one *property* that fits the constraints delineated by the concept.[99] In this way, contends Lynch, "the nature of truth" can differ across conceptual schemes "even as a single, univocal concept of truth is being shared" in all schemes.[100]

Drawing on his amalgamation of Alston's and Crispin Wright's conception of truth, additionally, Lynch contends that to be truly compatible with metaphysical pluralism the realist view of truth "must be both fluid and stable".[101] Picking out propositions

[98] "Propositions, in the minimal sense, are what occupy the role of the unquoted variable in the schema '*s*' says that '*p*'. Thus, the only constraint on propositions is formal: the propositions are the objects of 'that' clauses". Lynch (2001) 127.

[99] Lynch (2001) 126-27.

[100] Lynch (2001) 130.

[101] Lynch (2001) 131.

that represent the world, as it is, the minimal concept, representing the world accurately, performs its basic function. However, like any function, how that function is realised remains contingent on context. Consequently, in varying contexts functions may differ. This difference could manifest as either internal to, or between, conceptual schemes. As a result, these different kinds of conceptions give rise to a diversity of true propositions, i.e., propositions that may be considered true in different ways. Accordingly, truth can be "doubly plural" in context, that is, both within and across conceptual schemes.[102]

Make no mistake; although upon this view a true proposition may indeed be vague, this is not a drawback for the metaphysical pluralist, for this likelihood of vague affairs is not an implication that truth is relative. The only sense in which pluralism admits relativity "is trivial and has no bearing on realism".[103] As Lynch contends, truth is relative to a scheme, yes, propositions as well, most certainly. However, it is Lynch's claim that this is an innocuous brand of relativity as in no way does it imply that our concept of truth is relative per se. Certainly, the condition under which a proposition is true is indeed partly determined by the conceptual scheme in which the proposition is expressed; nevertheless, it is imperative to recognise that a proposition is true not because of its relation to a scheme, but because of its accordance to whether the conditions it purports accurately obtains. To be sure, truth concerns facts, and in turn, facts concern the way the world is.[104] Therefore, our minimal concepts of truth and fact are minimal in

[102] Lynch (2001) 132, 135.

[103] Lynch (2001) 137.

[104] Lynch (2001) 139.

virtue of the fact that they too "float free" of metaphysical debates amid relativism and absolutism. Apart from this, Lynch also adds that most of the time our thoughts do not even concern metaphysics. So, despite the fact that in this sense metaphysical pluralism can be seen as extending our minimalist conceptions of truth and fact in relativistic directions, Lynch confidently reminds us that this does not ensure that we should, or even could, will ourselves to forego these concepts altogether. These concepts are an integral part of how we take ourselves in the world, and relate to the fact that reality is larger than any one of us. For as per Lynch's apophthegm: "Minimal concepts are the stepladder to metaphysics."[105]

As specified by Lynch, it is scarcely ever acknowledged that despite the fact that pluralism denies absolute facts, "metaphysical pluralism is consistent with there being some *virtual absolutes*, i.e., facts that do not obtain independently of conceptual schemes, but *do obtain within every conceptual scheme*" and likewise are, "similarly consistent with virtually absolute propositions, or propositions that are relative to every scheme".[106] Take for instance the fact that Lynch's metaphysical pluralist admits that "every scheme must have the minimal concept of an object".[107] In effect, while sanctioning virtual absolutes, the metaphysical realist *implies* that many concepts and propositions are not relative to every scheme, despite the fact that all claims are internal to a conceptual scheme. This is a legitimate inference on the pluralists' part, for as Lynch

[105] Lynch (2001) 140.

[106] Lynch (2001) 142.

[107] Lynch (2001) 143.

contends, the issue over pluralism and absolutism is not whether there are concepts and propositions relative to every scheme; both can agree on that he says. Rather, the issue is over the *nature of the facts* in which they represent.[108]

It is to this point then, that for the metaphysician to say that reality is relative to conceptualisation, is not to deny any such reality. On the contrary, the pluralist "is exploring the limits of representation itself".[109] For although the world, according to the metaphysical pluralist, has neither a unique structure independent of our conceptual schemes, nor a single scheme of concepts for which to truly see the world, as it is language and thought do indeed represent reality. As the features of the world determine whether our statements are true or false, according to Lynch's metaphysical pluralist, even the minimalist reading of the t-schema '*s*' says that '*p*' requires the concept of representation. Lynch's pluralism does not deny the representational character of our thought and language because thought transcends thought as inevitably, in our attempt to make sense of another person's point of view, we do think of a world beyond our own conceptual schemes. Most notably when our employments of basic concepts differ and we are compelled to examine the result of those differences.

In fact, Lynch attests that pluralists, even in order to make their view plausible, "must" accept that our language and thought are about the world. Thus, it is as such, in opposition to Rorty's mistaken inference, "impossible" to maintain the claim that minimal realism about truth is incompatible with the view that language or thought can rep-

[108] Lynch (2001) 144.

[109] Lynch (2001) 147.

resent a world outside of itself.[110] In claiming that conceptual schemes represent a shared reality, we have to presuppose a basic concept of the world, and based in part on the fact that our minimal basic concepts of reality are of a world that impinges on all of us the concept of reality "is deeply presupposed by our world view".[111] Shared reality is non-relative in that it is something that is "independent of our schemes and conceptualisation", something that the conceptual schemes "are ultimately of".[112] As Lynch contends, the relativistic Kantian admits "the obvious truth that there is a single world represented by our conceptual schemes"; our basic concept of the world "is of nothing more or less than of the world we live in", although it is not a *noumenal realm* lying beyond appearances, nor an absolute structure either.[113] Essentially, the relativistic Kantian engages in *transcendental reflection*, reflecting on the metaphysical conditions under which thought and speech is possible, concluding that a concept of a single world is an essential part of any scheme inasmuch as we "must" view ourselves as part of a reality much bigger than, yet limited by, ourselves.[114] Nevertheless, Lynch's pluralist is not speaking of the world as a distinct entity; put simply, he says, "our minimal concept of the world is just the notion of everything, and our concept of *everything* is not the con-

[110] Lynch (2001) 147.

[111] Lynch (2001) 150.

[112] Lynch (2001) 150.

[113] Lynch (2001) 152.

[114] Lynch (2001) 154.

cept of one distinct thing among others". [115] As such, this conception of reality acts as a "*transcendental pointer toward the conditions of thought*".[116] A concept of the real or ultimate world is not a threat to the pluralist according to Lynch. Philosophically speaking, our conception of reality as the existence of everything is necessary, yet ultimately trivial, as it "serves no other function but to remind us that our world is *the* world, after all."[117]

Moreover, as minimal concepts are shared, that is, as conceptual schemes overlap, this shared reality enables me to not only evaluate my own scheme, but others' as well. As minimal concepts, propositions, facts, and virtual absolutes are shared, learning about other worldviews is made possible as *straddling* conceptual schemes gains us access into each. In short, this is how we learn, critique, adjust, and evaluate conceptualisations as the examination of basic concepts. Most often, this involves the evaluation of beliefs, concepts, and attitudes. Motivated by Collingwood, Lynch maintains, we *must*, even if only hypothetically, extend our conceptual perspective. This is what Lynch calls "assuming a *critical standpoint toward a scheme*", which requires the adoption of concepts that

> while minimally connected to our old ways of thinking are substantial enrichments of these new ways of thinking as well. By imagining how we might extend our rusty old concepts in radical new directions, artists, writers, scientists, poets, and metaphysicians are able to get us to see the faults of our current world view. They supply us with hypothetical vantage points from which to look at ourselves. And it is precisely because they are imagining an extension of our *concepts*, and

[115] Lynch (2001) 154.

[116] Lynch (2001) 154-55.

[117] Lynch (2001) 155.

> not just our beliefs, that we are often left confused and uncomprehending in their wake.[118]

Undoubtedly as the critical standpoint is always *relative*, there is an extent to which the connected conceptual scheme is limited, and one can transcend worldviews. Nonetheless, according to Lynch, this does not undermine our ability to engage in "constructive and revisionary" evaluation of ourselves and of others. Merely having a conceptual scheme, he adds, "cannot prohibit one from making appraisals of it or another scheme" nor need it imply that every scheme is as good as another.[119] There are *viable* and *nonviable* worldviews; a viable one, "hangs together, is free from massive internal inconsistency, fits the empirical data, is mostly truthful, and so on", whereas a nonviable one fails in some such respect.[120] Of course, any judgement concerning its viability is based on and made within our conceptual scheme; nevertheless, this also does not prohibit us from making judgements. Our aim is to do the best we can with the standards we have.

On this picture, metaphysics is the investigation of presuppositions of the contextually basic concepts of one's conceptual scheme, which as Collingwood would also have it "are both the tools and the subject alike of the metaphysician.[121] These concepts are contextually basic because they shift and change. Unlike Kant, (and even Strawson for that matter) Lynch's pluralist takes every concept to have a history. Conceptual description is an integral part of metaphysical inquiry; however at the same time it is also a

[118] Lynch (2001) 149.

[119] Lynch (2001) 150.

[120] Lynch (2001) 150.

[121] Lynch (2001) 156.

"description of how the world *presents itself to us*".[122] These projects can be separated in theory; however, in practice, the two intertwine. Metaphysics according to Lynch is as revisionary as it is constructive, for as he claims "[m]etaphysics seeks not just the truth but a truth that moves".[123] Hence, in countering the dire postmodernists' critique, Lynch's pluralist picture aims to give determinacy back to the world as guiding and restraining our account of it. Showing a hopeful and positive extension of our minimal concepts, in particular of truth and reality, Lynch claims his stake in the middle ground inasmuch as the world exists, and truth is absolute. Moreover, whilst countering Rorty, Lynch is still able to speak directly to Rorty's anxiety as he guides us through a possibility of change in, as Rorty is desperate to put it, "new vocabularies". However, unlike Rorty who is adamant in his conviction that change occurs only in the cultivation of agreement, Lynch shows how this seeming disagreement is not the detrimental notion that Rorty takes it to be, for Lynch attempts to show how much more agreeable the notion of "disagreement" can be for Rorty's notion of "consensus". Nonetheless, Lynch's notion would still not be an "original" enough "re-description" for Rorty. Despite the fact that both Rorty and Lynch seem to agree that truth is "flexible" and "nonepistemic", I think that against those of the same persuasion as Rorty, Lynch demonstrates his belief in truth's ontology, quite accurately.[124]

---

[122] Lynch (2001) 156-57.

[123] Lynch (2001) 157.

[124] See above 18-20 for Rorty's conception of truth.

CHAPTER 5

THE SPIRIT OF ENLIGHTENMENT CRITIQUE

Bernard Williams' endeavours to establish the middle ground as a viable position provide another positive picture, as he too, puts forth a new set of powerful intuitions in view of the milieu of mistrust, and his contempt for Rorty's menacing narrative. In his work *Truth and Truthfulness*, Williams' primarily concern is his worry for what he sees as "the crisis in the humanities", and for the "the value of truth" as such.[125] His concern regarding the 'crisis' is similar to what we have seen in our discussion of Rorty above, inasmuch as he too believes people to be criticising without the proper authority, which they consider themselves to hold. However, Rorty and Williams consider this lack of authority very differently. For Rorty thinks that this lack of authority involves those who criticise whilst deploying the truth, and conversely, Williams thinks that lack of authority stems from those who criticise without such deployment. Resulting from this divergence, Williams, in identifying this crisis, sees to correct this self-detrimental behaviour, and in doing so provides new aspirations, not only for philosophy, but also for the humanities comprehensively, in the way of opening up the past as a proper arena for philosophical rigour. Understanding the need for our ability to discriminate and adjudicate, and in countering Rorty's narrative, Williams claims that truth is not merely useful, but that it has intrinsic value. As such, Williams attempts to show how this intrinsic value

[125] The phrase "the value of truth" should be taken, as Williams says himself, as "shorthand for the value of various states and activities associated with the truth". Bernard Williams. *Truth and Truthfulness*. (Oxfordshire: Princeton University Press, 2002) 6.

arises out of human experience, and how, against pragmatism, no society can maintain a purely instrumental conception of the value of truth.[126]

Additionally, it is Williams' goal to assure us that we can place our confidence in the assertion of truth, and our confidence in such assertions, for it is Williams' belief that we can enter debates and affirm our discriminations with a *good conscience*. Williams recognises that, by and by, the activity of discriminating with a good conscience has becoming a dismal prospect. As a result, Williams empathises with Rorty's anxious efforts to quell the suspicious and mistrustful conduct surrounding the notion of truth, and to an important extent, views his concern as genuine, Williams agrees with Rorty that there is something really worth worrying about regarding the traditional notion of truth and the seemingly unproductive pattern which we seem to have found ourselves in. However, although Williams sees this as a legitimate concern, and agrees that, at times, we should be as concerned as Rorty and the other 'deniers of truth' suggest, most importantly, unlike Rorty, Williams does not extend this concern to the notion of truth itself.[127]

Williams argues that despite the fact that it may seem as though deception and fraudulence is integral to our conception of truth, indeed this is not the case, for as he argues, "if truth cannot be the aim of our inquiries, then it must surely be more honest or truthful to stop pretending that it is".[128] Our inquiries seem deceptive only due to the fact that our "devotion to truthfulness" and "the suspicion directed to the idea of truth" are

[126] Williams. *Truth and Truthfulness*. (2002) 59.

[127] Williams (2002) 6.

[128] Williams (2002) 2.

connected; and that as such, "the desire for truthfulness drives a process of criticism which weakens the assurance that there is any secure or unqualified stable truth;" however, this never occurs to the point of its own irrelevancy, for as Williams asks, What person says there is no truthfulness?[129] Truthful people, claims Williams, try to be accurate and sincere in their convictions, and if, like Rorty, we maintain that deception is built into such explicit attempts, then, it is Williams' contention that we ought to be a great deal more concerned than Rorty realises, for if truthfulness, and truth, as such, are not intrinsically valuable we are in dire straits indeed. Without the conception of truth beyond the notion of usefulness, we are merely engaged in a battle of rhetorics.

In advocating a 'modernists' conception of truth', it is Williams' attempt to recuperate certain, but not all aspects of the modern situation regarding Enlightenment thinking. It is as such that Williams, believing the basic problem for contemporary philosophy is the "intellectual stabilisation" of the notions of truth and truthfulness, in such a way that "what we understand about truth and our chances of arriving at it can be made to fit with our need for truthfulness", ultimately makes his move against Rorty.[130] By distinguishing between the authoritative and authoritarian (or imperialist) endorsement and employment of truth, Williams advocates the Enlightenment's notion of critique to the full extent, inasmuch as *truth is authority, and authoritative*, but not authoritarian. Indeed it offers constraint to our freedom, as evaluation is not contingent, nor is our vocabulary optional, and is worth our preoccupation because it is worth our attention (to

[129] Williams (2002) 1.

[130] Williams (2002) 3.

put it in Rortian terms). As such, Williams upholds the idea that this conception of critique has a particular association with liberalism, in which any attempt to disassociate it from liberalism is fundamentally flawed, for liberalism cannot be retained meaningfully whilst thinking that everything is contingent, especially values and vocabulary. Most infamous among those who have attempted to detach "the spirit of liberal critique from the concept of truth", he claims, is Rorty, the liberal ironist, claiming that liberalism has no universality and no rational way to adjudicate conflict, insofar as everything is contingent.[131]

Inasmuch as truth's authoritativeness is something we can stand behind in good conscience, Williams defends his belief that reductive criticisms of its application are harmful. For one, it leaves critics without authority, and then only the power of persuasion remains to get views across as worthwhile and worth taking seriously, as people do not trust what they have to say. But even the power of persuasion is no guarantee; if the critics are not careful and continue to claim an entirely reductive story, they will not only leave themselves without authority, but with little or no power at all.[132] Furthermore, scholarship's integrity dissipates altogether when all that matters is more data, and not a respect for the facts. Thus, despite the fact we have a penchant to tell the truth coupled with a "passion for truthfulness", as Williams will show us, if this passion goes un-

[131] Williams (2002) 4. See page 11-13, above.

[132] Williams (2002) 8.

satisfied, via stifling or control, "it will kill the activities it is supposed to support", hence the crisis.[133]

Truth is not indoctrination; and moreover, Rorty is difficult to argue against, not because we have been indoctrinated against him, but because he is wrong about truth. In his alliance with J.L. Austin, Williams maintains that it is commonsensical and "everyone should agree… that there are many everyday truths". [134] Standing in contrast to historical narratives and complex psychological interpretations, in referring to "everyday truths" or "plain truths" Williams does not mean things that are "certain and incontestable"; rather he is referring to what we can "readily and reasonably" count as fact. Williams stresses the importance of everyday facts for several reasons:

(1) Their presence has a significant role in accounting for truth and meaning.

(2) Everyone knows they exist, and knows what many of them are, for it is as such, the presence and relevance of these everyday truths provide the sciences their a claim to the seriousness that the humanities can easily lack without proper effort to secure their place.[135]

Nevertheless, in a certain sense, plain truths are relative, for a sentence's being plainly true does not imply that it is indubitable, for what is plainly true is itself not absolute in

[133] Williams (2002) 3. See page 15, above.

[134] Austin refers to what Williams calls "everyday truths" as truths about "middle-sized dry goods", see Austin, J.L. *Philosophical Papers*. Ed. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnock, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961); Williams (2002) 9.

[135] Here Williams claim to maintain the various lines put forth by Hume, Wittgenstein, and Stanley Cavell that recall us to "the everyday", but instead of recalling us to the everyday from the standpoint of personal alienation of "fantastical scepticism," which claims to doubt that there is an external world, past time, or other minds, Williams' recall to the everyday (i.e., to the kinds of truth that everyone recognises) is "from a politicised state of denial, which is not so much an alienation from the shared world, as it is a condition of sharing an alienated world". Williams (2002) 10.

the traditional metaphysical realist's sense, and as such, in this particular sense, truth is relative. Relative, that is, to a technology, or a set of skills in using it.[136] What is more, if we refuse to accept plain and everyday truths, as Williams espouses, we merely commit ourselves once more to one extreme end of the spectrum in which the middle ground locates itself.

In considering another sense of relativity regarding plain truths, similar to that of Lynch's notion of *basic concepts*, Williams maintains that what may be considered plain truths for one society, may be different for others in various places or times, depending on how the vocabulary of that language classifies its terms. It is in having understood another classification system (i.e., language game) that the same truths may be recognised as such, that is, as true or false, even when our identification with their perspective may only be partial and episodic.[137] Relating to another classification system hinges on the interpretation we put on what they say, for even if a proposition of theirs is false, an interpretation has indeed still been given nonetheless. This, in turn, not only explains to us how others make sense of their environment, but also requires us to make sense of their relation to us, and so our relation to them.[138]

As Williams notices, an idle relativism often emerges at this point to the general effect that people start holding that what they say is *true for them*, and what we say is

---

[136] Williams (2002) 49.

[137] Williams (2002) 50. Note: 'classification system' and 'language game' is my terminological imposition to describe what I think Williams means with brevity in mind.

[138] I want to point out that here Williams makes an important remark regarding the development of his argument. He claims that "[t]his process is likely to have a significant historical dimension". I will lay out this important aspect of his argument below as I approach it from a different angle. Williams (2002) 51.

true for us. Let's call this liberalism, or more precisely, pluralistic liberalism. However, this pluralistic-liberal position, if it can be made coherent at all, merely represents one kind of interpretation, that is, one that understands both explanations as mutually compatible. This style of relativism often complacently presents itself as an observance of human equality, i.e., a refusal to impose our conceptions upon others. However, in effect, this refusal is simply still one of *our* conceptions, claims Williams, which, moreover, "gives up before the real work of understanding human similarities and differences even begins".[139] With that being said, the quite basic role that truth plays in relation to language, meaning, and belief, is indeed, not culturally various, but always and everywhere the same, for as Williams attests, cultural variation itself could not be understood without taking the role of truth for granted. Williams argues that despite the fact that philosophical theories of truth have a history, the concept of truth itself most certainly does not.[140] Alongside Davidson, Williams maintains that we should resist any definition of truth, because defining it is problematic, for principally truth stems from a set of connected notions, such as meaning and belief, and as such, we are better employed in investigating the relations between these notions than in trying to treat one, or some of them, as the basis of the others.[141]

Yet, the cultivation of everyday truths is only the beginning. For Williams, truthfulness has to be grounded and revealed in one's dealings with everyday truths; and

[139] Williams (2002) 52.

[140] Williams (2002) 61-62.

[141] Williams (2002) 63.

"that is itself a truth, and academic authority will not survive if it does not acknowledge it".[142] Most importantly, truthfulness implies a respect for the truth and its two basic *virtues* namely, *Accuracy* and *Sincerity*.[143] Accuracy, as Williams defines it, is a virtue in the sense that one does the best they can to acquire true beliefs. Sincerity is likewise a virtue inasmuch as what one says reveals what one believes.[144] Alternatively put, the virtues of truth are "the qualities of people that are displayed in wanting to know the truth, in finding it out, and in telling it to other people". [145] Furthermore,

> [s]incerity basically involves a certain kind of spontaneity, a disposition to come out with what one believes, which may be encouraged or discouraged, cultivated or depressed, but is *not* itself expressed in deliberation and choice. Equally, Accuracy does involve the will, in the uncontentious and metaphysically unambitious sense of intention, choice, attempts, and concentration of effort.[146]

Certainly, Williams is not so naïve as to maintain that 'authority', or as Rorty sees it, authoritarianism (as I prefer to call it in order to distinguish between Rorty and Williams' use of the term), has no hand in this truthful endeavour. Nevertheless, Williams does affirm that in both the humanities and the sciences alike, we can have confidence and trust in scholarship insofar as the writer's dealings with everyday truths can be respected in view of the virtues of Accuracy and Sincerity. Like Nietzsche, James, and

---

[142] Williams (2002) 12.

[143] Williams' choice of the term 'virtue' is meant to make a point about how the distinction is to be understood. I will discuss this distinction in more detail below. Here, '*Accuracy*' and '*Sincerity*' are capitalised because Williams capitalises them. Here, and throughout this essay, when I am referring to the terms as Williams intends them I will continue to capitalise them in order to distinguish them from their more general meaning.

[144] Williams (2002) 11.

[145] Williams (2002) 7.

[146] Williams (2002) 45.

Wittgenstein, Williams calls on honesty and intellectual conscienciousness as he commends those who have an argument against the sceptics inside themselves, as they attempt to be reasonable, convincing, illuminating, and moreover, credible.[147]

In his effort to make sense of our most basic commitments to truth and truthfulness and explain the basis of truthfulness as a value, whilst at once urging us to forgo our preoccupation with reductionist explanations, Williams invites us instead, to think of the instantiations its value has taken on, and received, within different historical circumstances.[148] Leaving "almost everything open," so to speak, as opposed to the closed (i.e., determined or definitive) case of the traditional metaphysical realist, Williams reckons that "this is as it should be, because the questions that are substantial and interesting *are* open.[149] The questions are what we are prepared to regard, at each level, as an explanation.[150] In his case for *ethical naturalism*, as he calls it, Williams claims that living in a culture involves living under an ethical system, roughly speaking.[151] Refraining from functional accounts, which Williams argues are false, Williams' explanation contends that truth is a moral sacrifice. Staying clear of any psychological reductionism, in

[147] For instance, Nietzsche's claim to "ethical necessity" and "error as cowardice" in his *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1969) Preface, 3. Similar passages occur in Nietzsche's *Will to Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufman, (New York: Random House, 1967) §1041, as per Williams (2002) 15-17. James and Wittgenstein make similar claims to the effect that *truth does not go on holiday*.

[148] Williams (2002) 22.

[149] This is idea argues against Rorty's claim that a philosophers' goal in subscribing to the truth is that of a 'universal vocabulary' or 'a final vocabulary' as Rorty puts it the discussion above in "The Milieu of Mistrust," starting on page 10.

[150] Williams (2002) 23.

[151] Williams (2002) 26, 38.

his attempt to show how closely the motivations of practices of human ethical life are related to other aspects of human nature to the extent values can be regarded as intrinsic as opposed to instrumental, Williams employs the philosophical method of a genealogical account of truth, which as he adamantly maintains, "keeps historical fact and functionalist abstractions in their places" as it does not subvert truthfulness.[152]

Yet, Williams argues, such an account is incomplete without turning to history and cultural contingencies, for as Williams puts it so bluntly "philosophy only goes so far".[153] By this Williams means that philosophy, in an attempt to not fall short of its task, must involve itself in more than the merely abstract; it must engage in itself in reality; it must engage in history. Everything that can be accounted for is historical, in the sense that the immediate present is always changing, and indeed if the past is something to get right, then history is philosophical for it is a field of truthfulness, for our standards of critique are found in historical research, as historical endeavours must care for the truth.

In thinking about human attitudes about the truth, Williams also considers belief, assertion, communication, and as I have already touched upon briefly, changes in our conceptions. Belief and assertion are essentially involved with truth.[154] Like Rorty, and in fact, unlike Lynch, Williams does not subscribe to any conception of the correspondence theory. Williams is not explicitly against the correspondence theory per se, as is Rorty; he simply maintains that nothing interesting can be said about it. However, what

[152] Williams (2002) 35.

[153] Williams (2002) 39.

[154] This is the subject matter of Chapter 5: "Truth, Assertion, and Belief".

matters for Williams on this matter is the supposed consequences that have been drawn from such theories inasmuch as it has been argued that since truth does not, on these accounts come to much, neither does the truth. Here Williams is speaking to both those who deny that truth is a property, and those *minimalists* who, although they admit it does, take it to be a property only trivially.[155]

Taking his cue from both Wittgensteinian's and Davidson's (as discussed above in "The Milieu of Mistrust") projects Williams is a firm believer in the idea that we can trust that most of what people choose to assert is usually true. To put it Williams' way, "people simply tell the truth".[156] As such, a sincere assertion is one made by someone who believes that '*p*', and the fact that speakers very often assert the entirely obvious, that is to say, what is plainly true, is a fundamental aspect of the process by which language is learned.[157] Here plain true statements also serve to perform another function as they "remind us that we share the same world and find the same things salient, and help us to discover where we do and do not agree".[158] Although a basic function of language

[155] On this point and regarding the t-schema, Williams says the point "that an account of the truth should explain the correctness of t-sentences is widely agreed, but there is less agreement about what this means. Some have supposed that … t-sentences represent a relation of correspondence between language and world. The basic objection to this account of truth is that there is no systematic way of identifying the fact which supposedly makes a given sentence true. … There is no account of fact that at once is general enough for the purpose and does more than trivially reiterate the content of the sentences for which it is supposed to be illuminating the truth conditions, which is to say, there can be no interesting correspondence theory". Williams (2002) 64-65.

[156] To illustrate his point further, Williams invites us to consider how language is learned. To this he claims it can be acknowledged as an engagement of 'pre-reflective openness', or as Williams has termed it *primitive trust*, adding that it is not coincidental that in more developed social and political settings language learning begins in the family. Williams (2002) 49, 86.

[157] Williams (2002) 71.

[158] Williams (2002) 72.

is the transmission and sharing of information, it does not follow that this function must figure into the account of the assertion itself. Nevertheless, it does follow that the account must leave room for *insincere* assertions, which do not *necessarily* aim at informing the hearer. However, most importantly, insincere assertions do aim at misinforming the hearer.[159] In the case of sincere assertion, it is the innate connections between belief and truth that explain why the speaker's intention is to inform the hearer about the truth, which in turn, is to inform him about the speaker's beliefs – insincere assertion lacks both of these intentions. Thus, as Williams sees it, sincerity, at the most basic level, is simply an openness to say what a speaker believes, for an assertion is a direct expression of belief. As such, insincerity on the other hand, requires an adjustment of what is said on the part of the speaker.[160]

Williams also considers a related point as he examines the role of assertion in the transmission of knowledge. As direct expressions of belief, speakers are to be taken as reliable, and it is because of this fact that "a chain of assertions can transfer knowledge".[161] Calling to mind promising, according to Williams' picture, someone who asserts something standardly gives the hearer to understand that the truth about what is said can be relied upon, and in particular, as such, the hearer can base their actions on that assumption.[162] The fact that beliefs cannot intelligibly be adopted, or changed at

[159] Williams (2002) 73.

[160] Williams (2002) 75-79.

[161] Williams (2002) 79.

[162] This complements Williams' illustration of language learning, as discussed above.

will, is exceptionally important to the relation between belief and truth. For instance, when one is confronted with an objection to the content of their belief, one is not left with the same disposition with the same content; rather, one no longer calls it a belief, for in the simplest cases the disposition itself has changed. However, as Williams is keen to point out, this simplest case is far from the only case. In language users the conceptual content of their belief is, to a significant extent, the conceptual content of their language of what they are able to assert. It is far from being true that every thought is the content of a belief. Thoughts can also be other states of mind such as a guess, a fancy, a whim, or a wish, for example.[163] A strategy cannot be consciously adopted in order to cultivate some, or lose other beliefs.[164] To be sure, "beliefs aim to be true, and, just for that reason, [one] must take them to be true independent of [one's] will".[165]

In the sense that truth has an internal connection with beliefs and assertions, truth figures in that connection as a value. Assertions can be assessed for truth, for as per Williams, an assertion would thus cease to be an assertion could it not. From the standpoint of any society, this concept of assertion necessarily forms an important part of our experience. Thus, it is to this extent that truth must to be deemed as a value.[166] Despite the fact that there are norms in place, which contend assertions are supposed to be true,

[163] Williams (2002) 80-83.

[164] Williams (2002) 83.

[165] Williams (2002) 135.

[166] Williams (2002) 84.

many are not. This is often because they are not sincere.[167] As Williams indicates, there are many important motives. The significant motive among them is the virtue of Sincerity, which by now is implicitly understood as the notion of trust. This innocent and necessary aspect of "the epistemic division of labour" as Williams calls it, involves an *investigative investment*; as Williams puts it, it is questions like "How much trouble is it worth to find out about this?" that signal the need for the virtue of Accuracy.[168] This virtue encourages people to "spend more effort than they might have done in trying to find out the truth and not just accept any belief-shaped thing that comes into their head".[169] Hence, accuracy encourages people to ask questions and inquire into them.

A necessary condition of cooperative activity, such as that among any given society, is trust, wherein this involves the willingness of one party to rely on another to act in certain ways.[170] Williams claims that there are general forms of trust on which all social interaction depends. It is those who treat trustworthiness as having an intrinsic value who, in turn, must be able to make sense of it themselves as having such a value. Thus, it is in this instantiation that trustworthiness, Williams asserts, is an intrinsic good. Although the exact demand and expectations vary with the framework of values and sentiment in which trustworthiness makes sense, and this framework is different in differing cultural contexts, it is Williams' claim that nevertheless, we still have a general idea of

[167] Williams (2002) 85.

[168] Williams (2002) 87.

[169] Williams (2002) 88.

[170] Williams (2002) 88.

what kind of content is involved, for had we not, trustworthiness would be indistinguishable from any other disposition. As a result, abstract philosophising must involve itself in history wherein real histories of specific cultural circumstances fill in the framework thus providing the needed content. In addition, as Williams notes, the history of the particular range of values in a given cultural situation that have performed this role has been quite various and dense.[171]

Trust is an integral part of the research process, for both audience and author alike. As trustworthiness is much more than an avoidance of lying, astutely, Williams asserts the virtue of Sincerity is a particularly important disposition for a speaker to possess; "[w]e need people to have dispositions of Sincerity, and this implies that people treat Sincerity as having an intrinsic value".[172] Usually, as Williams tells us, in relying on what someone said, one inevitably relies on more than what is said, as hearers gather more from the content from the mere assertion itself, for as speakers obtain innumerable beliefs, not only are there numerous ways of expressing each, but also, given different contexts, as one belief is expressed, it can take precedence over another. In addition, as if this is not enough to make matters complicated already, there is interpretation, implications, and assumptions to consider in the mix as well. Nonetheless, all the while, in putting forth one's belief, one intends to express that which is believed, i.e., sincerely.[173] However, when a lie is told, the speaker intentionally brings it about that the hearer ob-

[171] Williams (2002) 91-93.

[172] Williams (2002) 95.

[173] For instance, "a speaker could always have said something else, mentioned a different matter, made their statements more or less determinate," etc. Williams (2002) 100.

tains a false belief, for when a speaker misleads, the speaker allows the hearer to acquire a false belief; but on the other hand, when a speaker tells the truth of what is believed and the hearer misunderstands, and as such, obtains a false belief, a violation of trust has, nevertheless, not been breached.[174] Lying, as Williams succinctly puts it, is "a violation of trust" bar none.[175] Even if lying is done out of concern and care the speaker still has not given the hearer the opportunity to form an opinion about the facts. In lieu of providing the hearer with a picture of the world, which one would have had they only spoken sincerely, the hearer has been provided a picture of the world that is a product of the speaker's will. The liar, to this extent, contends Williams, in replacing the world and its impact with a product of fabricated will, exercises power that in effect limits, or takes away, the hearer's freedom.

A deceiver, in any case, manipulates beliefs, which is wrong and a fabrication of the will as well, but in the lie, "the substitution of the will for the world becomes as immediate as it conceivably can be". As Williams perceptively accounts for it, the victim recognises the lie as

> a pure and direct exercise of power, with nothing at all to be said for … [the hearer's] point of view, and this is an archetypal cause of resentment: not just disappointment and rage, but humiliation and the recognition that in the most literal sense he has been made a fool of. … [Hence, the] structure of mutual respect and the capacity for shame in the face of oneself and others, is a traditional, indeed, ethical resource, but it is still very necessary.[176]

[174] Williams (2002) 108.

[175] Williams (2002) 118.

[176] Williams (2002) 119, 121.

Additionally, the reason Williams treats accuracy as a virtue is due to the fact that there are internal and external obstacles to truth. The external obstacles to truth-discovery, claims Williams, are an example of the world's resistance to our will. Incisively put, the fact that there are external obstacles to the pursuit of truth is one underpinning of our idea of objectivity, in the sense that our beliefs are accountable to an order of things that lies beyond our own determination, that is to be sure, "a specifically *realist* idea of truth, in the sense of an independent order of things to which our thought is answerable."[177] More to the point, in Williams' picture there is also another sense of 'objectivity', which as a virtue of inquirers, is connected to internal obstacles to discovery and pursuit of true belief.

As it is, the self-conscious pursuit of the truth requires resistance to such things as self-deception and wishful thinking, as such; it is precisely this component of Accuracy that renders it a virtue, say as opposed to a disposition of reliability.[178] Very importantly, Williams tells us that the virtues of Accuracy include dispositions and strategies for sustaining the resistance of belief against wish, and against one of the products of wish, namely, self-deception. As Williams pictures it, at the most primitive level, Accuracy and Sincerity ultimately get their meaning and content from human interest, both individual and collective, in the gaining and sharing of information. Accuracy aims towards both belief and truth as it implies "care, reliability, and so on, in discovering and

[177] Williams (2002) 136.

[178] Williams (2002) 125.

coming to believe the truth".[179] Williams not only supposes that the aim of inquiry is to arrive at the truth, but also that Accuracy is a truth acquiring method of inquiry.[180]

Resulting from his examination of belief formation, Williams contends, that in one sense Rorty is correct in that authoritarian force cannot induce belief.[181] However, from this Williams does not infer, as does Rorty, that truth and falsity drop out of the picture altogether. In insinuating that the account of the values involved here need not mention the distinction between truth and falsehood, Williams believes Rorty to be doubly incorrect.[182] In the first place, just as Williams distinguishes between authorisation and authoritarianism, we need to distinguish acceptable and unacceptable ways of inducing belief, and in particular, between various kinds of persuasion. For Williams there is no way to do this without the mentioning *the truth*. We need, for instance, the ability to describe the legitimate authoritative forms of persuasion such as education, which in Williams' view is a straightforward example of the epistemic division of labour. In the second place, Rorty simply fails to acknowledge that some beliefs are true.[183] Therefore, in rejecting the value of truth as itself central to the liberal ideas, Rorty has missed the point. Authoritative force, in the form of cruelty and suffering, i.e., authoritarian force,

[179] Williams (2002) 127.

[180] Williams (2002) 127.

[181] See my discussion on page 19, above, regarding Rorty's consideration of 'unforced opinion'.

[182] Williams (2002) 147.

[183] Williams (2002) 147-48.

subverts belief, and in doing so destroys the victim's relation to the world altogether insofar as it severs the distinction between fantasy and reality. According to Williams,

> [w]hat the inquirer must have in mind, as a condition of getting himself and his beliefs in the right relation to the world and to his will, can be summed up in these terms: some things in the world he can affect and most others he cannot; with regard to what he cannot affect and knows he cannot affect, a want can only be a wish; and a belief cannot properly be dependent on a wish. All of this adds up to a sense of reality, where this offers a contrast with fantasy. Self-deception, which is one thing that the accurate agent must avoid, is a homage that fantasy pays to the sense of reality.[184]

Moreover, the conception of self-deception along with the sense of being constrained by something outside the will, according to Williams, gave rise to a set of ideas that has deeply affected our present conception of truthfulness and its relation to the self. As Williams reminds us, although it is tempting to put our own conceptions into the past, the idea, or set of ideas, that we associate personal authenticity and self-deception with, namely Sincerity, was an invention of the eighteenth century.[185] As a result of our need to rely on each other for communication and action, we language users have learned to present ourselves, to each other, and consequently to ourselves, as being in possession of a moderately steady set of beliefs. A steady set of beliefs is important for the transmission of believable information, for if a person comes across as changing their mind haphazardly, for whatever the internal reasons, it will be difficult for others to consider them

[184] Williams (2002) 135.

[185] Williams (2002) 172.

as reliable indeed, for in this case they will be seen not to be in possession of beliefs, but rather *propositional moods*.[186]

Leaving behind assumptions that self-understanding is immediate and transparent, Williams asserts "at a more basic level we are all together in the social activity of mutually stabilizing our declarations and moods and impulses into becoming such things as beliefs and relatively stable attitudes".[187] The presence and needs of others that help us construct our factual beliefs; for if a belief turns out to be false, there ought to be an "epistemically convincing explanation" of how one came by it.[188] As Williams puts it, someone like Rorty who is sceptical about the truth, is registering something very important that can be explained. They are forwarding a concern that the dimensions of disagreement involved are not simply a matter of knowledge, or explanation, or more inquiry, but rather that the disagreements are matters of the needs of various parties, and of their relation to those who have other needs.

There is a social dimension in the construction of beliefs, attitudes, and desires. Drawn to bind oneself with others' shared values in order to make one's own beliefs and feelings steadier, (to make them, at the limit, for the first time into beliefs), one identifies with what they are prepared to sincerely profess and how willing one is to live under the personal and social consequences of this identification. In effect, according to Williams, what one has to ask themselves is how much they are willing to live without fantasy, and

[186] Williams (2002) 191-92.

[187] Williams (2002) 193.

[188] Williams (2002) 194.

commit to the truth, as people need to choose what is worth considering, and what is worth believing. [189] The process of arriving at a practical conclusion in our commitment to a belief typically involves shifting an indeterminate set of wishes, hopes, fears, and desires. A desire is a state of an agent, the content of which can be regarded by the agent at various stages of deliberation as satiable by the actions themselves that can arise from the deliberation in question.[190] And as Williams urges, if we only think in terms of belief and desire, the more subtle problems within the economy of belief formation may be overlooked, notably, the achievement, and to a significant degree, a cognitive achievement, of distinguishing between a desire and a mere wish. For that reason, and more generally, because of the idea of discipline that is involved in "maintaining the barriers between the route to desire and the route to belief," we can recognise that the virtues needed in our consideration of what to do "coincide at deep levels" with the virtues that we need in inquiring into anything, i.e., the virtues of truth.[191] If Williams is on the right lines, this insight removes the obscurity from wishful thinking. What is more, as specified by Williams, despite the fact that some forms of delusion are collective, it does not entail that the best way to grasp reality is in solitude.

Political truthfulness, particularly governmental, is valuable against authoritarianism, but as Williams asserts, this only occurs in alliance with other values, such as truth, and when expressed in a set of institutions and practices that together stand against

[189] Williams (2002) 204, 213.

[190] Williams (2002) 196.

[191] Williams (2002) 198.

authoritarianism, i.e., liberalism. As Rorty contends, Williams agrees that in contemporary times, liberal societies are more successful (at least in their own territory) than others in helping people to avoid the universal fears of violence, arbitrary power, torture, and humiliation. Although the demand for truthfulness, allies itself with some aspects of liberalism, it can nevertheless run into conflict with them. Williams in countering Rorty, illustrates how liberalism (the standard version we are familiar with, not that of Rorty's liberal-ironism) and the *liberal marketplace of ideas* is not optimal for the cultivation and promotion of ideas, (in any case or) as Rorty alleges. As such, liberalism (that is liberalism proper, not Rorty's version of the liberal-ironist) is not is favoured by Williams as a viable political position, more so along the lines that he has reservations about the alternative, not because he sees it as an intrinsic good as Rorty, as so many pluralists do at least seem to believe.

The ideal form of liberalism, as Rorty generally puts it, in its most realised form, is a tolerant and free society that raises its shared understandings, without unjustified authoritative, i.e., authoritarian, behaviour. Starting with the observation that the benchmark liberal assumption: that the two objectives of liberty, above all freedom of speech, and our concern with the truth coincide (let us call this pluralistic-liberal societies) is dubious, Williams is also keen to point out that the merits of the *liberal market place of ideas*, i.e., the *commercial market place of ideas*, as a means of encouraging promoting ideas, is one which merely encourages and promotes the *favoured accepted ideas*. The idea of a free market place not being biased and partial to economic gains in its selection of which ideas to promote is grim. It is very doubtful, as Williams shows us, how effec-

tive an economic market place can be in meeting Rorty's demands of the transmission of ideas, especially, with regard to many of those that are politically relevant. It is Williams who affirms that the ideas that favour truth are more likely to have the freedom to which Rorty aspires if we are able to assume a so-called *idealised market* whereupon it is a

> structure in which the success of a given idea is measured not by its being bought but by its being accepted, the competition will be not in commercial interaction between entrepreneurs but an intellectual interaction between people advancing various ideas, and the 'market forces' that operate on the ideas will consist of processes that are truth-acquiring relative to the question at hand. Abstracting from particular subject matters, these processes will standardly be such things as careful argument, attention to empirical inquiry, sifting of evidence and so on.[192]

Nevertheless, this is very misleading says Williams, economics is not only an integral aspect of our current liberal state, but it is revered. Rorty too must see this. However, in recognising that liberal society itself is not the idealised market place of ideas, given our present predilection for economic markets, and incorporating it with our concern for truthfulness, Williams claims that although the radical spirit of Enlightenment programs is something to fear in its own right, regarding its programs for the advance and application of truth, there is "a lot to cherish in its concern for truthfulness."[193]

Antirealists and the deniers of the metaphysical realist's conception of truth, Rorty in particular, maintain that our current conception of liberalism; namely, pluralistic liberalism (i.e., the type of liberalism that stems from our current milieu may accurately be considered as.) is the answer to our current dissatisfaction with traditional metaphysical realism. However, as Williams asserts, there is a limited extent to which

[192] Williams (2002) 214.

[193] Williams (2002) 231.

we can regard the emergence of liberalism (this current conception or the more standard version which does not forego the notion of critique) as an achievement in improving our situation. Rightfully put, Williams admits that presently we have such an attachment to this pluralistic liberalism, as opposed to its more critical cousin out of which our so-called politically correct version stems. Liberal societies are good, maintains Williams, but not ideal.

With respect to our making sense of people's actions, and as such, narratives, the condition of our understanding of each other as we integrate ourselves in our world is that it should make sense to us that such actions should make sense to people in those respective circumstances. Furthermore, as Williams insists, likewise the variation of what makes sense in different circumstances, particularly in different cultural circumstances, necessarily extends beyond feelings and actions, to the level of *explanation*.[194] Williams maintains that one way in which one can make sense of another's actions is, as Collingwood suggests, by imagining oneself into the position of the respective agent, whilst for the purposes of the exercise taking on, so far as one can, the agent's outlook. As Williams sees it, Collingwood's form of historical and, more generally, social understanding, is undeniably a basic way of making sense of other people.[195] Although it is unquestionable for Williams that facts have to be discovered, as facts are not individuated before any inquiry, and the interests that shape the narrative also shape the inquiry that discovers them, it is not the case that inquiry invents facts; as such, this is the reason

[194] Williams (2002) 234-35.

[195] Williams (2002) 237.

why the virtues of truth are called upon if the facts that are included are going to be facts at all. Accordingly, as per William's view, there can be agreement about facts and disagreement about what makes sense of them to whom.[196] This is where Williams admits that he agrees the deniers of truth have a case, for in the case of disagreement, which narrative prevails, if any does, may be a matter of power and politics. Nevertheless, the disagreement may also fade into the past, or more to Williams' point of view, may indeed be resolved as one narrative is accepted as believable, and hence, true.[197]

Unlike myth, "truth is not audience-relative". However, history, and as such any narrative, that is to say anything we say about the past, long-past or immediate, and how the world is, "cannot be a mere chronicle, the barking out of unrelated truths", for in any case any narrative can contain all true statements and still tell the wrong story; "[t]he problem is not whether truths, and to that extent, the virtues of truth, come into it, but how far they take us."[198] Making sense of narratives is a matter of interpretation, and interpretation is up to us, for the past does not make sense until we make sense of it. To add to this, there is no sharp line between what historians "recover from the record and what they 'fill in'; getting data from the record already involves filling in".[199] Hence, agreement or disagreement arises inasmuch as the explanations and the assumptions that constitute the narrative can be said to count as calling upon the virtues of truth. Some-

[196] Williams (2002) 240, 257.

[197] Williams (2002) 241, 262.

[198] Williams (2002) 242.

[199] Williams (2002) 247.

times, notes Williams, those disagreements are profound as they penetrate into what different people regard as significant.[200] Liberalist-pluralistic societies, as Williams sees it, properly conceived, give a "special shape to the problems that are inherent to the relationship between the historian and the public".[201] This is because of the fact that they are contrived of several audiences, and as such, contain not only a diversity of opinions regarding what is important, but also a diversity of writers who share or contest them, and not because of the fact that there is more than one truth, or several truths as the pluralist maintains. This accounts for why it is quite natural for us to speak of 'conservative' or 'left-wing', 'deconstructive' and 'postmodern', or even 'feminist' accounts of history; nevertheless, as Williams propounds, all these different accounts "will be advanced and defended under the constraints of truthfulness," for all interpretations are responsible to the demands of truthfulness, which of course, as we have seen in the opening of this chapter, includes Rorty's antirealist account as well.[202]

When we have methods of inquiry that are truth-acquiring as Williams contends, then, if inquiries using these methods should converge in their beliefs, then it also follows, according to Williams, then "we have some reason to think that they converged on the truth".[203] This is the case as much in the field of historical inquiry and philosophy, as anywhere else. However, as Williams' affirms,

---

[200] Williams (2002) 250.

[201] Williams (2002) 252.

[202] Williams (2002) 252.

[203] Williams (2002) 256-57.

> a model of convergence on the truth applies only to the extent that we can coherently conceive of what might count as 'the truth' about the matter at hand. In general, this requirement is met straightforwardly because what the inquiry is looking for is the answer to a question. I can say that there is a truth to the matter whether Caesar led his army across the Rubicon, because I mean there is a true answer to that question. This does not mean that there is such a thing as the truth about Caesar, or come to that, about the Rubicon; there are indefinitely many truths about them.[204]

However, with that being said, Williams warns that on this account we need to be especially careful that this idea does not intend to inform us of how the past "really is" or how it is "in-itself", which reverts to traditional accounts of metaphysical realism, maintaining all fiction is falsehood. The question for Williams in his allegiance to the middle ground, as we know, is not whether narratives involve interpretation, of course they do, rather the question for Williams is whether there are truths about the past; to this he answers "there are only too many"![205] The extent to which the formation of a narrative can be governed by considerations that have anything to do with truth and truthfulness, Williams asserts, is such that in the traditional sense there is not such thing as "the truth" about in any account of how the world is, past or present, for there could only be "the truth" were there only one most basic question that was the concern for all inquiry, but alas there is no such question.[206] While according to Williams, we must demand that in-

[204] Williams (2002) 257.

[205] Williams (2002) 244, 246.

[206] Williams provides an apt illustration complementing his insight on this matter. He says: "Philosophers of science disagree whether there could be such a thing as 'the truth about the universe', but those who think that there could be such a thing certainly do not suppose that there is just one true thing to he said about the universe, they mean something to the effect that there could be a final answer to the question 'What are the most basic laws of the universe?' where those most basic laws will have to satisfy some very strong requirement of what they can explain 'Everything,' some say, but the success of the project

terpretations should tell us the truth, in the sense that they should not lie or mislead, what we need them for is not to tell us something called "the truth," we need them rather to he truthful and to make sense *to us*.

Furthermore, another reason why things make sense to some, and not to others, is the fact that needs change. Needs are relative to interest that selectively forms our interpretation, and in turn, our narratives; nevertheless to be sure, this is not a relativity of truth. We can be brought to see the needs of other people, and in doing so will alter our own, but this is a matter of politics its broadest sense, for at the end of the line the question might be whether either, or any, party is willing to tolerate the fact that something different makes sense to another. In these situations, as well as in less dramatic ones, Williams claims that people often use the term 'relativism' here because of their correct sense that these disagreements are basically political, or ethical, or at the very least temperamental.[207] However, if we speak of relativism in this way, it should not be contrasted with 'objectivity'. The contrast suggests that on a relativist's account, interpretation implies the term 'bias' in a derogatory sense, inasmuch as nothing can be learned from the standpoint of interpretative fiction, and on Williams' account, this is simply not true.

---

can hardly turn on taking that literally. In the sense in which the scientists are looking for the truth abut the universe, they will not have failed because the theory they triumphantly produce cannot explain the Pilgrimage of Grace, Susan's divorce, or Beethoven's opus 110. Rather it will have to explain – we cannot put it much better than this – everything that those engage in the search take it to he the business of cosmology and physics to explain." Williams (2002) 257.

[207] Williams (2002) 260.

When differing narratives, with differing demands of what makes sense are told at the same time, and in knowledge of one another, it is usually not the case that they are insulated from one another, and in the rarer instances in which they are, Williams assures, this will not be an instance of a mere consequence of the relativist account – "it will be a political fact, which is constituted by there being two publics that do not speak to each other in ways that make enough sense," and when both parties are willing, if ever they are, it will be political questions themselves that will overcome disagreement.[208] The 'acceptance' or 'rejection' of an interpretation is not a case for voluntarism. As Williams reiterates, we do not decide what makes sense to us; making sense is not a matter of the will, for truth comes as discovery, but it is a matter of Accuracy and Sincerity. As a result, the ultimate aim of historical interpretations, is not truth per se (although they need to be truthful), but whether they are believed or not, as they are told by someone who tries to get others to accept an interpretation, that is, they are told by someone who is trying to convince them, and as such, trying to change their mind.[209] Good history does not equal, equate to, or amount to the truth – good history cares about the truth.

According to Williams' picture, those who advocate contested interpretations, as Rorty does, are often trying to rally not just their own group, but they are also trying to convince the unconvinced, and it is as such that, despite Rorty's best intensions, Williams asserts that surely Rorty's notion of solidarity and intersubjective agreement de-

[208] Williams (2002) 261.

[209] Williams (2002) 262, 267.

pends on some notion of truthfulness, if not truth alone. Certainly, (despite the seeming lack of integrity) Rorty's own purported narrative, and in turn, his reliance on the philosophical works of his supposed cohorts, is nevertheless *an historical account*, which in turn, according to Williams, is a reliance on the notion of truth, whichever way he chooses to name it, for to be sure, this is not the mere post-philosophical conception of solidarity and agreement that Rorty ostensibly advocates.[210] Despite the fact that Rorty thinks he is presenting a post-philosophical view, in his use of the narrative, and to history, as such, he already purports to subscribe to the virtues of Accuracy and Sincerity as he purports to present an accurate and sincere portrayal of what others have done and reasons why we should not continue in their futile footsteps. Rorty may contend that this portrayal merely subscribes to conceptions of usefulness and not to a *need* to make sense of history, but Williams believes this view is gravely mistaken, for "the need is there to make sense of one's situation, and that requires an appeal to the past that is worth looking for. [211] If it is not to the historical, then it will be to some kind of myth about it".[212]

> But, after all of this, why not myth? Of course, if a [narrative] is taken to actually make sense of their actual condition, people cannot *simply* regard it as fiction, but they can cease to care and cease to look. In relation to the past, Accuracy and its demands could come to be forgotten, and reminders of them ignored or suppressed. A culture of truthfulness, the 'sense for facts,' would disappear. Should we mind? ... To say that living in the truth is just a better place to be is a perfectly good answer. But it is not going to impress everyone, and it runs the risk, as an-

[210] See my discussion on page 6 where Rorty views the problems of representationalism as inherent and thinks that as such they will never reach epistemic closure because history tells us that no stance could ever confirm this position since no stance can transcend this privileged position.

[211] This is the case because of a historical reasons as discussed above in "The Counter Narrative" on page 28.

[212] Williams (2002) 263.

> swers in this style do, of implying that there are no other answers to the question why, if we are trying to make sense of the past, history is better than myth.[213]

It is Williams' aim is to show "that there is no one reason for preferring the truth, and to explain why many people much of the time do not even ask for a reason, and rightly so".[214] In his attempt to vindicate his genealogy, and show that truthfulness has an intrinsic value, Williams counters Rorty, as he believes himself to have shown us not only why the demand for truth can be seen with a good conscience, but also why a good conscience is a good thing with which to see the truth. Hope, as such, for Williams is threefold: that the virtues of truth continue and flourish, and that coinciding with this, there will be institutions designed with the intention in mind to both support and express them, and that the ways in which future generations will come to make sense of their surroundings will be encouraged by the virtues of truth.

[213] Williams (2002) 263.

[214] Williams (2002) 263.

CHAPTER 6

THE MODERN MEDIEVAL PREOCCUPATION

In giving us something that is a part of Rorty's own agenda, Frank Farrell in *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism*, is worried about the state of contemporary epistemology. In his attempt to counter Rorty's narrative, Farrell provides us a level of entrance into postmodern thought that Rorty is unable to provide, as he provides an honest and reliable treatment of recent philosophy. Conversely, Rorty's attempt is unreliable, and as Farrell shows, Rorty not only gets certain figures wrong, Davidson in particular, more importantly, he is also wrong about the positions we are led to as a result of that menacing narrative.[215] More precisely, although Farrell can acknowledge Rorty's sensitivity to developments in contemporary philosophy, as there have been a number of important recent challenges to our understanding of mind, subjectivity, and language, it is Farrell's position that Rorty's belief that these developments lead to a picture of free-flowing cultural conversations, for which the world provides no constraints in matters of 'getting things right', is erroneous. Farrell, in contrast, thinks that they lead to a more deterministic account of the world, or as he puts it "to more realist accounts and to what we might call a recovery of the world".[216] Effectively, Farrell wants to show why Rorty's recom-

[215] Farrell is primarily speaking toward Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979). However his discussion is not exclusive to it.

[216] Here the term "deterministic" is used to describe the idea that inasmuch as the middle ground position maintains that the world is partly determined by us, and partly determined by itself, Farrell here pushes this already accepted ratio to account for even more determinacy from the world then henceforth conceived. Each middle ground position, stemming from Davidson's amicable premise, adheres to this ratio

mendations for philosophy are wrong, and why we ought to be encouraged to more realist conceptions as opposed to more relativistic, or postmodernists ones.[217]

Farrell places recent arguments in their historical context, namely, those related to medieval philosophy and German idealism. His concern is for philosophy, and in his Hegelian attempt to figure out where we are in our current debates, Farrell is concerned about our lack of communication. As it is, both Farrell and Rorty are urging philosophers to communicate more openly. For as Rorty contends, and Farrell agrees, philosophy has isolated itself unnecessarily. Farrell is troubled that we obey imaginary lines that we have constructed ourselves and that are gratuitously fragmenting not only philosophy, but the other disciplines as well. However, unlike Rorty, who maintains this acknowledgement marks the end of philosophy as such, Farrell believes this marks the stage upon which the middle ground is set. As result, he wants us to understand our common space between us philosophers and the other disciplines alike. The strength of Farrell's thesis, whether it is ultimately right or wrong, is that it implores us to examine our conception of truth inasmuch as it encourages us step back and re-consider arbitrary

---

as the middle ground position holds two important tenets: (a) the rejection of the realist's notion of a God's-eye view on reality converging on a single and absolute reference point, and (b) the acceptance, as a given, that interpretation plays a role in our conception of both truth and world. Farrell, Frank. *Subjectivity, Realism, and postmodernism: The Recovery of the World*. (Cambridge NY: Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge, 1994) "Introduction".

[217] This is to say "postmodern" in the sense that it is the generic name for the position that situates itself on the polar end of the scale in which the middle ground positions itself. Generally, what can be said to characterise this position is the given role that interpretation plays in our conceptions of both truth and world as it takes a decisively dominant role in this relationship. Interpretations are primarily comprised by their own determination, and not by our own.

starting points.[218] For as Farrell contends, it is indicative of the character of a philosophical period, where it thinks its explanations may stop. In medieval times it was with the divine, and in the modern period, (our period as Farrell considers it) it is with human subjectivity, as its mental activity confers meaning and determinacy upon itself in virtue of its own performance, in which 'things' or 'shapes' in the world have to be ordered and interpreted, by "mental activity that is somehow self-ascribing, self-interpreting, and self-reading."[219] As a result, our explanations can rest here, in a way they could not had the world more determinacy, and as such, the move beyond our modern philosophical period, which he encourages us to do, is "the refusal to accept that there can be such an activity, coupled with the demand that we explain how the mental realm itself comes to have the semantic character it has".[220] In order to argue that the world both informs and constrains us, or as he puts it, to reclaim the world's determinacy, Farrell does some fine-tuning of Rorty's narrative, addresses some of the problems of the antirealist's position in general, and then sets up his own positive story in such a different way.

After observing the terrain, Farrell forms the hypothesis that philosophy, as we know it, and all of our arguments, are stuck in a system characterised by medieval conceptualisations – even Rorty's. Farrell shows, as he sees it, that the moderns continue exactly what the medievals set up for them, and in contemporary times, just as in modern times, we continue to take it piecemeal and apply it to our philosophy. This includes

[218] For example, one suggestion is to look at the analytic tradition as Farrell has done. He shows how analytic philosophers do not debate their starting points; they argue within the line that tradition has drawn for them.

[219] Farrell, Frank. *Subjectivity, Realism, and Postmodernism*. (1994) 68.

[220] Farrell (1994) 68.

everybody, in all divisions and categories. This is a powerful thesis. It aims not only to undermine Rorty explicitly, claiming that he has not moved away from our old models as he holds, but it also suggests a new project for philosophy inasmuch as it points at something new to discover about truth and world.

There are two senses in which Farrell speaks of the 'recovery of the world':

(1) The alienated self of modernity is assured that its concepts are at home in the world as it is;

(2) and the world itself recovers from a process of thinning out and contraction that it suffered in relation to the powers of the modern subject.[221]

According to Farrell, it seems that in repeating the cycle of medieval philosophy, we have only replaced god with ourselves, which is to say that while ousting god from our metaphysical conceptualisation of reality, we have merely shifted that determinacy conferring onto ourselves. And we have ended, as they did, "with a nominalism that makes the world a sort of 'thinned-out' region that puts the least constraint on our willing and ordering". It is in this context that we can, Farrell says, now conceive of a further process: a complete disenchantment of subjectivity that will match the complete disenchantment of nature that has already occurred. This would mean reaching a stage resembling late medieval nominalism only now in relation to the mental and semantic items of the subjective realm instead of in relation to the natural world. Farrell's prediction regarding this foreseeable result is twofold. Rather than being hidden behind the scene like the medieval voluntarist god, the determinacy conferring subject will exhaust itself in the sort of behaviour it could display to an interpreter, and as such, we will be readier than

[221] Farrell, (1994) "Introduction".

we are now to see the world itself as guiding and constraining our accounts of it. Or even before that foreseeable outcome, as Farrell hopes to encourage, we can come to realise that perhaps without the theological model in place, our lack of confidence in letting explanations come to rest with the subject, will work out in such a way that the idea of a scheme imposed by thought and language "will become much less appealing, and consciousness will lose its absolute character as determining its own identity from within.[222] In Farrell's view, one of the most pressing problematic issues that medieval thinkers left their modern counterparts is the *problem of redistribution*: "they constituted an energy field one point of which had such an unlimited power against all other points that it was bound to suck into itself all activity of determination and to leave the rest of the field thoroughly evacuated of power, meaning, and value. The modern subject's power, if not limited in that way, has at least a similar status".[223]

In effect, Farrell's goal is to challenge the configuration set in place by the medieval and modern picture of subjectivity. Whatever the philosophical merits, it was Aquinas who set in play the conception of the subject that pervades the history of the modern subject. This is a picture of what an unconditioned autonomy must be like, and a model for the picture of self as self-relating-in-relating-to-others. A common theme is

[222] Farrell (1994) 2,3, 6.

[223] Farrell (1994) 28. Note: Farrell's articulation of the 'problem of redistribution' is an important one that I will employ and rely on from this point onward. Moreover, henceforth, all references to the term 'determinacy' will explicitly refer to Farrell's conception as articulated here. Furthermore, the terms 'subject' and 'subjectivity' are used, and will continue to be used, throughout this essay in contrast and comparison to the world's own determinacy as constraining our account of it; and as such, extends itself to the intersubjective as well, for the middle ground maintains that interpretation has a significant part in constituting a world that is not 'ready-made' as per the traditional metaphysical realist's conception.

that one's knowing is ultimately a self-knowing; we see this in the number of versions of that conception of autonomy, such as the Kantian, Hegelian, existentialist, and so on.[224] Farrell even sees a residue of the religious picture in positions that emphasise their contrast to the God's-eye view.[225] According to Farrell, this contrast suggests "why *our* knowing must be characterised as a pragmatic or instrumentalist self-assertion, rather than as a grasping of things as they are".[226] Turning to our conception of reality, one deep-seated difficulty for a philosophical account of reality as we have discussed above, is that it seems to expose itself to a worrisome objection that our account may not match up to how things are, for it may always be contrasted with a God's-eye view of matters. However, Farrell argues that without the theological overtones, the claim is just "that we cannot be sure that very substantial increases in our various intellectual abilities would not make available to us a fundamentally different account of what reality is really like".[227]

G.W. Frederich Hegel and Donald Davidson in their attempts to challenge the configuration of subjectivity, as Farrell sees it, have attempted to bring out this double recovery of the world.[228] Although he believes that Hegel's project does not work, Farrell thinks his writings "*spur us to be aware* of, and also to offer resistance to, patterns of

---

[224] Farrell (1994) 7.

[225] For instance, 'humanistic realism', such as Putnam's externalism, in particular, and pluralism in general.

[226] Farrell (1994) 13.

[227] Farrell (1994) 25.

[228] Farrell (1994) 16, 27.

thought that modern philosophy would have us take for granted".[229] As Farrell understands it, the Hegelian strategy for showing what reality is like, and how our thinking is 'at home' in it (as opposed to 'alienated from'), does not appeal to theories of reference, of epistemic anchorage, or construction by a scheme, as it does not seek to have a 'fit' that depends on a linkage between our thought of the world and how it really is, i.e., as per the correspondence theory. Likewise, as discussed above, Davidson also tries to secure that relation without depending on this comparison.[230] Furthermore, as Farrell puts forth, both Davidson and Hegel argue that if we understand the realm of thought properly, we can see that just by manoeuvring around within it, by making various internal connections, by aiming at coherence, and by setting concepts and beliefs in relation to one another, instead of looking for word-to-world confrontations, we can be sure that we are generally in touch with the world as things are. In pointing this out, Farrell is careful to say that he does not want to overplay the comparison with Hegel and Davidson, for indeed, he is well aware that their differences run deep. Nevertheless, he believes that moving to a "somewhat higher level of resolution," real parallels can be seen between quite a number of anti-Kantian and anti-empiricist moves in both Hegel and in recent philosophical works, such as Davidson's in particular, that support anti-traditional realist conceptions.[231]

---

[229] Farrell (1994) 26.

[230] See "The Milieu of Mistrust," pages 4-8, above.

[231] Farrell (1994) 28, 116.

What particularly interests Farrell in Davidson, as one thinker, is the attempt to secure the adequacy of our concepts not through any empiricist anchorage to the world, but through rethinking the conditions for the realm of thought having the determinacy it does in the first place. As Farrell shows, in Davidson we do not look for some kind of evidentiary linkage to the world, rather we consider various conceptions of how thought is related to reality, and try to show that these conceptions collapse when we press them to account for what they take for granted. Considering this, any proposal that our thoughts would be the same despite how the world is, is charged as having not appropriately asked how thoughts came to be the thoughts they are.[232] Although he knows that Davidson would be unwilling to describe his project in his terms, and as such, would be unhappy with the classification, Farrell refers to Davidson's position as, at the least, weakly realist. Because as he sees it, "Davidson does not try to establish a stable point that can withstand the arguments by Quine and others for indeterminacy, but rather pushes for even more Quineian claims by showing that relativists have not been radical enough"; put another way, Davidson resists accounts that take beliefs to be made true by a causal hook-up to an already determinate world.[233]

Farrell thinks that Hegel's solution is clever in that he accepts the modern turn to subjectivity, and then proceeds to reform our conception of subjectivity so that its structures and patterns can count as already being at work in the self-articulating of things. Thus distributing the determinate power across the field, as there is no "emptying out

[232] Farrell (1994) 28.

[233] Farrell (1994) 29, 113.

rush to a single point of determination".[234] Had Hegel's project been successful, it is Farrell contention that he would have solved the problem of the recovery of the world. In attempting to find an alternative solution to the problem, Farrell turns to, and examines whether full disenchantment with subjectivity, in earning a full determinacy-conferring power, will allow us to find ourselves in a world whose order and value we contribute to, but do not constitute. Likewise, Farrell also appreciates Davidson's stance toward the middle ground. He recognises that the lesson we learn from Davidson is that many of the features of the world do not have the metaphysical depth of traditional metaphysical realism. However, Farrell takes Davidson to seriously underestimate the degree in which meaning is shared, as he does not grant enough weight to the pressures of a common cultural world on our activity of interpreting.[235] To this Farrell claims Davidson "constantly underplays … the significance of belonging to a shared practice, and of being in the wrong when one fails to follow its rules".[236] Farrell's claim is to take the occurrence of different speakers to be speaking the same language at an earlier point than Davidson supposes. To this Farrell adds that "Davidson has an under appreciation for the Hegelian middle realm: the cultural world that mediates between the particular

[234] Farrell (1994) 29.

[235] Indeed, central to Davidson's account is that meaning is social; however, as Farrell sees it, it is also shared. As such, he places due emphasis on it.

[236] Farrell here offers the consideration of an analogy with styles of clothing. "Some clothing, such as military uniforms and judges' robes, is determined by conventions to which those in certain positions are expected to conform. Then there are other occasions where there may be a great deal of conformity not because of conventions but because of a common socialization, as when college students going to a basketball game may end up dressed very much alike. Davidson seems to regard the similarities among speakers of the same language as more like the latter sort of conformity rather than like the former." Farrell (1994) 96.

features of an individual and the universal principles that apply to all in the same manner".[237] According to Farrell's account, the Davidsonian linguist obeys the universal principle of determinacy inasmuch as every speaker is taken as speaking about the same world.

> But then each individual speaker is fitted to that world as a naked individual, and a theory of meaning will be valid only for a single speaker on a single occasion. Speakers are not seen as being related to that universal horizon of sameness through the mediation of particular linguistic communities whose institutions impress their meaning upon a speaker's mental states and utterances.[238]

Davidson recognises that socialisation shapes how we speak and makes those living in a community rough copies of one another in how they use language. Most importantly, like Williams, Davidson thinks that only communicators can have belief states, as it is only in recognising beliefs from a different perspective, about the same world, that I can have a significant purchase on the notion of objectivity to count as a believer.

Although Farrell does not doubt that there are some important similarities between Rorty and Davidson, Farrell charges Rorty with exploiting his alliance with Davidson, and moreover argues that Rorty's position is imbedded in patterns of thought

---

[237] As Farrell also contends, the same under appreciation is also shown in a different way in Kantian ethics "where universal principles of reason confront every rational thinker in just the same fashion". Farrell (1994) 98.

[238] This attempted link with Davidson is not an incidental one, claims Farrell; "it is part of [Rorty's] overall strategy to show that his position, radical thought it may seem, is largely motivated by considerations that come out of the work of one of the most honored of contemporary analytic philosophers. … When Rorty is trying to defeat his opponents, he describes them as holding a radical position virtually no one holds, and opposes it to the position he claims to share with Davidson. But then when he describes the position he thinks he has established as a result of defeating those opponents, he describes not what he supposedly has in common with Davidson but a more controversial antirealist position. So the frequent misreading of Davidson serves a purpose; it makes an argument appear to go through that really does not, and enlists Davidson's support for an account that he would not, or should not endorse". Farrell (1994) 98.

that still pertain to medieval conceptualisations, despite the fact that he presents himself to be rejecting the entire tradition.[239] Furthermore, to show that Rorty is wrong in the stance that we are supposedly led to, given his menacing narrative, Farrell claims that he needs to pry him apart from Davidson, whom Rorty supposedly thinks his closest ally, for the differences between them are profound – as the world itself is missing from Rorty's picture.

Rorty holds, as Davidson does, that our beliefs must generally be correct, but his reasoning is very different. For Davidson, the fit is world driven, as it is because of the role the world plays both in causing belief, and in guiding the identification of beliefs of an interpreter, that we are sure of a rough match. For Rorty, in contrast, that matching is guaranteed because of the world being little more than a mere reflection cast by our generally accepted beliefs, or 'environment' as he puts it. More to the point, whereas Rorty claims that there is no language-to-world relationship to concern ourselves with, Davidson, accepting various sorts of indetermination, sees that relationship as 'holistic', rather than nonexistent. For Davidson, on its own the world is unable to make our beliefs true, as the world is a criterion of our beliefs both in the sense that it is what our beliefs attempt holistically to accommodate themselves to, and in the sense that it affects our practices. Rorty will not allow the world to be any sort of criterion at all for belief as it collapses when Rorty denies this standard.[240] It is perhaps difficult to miss what exactly

[239] To be fair, Farrell does say that in some respects Rorty does reject such pictures, but without them, he would have far less motivation to develop his account, or to accept it once it is developed for that matter. Farrell (1994) 117.

[240] Farrell (1994) 114, 119-20.

Davidson rejects of empiricist philosophies. The empiricist has a strong notion of truth-conferring circumstances, and as Farrell shows us, Davidson clearly believes that confrontation like this cannot occur. However, he can give up that strong notion of letting experience decide matters for us, and yet still hold that our beliefs direct themselves toward the world and aim at getting matters right. Just because there is no "absolute" confrontation with the world, as the traditional metaphysical realist would have it, it does not follow that there is no correspondence. Davidson, rather, shows us that "coherence must yield at least a rough correspondence"; for it is not the linking up of beliefs with other beliefs that is the end of the picture, as Rorty portrays it.[241]

In claiming the middle ground as a viable position, and defending what he calls a 'modest realism', Farrell supports the idea that "even if the world appears according to the character of our conceptual apparatus, it is the conceptual world that is appearing, not the conceptual apparatus itself or one of its cultural artifacts".[242] Hence, how we take it to be, and how it is, cannot vary that much, and this is the case, not because we determine what reality is, but because *it determines* how an interpreter will fix the semantic content of our statements. Yes, our beliefs are limited, but "the beliefs we do have are largely about the features that are really there, and that we can hope to extend gradually to our conceptual reach so that our picture of how things are become more adequate".[243]

[241] Farrell (1994) 122.

[242] Farrell (1994) 128.

[243] Farrell (1994) 127.

Despite any fact that other intelligences may be able to describe the world differently, we do succeed in bringing about the world, as we do use our best picture in describing reality, as it is, in itself, so to speak. This is the reality we have been aiming toward (remember Farrell is a Hegelian) in our different conceptualisations of it. According to Farrell, if Rorty's picture were right, then a scientist would earn the best reputation by studying the sociology of belief fixation in the scientific community, rather than by learning proper laboratory methods. For Rorty, adopting a scientific theory is akin to adopting a fashionable way of speaking or dressing, as one wants to be the person who comes up with the new fashions that the others will adopt. But this is simply not the case, for in the long run the best strategy for getting one's theory generally accepted is to attend to the world, and to discover something about how it works, as opposed to attending to strategies of sociological manipulation. As Farrell tells us, there a good reason for this being the best strategy. The world is a constant standard of measurement. It is the same world that all scientists attend to, past and present, and as such, have their beliefs caused by its happenings. The more sensitive one's beliefs are to how matters stand in the world, the more likely it is that future scientists will adopt the same beliefs and will give one credit for their discoveries. Given this, the interest in explaining why the universe operates the way it does is continuous across many different vocabularies over the centuries.[244]

Rorty is "quintessentially and 'religiously' modern" in his adherence to the idea that if we open ourselves up to any constraint at all from the world, we are thus submit-

[244] Farrell (1994) 129-34.

ting ourselves to an unacceptable authority that "limits the free-self relating play of subjectivity".[245] Developing his notion of Rorty as a 'modern' thinker, Farrell brings our attention back to Rorty's propensity for acknowledging only two alternatives for explaining the success of our beliefs, and completely bypassing the middle ground position of the moderate realist. Rorty cannot see the possibility of the stable middle position.[246] He thinks, so goes his narrative that once we turn away from a commitment to a Kantian noumenal world, the next stable position is his rendition of pragmatism. Hence his anxiety, for as he sees it, the consequence of rejecting his position, is only to arrive back at the stable, but wrong, position of belief in regulation of an inscrutable thing-in-itself, i.e., representationalism via traditional metaphysical realism. It is clear that Rorty believes that either we must make a very controversial metaphysical commitment to a noumenal world, or a noumenal self-willing, or that we must accept, as he does, that there is no further support for our practices beyond the fact that we support them.

As Farrell argues, the only reason that Rorty thinks that the world's ontological order and character collapse so readily into one of the two sides, is his incapacity to get beyond the theological thinking that the medievals set up for him. It is true, of course, that Rorty rejects the commitment to the noumenal, for he correctly sees that commitment as an outcome of religious thinking.[247] However, his adherence to the notion that whatever is not immediately given in experience must be something that the mind adds

[245] Farrell (1994) 134.

[246] See page 11-12, above.

[247] See pages 19-20, as discussed above.

for biased and instrumental reasons, is indeed still quite a part of the theological structure, albeit in a more secularised version, as Farrell describes it. Ignorantly, Rorty lops off a considerable part of it, assuming that the rest is unchanged.[248] According to Farrell, once that part of that structure is removed, our motivation for supposing that our conceptions of the world are merely good for coping with it becomes very unclear, for one cannot remove one part of the structure and keep the rest; the two sides go together and are defined by their opposition. Without the presence of god's determining of the world, "there will be no demand that the world's own character be eroded until it is an indeterminate realm onto which we project our pictures in order to cope", as Rorty would have us believe.[249] Then our conceptions of the world can properly count as world-guided, for how we take matters to be will not be an instrument for producing useful predictions, but rather, an approximate exhibiting of at least some of the world's own features. As such, in view of Farrell's position, the middle ground can hold stably against Rorty's bidirectional momentum.

When coping remains contrasted with seeing the world the way god does, it makes sense to restrict our capabilities to the former. If a realist's claim is instantiated by recourse to theological intentionality in contrast to that of coping with what we have, it makes sense to remind one of their proper limits. Nevertheless, as Farrell asks, when not defined by such a contrast, then why should it be defined as mere coping? Rorty supposes that the realist is claiming to be able to describe the world as it is before any

[248] Farrell (1994) 136-37.

[249] Farrell (1994) 136.

contact with our perceptual and conceptual apparatus. However, the modest realist in holding its middle ground is careful to not make those claims that harken back to the traditional metaphysical realists conception. As Farrell lays it out, in spite of the fact that it is possible for a moderate realist to believe that there might be more sophisticated knowers than human ones, who may find our picture of the world crude, the moderate realist does not see any appeal to the idea that the world might be entirely different from how it appears to me, and that it must be described apart from any apparatus whatsoever.

As Farrell puts it, by way of contrast to Rorty, Davidson's attack on the given is accompanies by a rethinking of subjectivity, which, in effect, does not lop of part of the modern theological system, but is an attempt to break free of it. If, as Davidson urges then, we do not divide experience into a *sensory given* and *what we then add*, the entire belief-regulation apparatus, as a holistic system, can be considered sensitive to how matters really are, inasmuch as the success of our accounts of the world is not limited to a mere coping. While Rorty commends Davidson's attack on semantic and mental reifications, Rorty remains committed in a significant way to a reified linguistic subjectivity that is positioned over against an emptied-out realm, and that, as such, goes on autonomously with little or no regulation by an extremely indeterminate world.[250] This is the result of merely renaming the positions in the theological structure somewhat differently, rather than rethinking the entire subject-world relationship.[251] Rorty sees himself as a herald of the disenchantment of subjectivity, and defender of its anti-metaphysical

[250] See my discussion on Rorty's view of this matter on page 13-15, above.

[251] Farrell (1994) 137-38.

status, but according to Farrell's picture, the opposite is the case indeed. His "yearning for divinity" is witnessed in his optimism that the only thing a subject shall encounter is itself in everything it confronts. One hopes "for a divine way of being in supposing that all determination will be a self-determining, and that the boundaries a human discourse runs up against will be boundaries that it has set for itself".[252] To this extent, as discussed above in "The Milieu of Mistrust", Rorty gives us the more narcissistic version of encountering only ourselves, for if this is the case, when we think and talk, coping with the world is just to encounter our present cultural artifacts. Hence the a historicism, for Rorty gives us a picture of otherness collapsing into the self-relational activity of conversations feeding off other conversations, so that we never encounter anything but what we have made. Rorty praises this state of affairs, but this position can simply not maintain itself.

As Farrell argues, when you cut the rest of the picture and keep the realm of subjectivity as it is, with full determinacy conferring power, any attempt to ask what character it has, apart from a relationship to a particular world, all that is left is "the empty running of a syntactic engine".[253] Without seeing the whole system for what it is, that is, due to his lack of historical perspective, as Williams would put it, Rorty leaves us with nothing. There is no noumenal world that god has created, and no raw material the we are give to work, and there is nothing to work as demiurges. Only we ourselves could know what we have made, which are merely the cultural artifacts upon which we had

[252] Farrell (1994) 139.

[253] Farrell (1994) 140 and Chapter Two "The Disenchantment of Mind" in general.

laboured. Rorty however does not lament this loss, and as I have shown above, in fact, Rorty celebrates this loss as an achievement and builds his entire view around it. However, again, as Farrell urges, once we remove the theological structure that is implicit in this picture, that is once we no longer take god's creation as a metaphor for the relation of thought and reality, then we shall no longer see Rorty's stance as something to even consider, perhaps except as another part of our history, but no longer as a contending philosophical position, as Rorty just does not seem radical enough in his rethinking the structures of modern thought that he has supposedly himself escaped from. As Farrell shows, Rorty fails by his own standards.

> [H]e is trapped within an older fashion, and older vocabulary, as the narrative has moved on. But it is more than by his own standards that he fails. Rorty is missing what is significant about recent work in philosophy and has learned the wrong lessons. When we apply ourselves thoroughly to rethinking the subject-world structure of modern philosophy, we end up not losing the world but recovering it, not in narcissistic play but in a project of increasing our sensitivity to what the world is like and what is right and wrong.[254]

Going back to Farrell's earlier discussion, the modern idea, he said, was to try to derive, from the resources of subjectivity itself, the standards that reality and rational practice, as well as political and ethical life, must satisfy. Now as the disenchantment of subjectivity undermines that project we are left with two options as Farrell sees it. We can either continue to work with the old model and push relativism in new ways to show that this conclusion is wrong. Or, as Farrell himself puts forth, now that the principal obstacle has been removed, we can bring about the restoration of the world, and start to re-

[254] Farrell (1994) 147.

think the picture of subjectivity as projecting its determination onto the real world with its own determinacy conferring power.

In looking into the more general issues that come into play when realist accounts are defended, and not just those of Rorty, and in looking at how certain conceptions develop historically, Farrell contends that "very many" features, once seen as due to the world's own determinations, are instead seen in his new picture as projections upon a 'much thinner world' than it really is by the powers of the subject, or a fiction produced to make the prediction of experience more reliable. However, as I said in the opening of this chapter, Farrell believes that, as well as losing its own determinacy to thought or language, the world has also suffered what Farrell calls a 'contraction', as the epistemic or semantic powers of he human mind are said to limit, in advance, the extent of reality. Given this, Farrell's position, in putting forth a modest realism, resists both of these movements. Farrell's modest realism holds that our beliefs must accommodate themselves to or "track the contours of the world, and that yet, even so, "we might still fall short of grasping what is the case".[255] The important part being though, that reality is not a product of our abilities for organising, having meaning, and evidence gathering, but is an "independent measure of how good those abilities get to be".[256] According to the modest realist, not only will our conceptual networks and our moral values not be imposed on a 'featureless substrate' but instead they will be due, to a very considerable ex-

[255] Farrell (1994) 148.

[256] Farrell (1994) 149.

tent, to our sensitivity to the real contours of the world. A key to this change, claims Farrell, is

> that subjectivity no longer has the same radical anxiety and radical responsibility from facing an emptied-out world that offers no support for the self's activity. As the world itself is allowed to be richer in its determinations, there is less pressure on subjectivity to produce all determinacy out of itself. The character of what is out there in the world can play a role in fixing what we mean and refer to so that our own labor does not have to do all the work of setting the conditions for our engagement with reality.[257]

The role of the world itself eliminates the possibility of radical differences. For Farrell's modest realist, as our belief system reflects a holistic sensitivity to the world it is possible to maintain a commitment to unobservable entities, and hold a good reason for it. Our concepts may go in directions that presently we cannot conceive (as in something similar to, or not like, Lynch's idea of 'robust concepts'), or regarding more global concepts by which we talk about reality may exceed our comprehension, or furthermore, there is no reason to limit expertise to human intelligence (think technology for instance). For with the theological absolutist pressure out of the picture, we take our thought to a wider range hitherto forbidden because of the sense of trespassing, as the sense of self-assertion has waned. The stance of self-assertion described in Farrell's modern theological structure made it important to demarcate a properly human sphere for our activity and so gave privileged status to the sort of sensory apparatus we possess.[258]

---

[257] Farrell (1994) 155.

[258] Farrell (1994) 156, 179.

The role of truth, as per the modest realist, is such that truth is a matter of rightness of belief, which is defined in terms of the maximising of epistemic value.[259] In this light, Farrell contends that science is more like ethics than we might have assumed in the modern theological structure; for similar to what both Lynch and Williams tell us, "truth is a property that some utterances and beliefs have because of their success in being about the world they aim at".[260] Our goal in aiming our beliefs at the world and in being good reasoners requires us to not think that reason is a 'local phenomenon,' one that is linked to the design of human biology, but as *an ideal* – "*an ideal striving for* which may make us compensate for, rather than rely upon, certain design features of the human brain".[261] The capacity of our intelligence as humans enables us to do much more than what it was merely designed for, and as such, renders us capable of criticising our own reasoning process,

> as we try for a more objective account of what makes for a sensitivity to good reasons in our own understanding … of what we are doing when we think and reason, and justify our beliefs and aim at a true account of the world, we take ourselves to be doing something that others might do better.[262]

---

[259] Farrell's four pressures to which the belief forming process is sensitive: (1) World – "as we try to make our beliefs accommodate themselves to what is really the case through putting ourselves in a position to have the world generate beliefs in us and test the adequacy of those we already have"; (2) "stems from the rational constraints on linking beliefs with other beliefs in chains of inference. Very many of our beliefs will not stand up to rigorous evaluation of the inferential support we take them to have"; (3) "arise from our own interests, desires, and prejudices. We shall prefer some beliefs to be true rather than others, and the acceptance of some may increase our power in dealing with those around us"; (4) "the inertia of previous beliefs and utterances. Our sayings echo, and are shaped by many earlier ones, and we operate on the basis of discursive codes of which we may be very little aware". Farrell (1994) 254-55.

[260] Farrell (1994) 177.

[261] Farrell (1994) 178. My emphasis.

[262] Farrell (1994) 178-79.

As we see in Farrell's treatment of Davidson and Rorty, Farrell argues against the move toward a single point from which determinacy is projected and is in favour of a distribution of meaning-conferring power across a triangular structure whose points are:

- world
- speakers' activity, which includes self-understanding of that activity
- cultural practices of interpreting and repeating statements[263]

In view of this distribution, utterances would be meaningless if we could not already take into consideration the world and its contours as the context in which sounds and shapes are to be interpreted. As a result, utterances can only mean what they do, if they can, at least in principle, be determined as objective from the interpreter's standpoint, and only if they can, also in principle, be taken up into a chain of further repetitions, interpretations, and determinations of truth. Most importantly, this triangular distribution of meaning-conferring power, according to Farrell, shows us how we can speak of a reality that transcends our own practices of use and investigation. The secret, he says, is that once again, it is not us doing all of the work anymore; the other two aspects of the triangulation are making their contributions beyond what one may understand those contributions to be. Meaning and applications are determined both by what an interpreter makes of them and "*by what come upon* [them] through [their] residence in the world as it is and through its insertion in chains of usage extending before and after its occurrence".[264] Additionally, for Wittgensteinian reasons, in this triangulation, there can be no undetectable truth conferrers that grant determinate truth-values independently of prac-

[263] Farrell (1994) 179.

[264] Farrell (1994) 179.

tice. As it is, what ongoing practices take to be a justification will be part of what gives the utterance the semantic content it has.

As Farrell wants us to understand it, the triangular space 'opens out' to include future practitioners, who may be continuers of what we do, or maybe even continuers with far greater abilities than currently our own. Under such circumstances, Farrell contends that it should not be difficult for us to understand how such terms as 'objectivity', 'reality', and 'reason' "can easily transcend our own abilities and practices, so as to support the strong sense of objectivity that the realist needs for his position'.[265] The world continues to occupy its irreducible place in the triangular space, rather than being a construct of investigatory abilities of speakers, despite the fact that it does not have the truth-conferring powers that the traditional metaphysical realists have taken it to have. In letting the other two sides of the triangular configuration have a substantial character, the modest realist is able to grant a rich and proper conception of objectivity. To be sure, in Farrell's picture of reality, our conceptions of objectivity and of the guidance of our beliefs by reality are world-guided, and over time, we develop better conceptions of what it is for the world to guide us. It is not that the world's guiding regulates a 'fixed account' of our beliefs, or for that matter, of what the world is like that is doing the regulating. On the contrary, the triangular structure as it always remains in play, creates some leeway for manoeuvre regarding "precisely what account we come to of objectivity".[266] As a result, history may come into the picture, for it is possible that what can count as an

[265] Farrell (1994) 179.

[266] Farrell (1994) 190.

"idealisation of our practice of adjusting beliefs to reality will depend in some measure on what practices of ours develop into history, and so on, the conceptions of future communities".[267] However, in no way is this circumstance an occasion for Rorty to claim that our conceptions of 'objectivity' and 'reality' are simple projections of our practices, for these conceptions develop *within the holistic process* of the meaning-conferring triangulation, in which "we adjust our beliefs to how matters really stand, and they are a part of that adjustment".[268]

Ethical and moral beliefs are world-guided in much the same manner. To an important extent the world offers considerable constraint on belief formation. In addition, as Farrell contends, one of the factors in making it seem difficult to account for such guidance is because of a misconception of what that sort of guidance would have to be.[269] As modest realists we need to ask ourselves if there are any aspects of reality that are worth valuing in themselves, that is, where the value is not derived from the acts in which conscious creatures take themselves to be valuable. After the removal of our modern-theological conceptualisations, Farrell thinks that we shall find it much more natural to accept that "aspects of reality have an intrinsic value that we have to respect".[270] To this he adds:

> Even if there are such, it may remain a very complicated story how, and to what degree, that pressure from the world on our acts of valuing will determine the

[267] Farrell (1994) 190.

[268] Farrell (1994) 190.

[269] Farrell (1994) 194, 197.

[270] Farrell (1994) 195-96.

> rightness of our moral beliefs. …To says that moral beliefs are world-guided is not yet to decide just how much constraint the moral believer will be under.[271]

We can see without difficulty how Williams' picture can readily complement the modest realist on this aspect, for Williams has at least attempted to achieve such an endeavour. Farrell does not think that we should expect a theory to systematically weigh in our goods, or features of our intrinsic worth, and that determines the right action in a given case. He maintains that it is not theory but the leading of a certain life that brings out some goods of the many that are available to my activity. As such, it is the narrative of a particular life, which is different from any other, that gives a focus to one's moral engagement with the world, that allows some ethical concerns to emerge as opposed to others. Like Williams, Farrell is claiming that at some point our moral beliefs run-up-against an objectivity, namely the world, to which they must conform in order to be correct, i.e., true.[272] And once we get past our modern-theological model, "we shall be much readier to accept that our ethical judgements depend at least in part on a sensitivity to real features in the world," rather than only on us imposing our schemes or ethical determinations on a thinned-out conception of the world.

In rethinking the new (comparatively) limited role of human subjectivity, Farrell holds that human flourishing is not to be all that counts to the modest realist, for we ought to ask what has sufficient intrinsic worth to deserve our ethical considerations in a

[271] Farrell (1994) 195.

[272] Farrell (1994) 196, 208.

way that does not take humans as central.[273] However, with that being said, in the post-theological conception of subjectivity, subjectivity still plays an important role, as being as self is an integral feature of the triangulation process, despite the fact that its powers of determining have to be limited. In being a self, one is necessarily world involved, for when we give up the theological notions of autonomy we still have a "very real and valuable portion of it".[274] In giving up its determining power of that which is external to it, the subject can still "come to achieve a degree of reflection and deliberative excellence and causal power such that it is in important respects self-making.[275] Moreover, in order to be genuine selves in the manner that autonomy requires, the modest realist holds that, we have to be able to consider ourselves as autonomous, which as such, means that to a considerable degree we have to be responsible for being the sort of selves we are. Are we better off in a postmodern age? One of Farrell claims throughout this work is that in giving up our modern-theology we really are not giving up all that much, insofar as we can still retain a robust sense of 'getting things right'. In middle ground fashion Farrell endorses the commitment that in one sense we are postmodern in having to face up to practices and conceptions that have lost their traditional metaphysical support, but that it turns out that we are modern in that these practices and conceptions can to a very considerable degree survive the changeover. However, it should be obvious that in giv-

[273] Farrell (1994) 215.

[274] Farrell (1991) 243.

[275] Farrell (1994) 243.

ing up our metaphysical conceptions we have hardly given up our faith in our everyday conceptions of ‘truth,’ ‘objectivity,’ and rational self-criticism.

CHAPTER 7

GROUND WORK

I said earlier that the insidiousness of Rorty's notion of agreement renders his whole project insidious. I wanted to examine what Rorty's position was truly offering us and take a closer examination of where his version of the mistrust of traditional metaphysical realism leads us; and why, with the aid of the three luminaries, we ought to reject his agenda.

Rorty maintains that differences will always remain radical, and, as such, will continue to remain a serious concern for those who chose to subscribe to any conception of truth whatsoever (other than his of course).[276] The luminaries show us Rorty's short-sightedness, and argue for positions that maintain that the differences regarding what can be declared a fact, that is, regarding the validity of a statement, are not as radical as Rorty claims. Particularly when truth is considered aside from the traditional metaphysical realists' conception of truth as 'absolute'. Disagreement they each say, in their own way of declaring it, stems from the fact that, although truth is real, it is so, not to the exclusion of the role of the subjects' experience in accounting for the relationship between truth and reality.[277] In appealing to historical accounts, and calling to our attention the

[276] See page 16 above, for Rorty's non-philosophical conception of truth, if he ever concedes such a term is only ever that which is good for us to believe.

[277] As mentioned above, here the term of subject is used in contrast to the world's own determinacy as constraining our account of it, and as such, extends itself to the intersubjective as well, for as the middle ground maintains that interpretation has a significant part in constituting a world that is not 'ready-made' as per the traditional metaphysical realist's conception.

relevance of a historical perspective, the luminaries show us how transcending one's own contingent predicament is not only possible, but also necessary. History, they show, enables one to understand the scope of disagreement in a broader perspective. Lynch informs us in a most detailed explanation, that every concept has a history. William shows us that history is something to care about or something to 'get right,' so to speak. History provides us with our much-needed standards of accounting for something besides our own contingency. Both Farrell and Lynch agree. Farrell reminds us that in order to think problems through properly, one needs to know where the problems arise, in order to understand how one's own approach to problems fits into the broader whole. All three luminaries contend that lack of historical perspective renders Rorty's position weak and limited, as he leaves himself with nothing to speak of.

Disagreements, particularly in the way in which Rorty refers to them, are not resolved by an outright dismissal of the nature of the disagreement itself, nor are they of the nature Rorty conceives them to be. As William explains, although we can choose to not care about truth, and as such, cease to look for it, this decision is a reflection of our needs, and not about how matters really stand in the world. Needs comprise an important aspect of how we view reality. As the luminaries agree, being in the world involves a certain degree of relativity, that is to say it necessarily involves interpretation, as we are not presented with a 'ready-made reality'. Disagreement in matters of truth inevitably, and welcomingly arises, for as any adherent to the middle ground understands, we all have our own investment and interests. Rorty refers to these disagreements as incommensurable, and the effort of the philosopher to understand them in their relation to

the truth, as an imposition of a single vocabulary. Each luminary shows that it is possible to account for, and defend, our so-called 'differences', or 'lack of agreement,' to the extent that disagreement, and hence agreement, ought not be understood in the strict traditional sense in which Rorty takes it. Commensurability is not the ultimate goal; it is the guiding factor.

The concern for the role of limiting radical differences is key in this project, for in recognising the need for such a middle ground position in the first place, or at least as these three luminaries understand it, one must first maintain that radical differences are something to be explained philosophically, and not to be neglected as irrelevant, or amplified to the brink of despair concerning the adjudicative authority of truth. As this project attempts to show, how we account for these supposed radical differences that step from our recent milieu, has important consequences for how we portray our selves as social and political beings, and for what we treat as worthwhile and valuable, and for how we choose to live with these differences that inevitably arise in matters of belief.

Stemming from the milieu, certain concessions have been made pertaining to any view that deviates from that of the traditional metaphysical realist's notion of representationalism and correspondence. The middle ground position itself stems from this milieu of mistrust regarding this very notion, and in putting forth a view that accounts for (a) the rejection of the realist's notion of a God's-eye view on reality converging on a single and absolute reference point, and (b) the acceptance, as a given, that interpretation plays a role in our conceptions of both truth and world, certain concessions have had to be

made in order to stabilise such a position as not only achievable in the first place, but also as viable for the long term.

As I have discussed in detail, put straightforwardly, Lynch's concession is that truth and facts are relative to conceptual schemes, and as such, hinge on the notion of 'minimal' concepts, and the fact that our perspective of the world is contingent on our viewing apparatus. According to Lynch, facts are always internal to our conceptual schemes and worldview, and along with his nonepistemic conception of truth as a basic concept truth is something that applies to statements and not to matters of fact that would penetrate the boundaries of conceptual schemes. However, this is the concession that Lynch puts forth in his admittance of both tenets (a) and (b), but there is another compromise that Lynch takes that renders his position less stable than he wants to maintain, as his view takes some implications for granted. First is his concept of *virtual absolute*. After claiming that all facts are internal to a scheme, and that no facts obtain independently of conceptual schemes, he informs us that virtual absolutes although not independent, do obtain within every conceptual scheme. This concept of virtual absolute rests on the *implication* that many propositions and concepts are not relative to a scheme.[278] This *legitimate inference* as he says himself, also extends itself as it also implies the 'obvious truth that there is a single world'. The effect of this inference is that it renders the existence of the world as ultimately a functional one, which in turn, is 'ultimately trivial'. [279]

[278] See page 50, above.

[279] See page 58-59, above.

Williams shows us that his concession can account for a more stable balance of tenets (a) and (b). For according to Williams, the concession entails that the plainness of truth can be relative, and that as such, there are an indeterminate number of facts, which are relative to inquiry, as they are not individuated before inquiry. Facts are relative to the questions they purport to answer. More appropriately accounted for, Williams accounts for the subjective contribution in a more philosophically vigorous manner. Lynch, in assuming his "critical standpoint toward a scheme" merely posits reality, and consequently, world and truth, as hypothetical. [280] However, for Williams it is the role of the world itself that eliminates the possibility of radical differences. Not as hypothetical, but as something very considerable in its own right that, as an independent measure, accounts for diversity in beliefs while maintaining that our opinions about the world are not radically different. Williams maintains this determining role by integrating the fact that facts are relative to inquiry. Truth in Williams' case is not a basic concept that we all share. Truth runs deeper. It is indeterminate not because of indeterminate worldviews, but because of the indeterminate number of facts, for although facts are not individuated before inquiry, they are only relative insofar as they are relative to the questions they purport to answer. According to Farrell, the biggest concession that is required of the stabilisation of the middle position is that the subject loses its leading role, and the world's value, contrary to Williams' beliefs, is not based upon what humans value as intrinsic, for it is holistic.

[280] See page 59, above.

Lynch offers us an account of agreement that is closest to Rorty's conception for he holds onto traditional contrasts, and offers us the position that maintains the closest contrast between agreement and incommensurability, and disagreements and commensurability. For Williams and Farrell, agreement means something else for it is not contrasted in such a way.[281] Rorty's conception of agreement entails the idea that it is 'better to agree to disagree than to disagree' if it means that truth cannot be deliberated on without an appeal to compromise. For Rorty this compromise comes at a heavy cost. To agree on matters of truth is to limit one's freedom, and we know where Rorty stands on this issue. However, to compromise on matters for the sake of truthful deliberation is not so heavily weighted, as Lynch shows us, for, as his picture regarding the relationship between truth and reality illustrates, we can see how it is that disagreements, i.e., indeterminate situations, are merely apparent, as a disagreement on matters of truth is actually about how a concept has been applied in a given situation. Disagreement is nothing to be concerned about in this case because with proper investigation and understanding two seemingly opposing parties could come to realise just how, and why, their concept or proposition of disagreement is merely an employment of a basic concept in more robust forms, filled out in incompatible directions. This is akin to agreeing to disagree, for as Lynch says himself, when confronted with such indetermination, the pluralist, in not insisting on his own view, admits more.[282]

[281] See "The Milieu of Mistrust" on page 13, above.

[282] See "A Mistaken Inference" above on page 30.

Nevertheless, this account of agreement being similar to Rorty's is relative, for it is in comparison to Williams and Farrell's notion that this claim holds the weight I think it does. In comparison, I think that Williams', and more so, Farrell's notion of disagreement is more fruitful of a conception in relation to the middle ground. As they both see it, philosophy is not a place to get along, for the sake of accepting more. I take Farrell's claim seriously that the problem we have inherited is the problem of redistribution. Whether, or not the reasons for his arrival at this observation are sound, is another matter, which for now I only save for further speculation. Nevertheless, I think the articulation of the problem stands on its own ground as both Williams and Lynch also strive to remove some of the subject's determinacy conferring power and give it to the world. We see this in the claims that the world has a significant level of determinacy in our belief formation process, which all three agree to explicitly. If this is the case, then Lynch has given the least amount of determinacy back to the world. His adherence to nonepistemic truth, along with Rorty, renders his notions of world and truth "thinned out concepts".[283] If the problem of the middle ground is in fact the *redistribution problem*, then in effect, Lynch has not secured his position to the degree in which both Williams and Farrell are able to attain.[284]

Given that, as Lynch's views on the idea of redistribution provide the subject with the most determinacy, it may be fair to say that just as Williams claimed of Rorty, Lynch's views on agreement and disagreement stem from, and are indicative of, a plu-

[283] See page 33, above, on Lynch's nonepistemic conception of truth.

[284] See page 88 for Farrell's idea of the "problem of redistribution".

ralistic liberal society as he tends to focus more on the individual rather than the community members at large. On Farrell's view, Lynch lacks the richness of what the world really has to offer the realist. On Williams' account, pluralistic liberalism does not have enough authority to work other than idealistically. Lynch's view is different than Rorty's liberal ironist; Lynch maintains the world, but this world is supported by conceptual manoeuvring on the part of the metaphysical pluralist, which although it hangs together in Lynch's argument, in comparison to the other luminaries, at times seems forced to fit the argument, and not reality, especially regarding the conceptions of 'minimal world', 'virtual absolutes', and 'critical standpoint towards a scheme'.[285] His conception of 'world' and 'fact' is too 'thin', to borrow Farrell's vernacular. In particular, Lynch's conception of 'truth' could benefit from Williams' and Farrell's treatments. Furthermore, Lynch's idea of how schemes overlap employing the idea of basic concepts and then filling them out accordingly, is very agreeable, as it seems to accurately depict what is the case in practice, at least. Williams and Farrell seem to agree as well, for there are times when both give the impression that they subscribe to this idea that Lynch is able to explain in depth.

At times, Lynch does not even seem to be speaking of pluralism. Especially when we consider his goal of "how to account for, and incorporate the multitudinous viewpoints into one culture, or the other way around, one culture into multitudinous viewpoints".[286] This is contemptible for me to say to such a devout pluralist; however,

[285] Pages 38, 42, and 45 respectively.

[286] See page 35, above.

what I mean is that if there are overlapping schemes is this pluralism, or monism? Lynch pushes his pluralism so far that it collapses upon itself in its failure to discriminate and adjudicate between differences. This is due to his lack of critique along the lines of the way Williams sees is required in a conception of liberalism. Perhaps if Lynch were not so subject oriented, the idea of pluralism would not have to be stressed to this labouring extent. Lynch does not account for difference in the way that Farrell and Williams can, for contrary to Lynch, differences do not arise from our differences in conceptual schemes and world views; they arise from the epistemic notion of truth itself as it relates to our relation to the world, and as such, reality. Williams and Farrell, in a sense embody a conception of pluralism in their pictures; however, the point is not stressed because with more of a distribution of determinacy-conferring powers, the cumbersome conception, although still present when pressed, fades into the background as a nonissue as they appeal more to the world, and not to the subject as such.

Williams, in comparison to Farrell, offers another less distributive determinacy conferring power on the world. However, Williams subscribes to the modern notion of critique and to the idea that value is determined from the needs of the human subject. As mentioned above, Williams and Farrell nearly parallel each other in their idea of morality and ethics as a relation to reality and belief formation, as opposed to metaphysical notions. Although Rorty would like to say that he believes in moral progress, his own position renders moral progress impossible, for there is no standard of measurement. However, Williams himself relies on political notions of truth inasmuch as disagreement is a matter of not making enough sense. Like Farrell, Williams thinks that disagreement

is not something to 'agree to disagree upon' either, for disagreement provides the opportunity not 'to admit more', but to push forward with one's beliefs with a good conscience. Having confidence that one's beliefs have been checked against reality and truthfulness, one can have confidence that they are well informed, and gain a secure stance to inform others, not through force or persuasion of course, but through being Accurate and Sincere. However, of course, in order to accept Williams' picture one has to accept that some people are more morally predisposed than others, and have a stronger propensity for truthfulness, as some people, as Williams explains it, will be better at getting through truths internal and external obstacles. As Williams sees it, these natural dispositions exist, as truth is a moral sacrifice. Can this be? Is telling the truth a natural talent, just like any other natural predisposition? Are people morally gifted?

Well, to add to this, Williams argues that we need history in order to tie things together, that is, to make sense of the world and our part in it. Understanding one's self in relation to how the world really is, is freedom as far as Williams is concerned. Rorty and Williams will never agree about matters of freedom and truth. This does not mean that both of them are correct; it means that, as Williams shows, the real work of the philosopher begins. Rorty claims that truth is dangerous as it limits our ability to generate and promote new ideas. Traditional metaphysical notions are old ideas, and new ideas need to emerge. Rorty believes this will occur when ideas are free flowing and not put in check. Williams maintains the same sentiment. Williams does not want to limit the generation and promotion of ideas that could benefit moral and practical progress. Quite the contrary, Williams wants to ensure that they have the opportunity to become and to be

recognised as such. It is with a lack of care and concern for the truth that truthful matters will be stifled. Truth is a matter of conscious awareness, as indeed it, and any subscriptions to it, are not as restricting as Rorty fears. Truth as it is viewed from the middle ground is what ensures our freedom, that is, our freedom to not be deceived by the will. Truth is that which enables us to push through with our own viewpoint and make it more than an opinion that we are reluctant to impose upon one another. Truth according to Williams is not the preoccupation we ought to be concerned about. Liberalism with its inability to provide a standard for effective judgement and discernment is the preoccupation that distracts us, for in talking about truth and reality it is better to be more conservative (or modern as Williams puts it) in our discriminations and deliberations, than it is to be liberal.

Farrell, on the other hand, is able to account for the middle position while achieving the most successful solution of the redistribution problem, which, if Farrell is correct, is a most advantageous stance from which to secure the middle ground, as he has made the strongest gesture in securing its vigour. Although Farrell is the most radical in terms of reconsidering the role of subjectivity, his holistic view is very palatable, and less radical in many ways than Lynch's position, which looked at from another angle, is the least radical in comparison to Farrell's as he does not try to revamp the entire structure of subjectivity. If Farrell is correct, which only further investigation along his lines will tell, then it is he who opens up the largest space for the middle ground to claim its territory, for so much more work can be done along this trajectory he sets us upon. However, if he is wrong, he is quite wrong indeed. In case Farrell and his picture of

modest realism is mistaken, and I am mistaken in thinking that it is the redistribution problem that is the concern of the middle ground to content itself with, then Williams too, with his picture of intrinsic value and modern critique, falls short of Lynch's account of how the role of the subject is central in acquisition of nonepistemic truth, as per the metaphysical realist.

CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSION

The middle ground, as I see it, is a philosophical position that tries to situate itself between that of 'traditional metaphysical realism' and ' a particular version of antirealism that stems out of this tradition. Given this, the middle ground rejects the traditional metaphysical realist's notion of 'absolute' as it encompasses both: (a) the rejection of the realist's notion of a God's-eye view on reality converging on a single and absolute reference point, and (b) the acceptance, as a given, that interpretation plays a role in our conceptions of both truth and world.

The problem is, as Putnam has put it once, there is recoil from position (a) to position (b) that seems to occur once one attempts to establish any deviation from either pole. Our tradition is strong, and one explanation for this recoil has been to think, as I do, that each pole has been defined in opposition to the other, in effect leaving them reliant on each other to maintain their own stature. This supposed recoil has sparked a long-felt sense of frustration, and arguably, to a significant extent, a dismissal of the concepts of truth and reality as something to philosophise about, as relativistic notions have been ushered in to take their place. Richard Rorty is infamous for his observation on this matter, believing that he has removed himself from this so-called 'futile' and 'perpetual' state of philosophical affairs. He, along with his notorious narrative, claims just how pa-

thetic the state of philosophy has been in since its inception beginning with Plato, and rejects the enterprise entirely, or so he and his liberal-ironists believe. Claiming that philosophical endeavours are a self-serving, self-perpetuating sham, he has merely expressed a common cultural sentiment, and taken it to its fullest conclusion. The middle ground contenders, namely Michael Lynch, Bernard Williams, Frank Farrell, otherwise known as my three luminaries, in rejecting what I term Rorty's insidious 'post-philosophical' picture, argue that it is possible to forego certain metaphysical aspects of traditional metaphysical realism, and adhere to 'fixed' notions of truth and reality, whilst maintaining the significance of the role of the subject as partly deterministic. In effect, the middle ground purports to end this recoil and show itself as a viable and intelligent philosophical position.

In order to establish the middle ground as such, I have solicited the aid of the three luminaries, first to show that against Rorty the position stands up. Rorty's position is taken seriously because some of his concerns are our concerns as both positions attempt to turn away from what the tradition offers; only the luminaries draw much different conclusions from Rorty. The attempts to balance the precarious relationship between truth and reality, to an important extent, are satisfactorily demonstrated by each luminary. Together, not only have they stood their ground against Richard Rorty, the determined antagonist, who, from the perspective of the antirealist, argues that such a position is misguided and misconceived, and as such, hopeless; they have also together argued for aspects of realism against the tradition which takes pride in ruling out such concessions as illicit. In intelligently finding our way out of our current milieu, Farrell,

Williams, and Lynch make strong cases for their positions, both individually and collectively. Indeed, each position does justice in that they do more than just gesture toward the establishment of the middle ground as a viable and respectable philosophical position. Each attempt is earnest and with good spirit establishes exceptional reasons at least to consider the middle ground as a contending alternative to what is being offered otherwise.

The three luminaries openly put forth arguments against Rorty's claims; namely, that thought is about a world that constitutes part of its own determinacy in its own right; that the strict notion of critique (analysis and evaluation embodying a fixed notion of truth) is required in maintaining liberalism and 'solidarity'; that history is something to be right about, and that there is intrinsic worth to our human activities; and also that Rorty remains imbedded in the same tradition from that which he claims not to be a part. These replies provide some level of assurance that we are not doomed to recoil. Moreover, this is further shown as Williams, Lynch, and Farrell put forth their own pictures of what the middle ground looks like. Lynch in the chapter titled "The Mistaken Inference" subscribes to a pluralism in which conceptual schemes overlap and basic concepts are shared to the extent that a 'virtual' absoluteness can be maintained of a nonepistemic conception of both truth and world. Williams in "The Spirit of Enlightenment Critique" argues that truth is an inherent value, not in itself, but in light of human experience. Farrell in Chapter six, "The Modern Medieval Preoccupation", argues that old medieval models need to be shed in order to see the world as having as its own determinacy; not absolute determinacy, of course, but holistically, stemming from a con-

stant play of a triangulation process whose points are world, speakers' activity (which includes self-understanding of that activity), and cultural practices of interpreting and repeating statements.

After careful scrutiny not only of their success in countering Rorty, but also in isolating their realist and relativistic leanings, and evaluating their concessions against one another, it is Lynch's position that is the least stable, not in that it is not a viable middle ground position, or that it does not successfully contend with Rorty's menacing narrative, but because his conception of metaphysical pluralism is too entrenched in the contemporary liberalist's view of agreement as the pluralist would have it. Williams shows us that liberalism needs to embody the spirit of critique, and Farrell shows us that one must step back and evaluate how one's concepts fit into the large picture. Lynch has not looked evaluated this larger picture broadly enough, for his way to account of differences encourages us to agree and accept more viewpoints, rather than providing us with the backing support to stand behind our beliefs and firmly assert our beliefs as right or wrong. Lynch entrenches his position in pluralistic-liberal values, which lacks the authority that is required to maintain a stance toward the truth that goes beyond agreeing to disagree. To be sure, Lynch is not subscribing to the kind of ironist-liberalism that Rorty claims to maintain; this rather accounts for truth as that which is accountable for multiple viewpoints into one, or one viewpoint into multiple views – and hence, one that stops before any differences are philosophically accounted for, in the sense that Lynch does not provide us with more on what we should do in matters of disagreement rather than follow our pluralistic intuitions and admit more.

Nevertheless, I do see that from Lynch's view, Williams and Farrell are zealous in their more holistic accounts, perhaps, as Lynch shows us, unnecessarily. Farrell claims that we might not be giving up too much in forgoing some of our determinacy conferring power, but after all, as Lynch asserts, perhaps we do not have to give up anything at all, only we need to change on our ideas of what the conceptions of 'truth' and 'reality' really are. From Lynch's view, Williams, and especially Farrell are too traditional and are not rethinking our concepts adequately enough as the middle ground ought to maintain. For these reasons, liberalism has not been ruled out in this examination as possibly being the proper lens with which to view truth and reality; however, I believe that as Farrell and Williams show, in talking about truth and reality it is better to be more conservative in our discriminations and deliberations, than it is to be liberal.

With that being said, together in their effort to secure philosophical endeavours their rightful place, Lynch, Williams, and Farrell, unlike Rorty, do not reject opposition and resistance as inconsequential. Quite the contrary, they deal with their contenders, stand behind their beliefs, and argue their way through their convictions, in order as they an I both hope, to give us something that is more truthful then had we done otherwise. It is as such that I believe, with more productive work in the trajectory this project attempts at articulating, and with more rigorous consideration of the very aspects brought up collectively in this project, the middle ground position can eventually come to be seen as a viable position in its own right, as opposed to being contrasted with what it seemingly denies, that is the privileged view from nowhere.

APPENDIX: TYPES OF PLURALISM

Table 1. Types of Pluralism

	Local	Global
Horizontal	There can be incompatible facts within a single discourse.	There are incompatible yet equally correct truths in any discourse type
Vertical	There is more than one type of irreducible fact at different levels of discourse.	No type of fact is reducible to any other type of fact.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Austin, J.L. *Philosophical Papers*. Editors. J.O. Urmson and G.J. Warnok. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961.

Baç, Murat. "Pluralistic Kantianism." *The Philosophical Forum* Vol. 37 (2006): 183-204.

---. "The Ontological Status of Truthmakers: An Alternative to Tractarianism and Metaphysical Anti-Realism." *Metaphysical* Vol. 4.2 (2003): 5-28.

Brandom, Robert, ed. "*Rorty and His Critics*". Oxford: Blackwell's Publishers, 2000.

Collingwood, R.G. *An Essay on Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1940.

---. *The Idea of History*. Revised edition. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993.

Donald Davidson. "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. 183-198.

---. "The Method of Truth in Metaphysics." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. 199-214.

---. "Thought and Talk." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. 155-170.

---. "Reality Without Reference." *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation.* Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2001. 215-225.

---. *Subjective, Intersubjective, and Objective*. Oxford: Claredon Press, 2001.

---. "The Folly of Trying to Define Truth." *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 87 (1996): 263-278.

---. "The Structure and Content of Truth." *Journal of Philosophy* Vol. 87.6 (1990): 279-328.

---. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in *Truth and Interpretation*, Ernest Lepore, ed. Oxford, U.K.: Blackwell, 1986.

---. *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984.

Farrell, Frank B. "*Subjectivity, Realism and Postmodernism: The Recovery of the World in Recent Philosophy*." Cambridge: State University of New York at Purchase, 1996.

Greenough, Patrick, and Michael P. Lynch, editors. *Truth and Realism*. Oxford: University Press, 2006.

Lynch, Michael P. *Truth in Context: An Essay on Pluralism and Objectivity*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 2001.

---. Editor. *The Nature of Truth*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 2001.

---. *True to Life: Why Truth Matters*. Cambridge: The MIT Press. 2004.

Mason, Richard. *Before Logic*. Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Friedrich Nietzsche. *Human, All Too Human*. Trans. G. Handwerk. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1995.

---. *Ecce Homo*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1969.

---. *Will To Power*. Trans. Walter Kaufmann. New York: Random House, 1967.

Putnam, Hilary. "Reply to Bernard Williams' 'Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline'." *Philosophy* Vol. 76.4 (2001): 605-614.

---. *Renewing Philosophy.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press: 1992.

---. *Realism with a Human Face*. ed, James F. Conant. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

---. *The Many Faces of Realism*. Peru, IL: Open Court Publishing Company, 1987.

---. *Reason, Truth, and History*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981.

---. *Meaning and the Moral Sciences*. New York: Routledge, 1978.

Quine, W.V.O. *Word and Object*. Cambridge: M.I.T. Press, 1960.

Rorty, Richard. *Truth and Progress: Philosophical Papers*. Vol.3. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

---. *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Vol.1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

---. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.

---. *Consequences of Pragmatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.

---. *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.

Strawson, P.F. *Analysis and Metaphysics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Williams, Bernard. *Truth and Truthfulness: An Essay in Genealogy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002.

---. "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline." *Philosophy* Vol. 75.4 (2000): 477-496.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2001.

Wright, Crispin. *Truth and Objectivity*. Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1994.

---. "Realism, Antirealism, Irrealism, Quasi-Realism," *Midwest Studies Philosophy XII*. (1988): 25-50.

---. *Realism, Meaning, and Truth*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 1987.