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THE UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA  
GRADUATE COLLEGE

HOLISTIC REALISM: A MARRIAGE OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM AND  
CONCEPTUAL RELATIVITY

A DISSERTATION  
SUBMITTED TO THE GRADUATE FACULTY  
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the  
degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

By  
WILLIAM FERRAILOLO  
Norman, Oklahoma  
1997

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**HOLISTIC REALISM: A MARRIAGE OF METAPHYSICAL REALISM AND  
CONCEPTUAL RELATIVITY**

**A DISSERTATION**

**APPROVED FOR THE DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY**

BY

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## **Ch I: Introduction and Overview**

Realists and relativists have been warring with each other since Socrates and Protagoras first crossed paths. In the two and a half millennia since the battle lines were first drawn, philosophers in each camp have executed innumerable strategies of attack upon what they perceived to be the enemy stronghold. These attacks have led the members of each camp to erect all manner of battlements in defense of all sorts of realisms and relativisms. Every so often, one or the other army declares victory. The enemy's flag is captured, and the doctrine they defend is pronounced dead. But the reports of death have always been greatly exaggerated. The banners of realism and relativism are invariably raised again from the tomb, and defended with renewed fervor by an array of new devotees.

It seems that neither relativism nor realism is very easily disposed of. Each has managed to persist through periods of acute criticism, and also through periods of relative disinterest. Each has managed also to captivate its share of noteworthy intellects. The eclectic group of intellectual heirs to Protagoras include some of the most impressive and influential minds both in and out of philosophy, and they are arrayed against an (at least) equally impressive army gathered under the ideological banner first raised by Socrates against the threat of Protagorean relativism. Protagoras, Heraclitus, Hegel, Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Goodman have struggled against the likes of Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Devitt, Armstrong, Alston, and Searle. At stake is the fundamental nature of reality and our place in it.

One figure in particular occupies a prominent, and strangely ambiguous territory in a sort of "no man's land" separating the combatants. Much as he did when it came to the disputes between rationalists and empiricists, Kant holds an odd position in the lengthy struggle between realists and anti-realists. His own metaphysical view, while not relativistic, has nonetheless paved the way for a number of modern-day Protagorean sympathizers. In particular, he revolutionized the way that many philosophers conceived the structure of reality and of our relationship to it. His transcendental idealism pulled all the empirical world into the mind and left only noumenal things-in-themselves existing independently of consciousness.

Kant's Copernican revolution in metaphysics and epistemology enabled philosophers to think of the empirical world as importantly mind-dependent. Here, for example, is what Kant has to say about the nature of space:

It is therefore from the human standpoint only that we can speak of space, extended objects, etc. If we drop the subjective conditions under which alone we can gain external intuition, that is, so far as we ourselves may be affected by objects, the representation of space means nothing. For this predicate is applied to objects only insofar as they appear to us and are objects of our senses. The constant form of this receptivity, which we call sensibility, is a necessary condition of all relations in which objects as outside us can be perceived. When abstraction is made of these objects, what remains is pure intuition which we call space. (*Critique of Pure Reason*, 43)

The structure of the mind's categorical/organizational system serves as a conceptual template by virtue of which empirical reality is constructed. We perceive extended objects, not because there are extended objects "out there" in the world-itself, but because of the mind's spatio-temporal "intuition." The mind *makes it the case* that the empirical world has the characteristics that it does. The world-in-itself is experienced from a spatio-temporal "point of view," and so empirical reality takes shape accordingly. In

empowering the mind in this way, Kant opens the door to suggestions as to the nature of empirical reality from "within" the perspective of minds that are equipped with different forms of intuition and concepts.

It is not a great step from Kantian constructivism to a plurality of constructed realities each issuing from one of indefinitely many alternative categorical systems or conceptual schemes. Those who saw the potential for one or another form of "world-making" such as Hegel, Goodman, Kuhn, Feyerabend, Whorf, and even one-time metaphysical realist Hilary Putnam, repudiated the Platonic/Aristotelian legacy of a ready-made world, complete with its own categories, particulars, universals, and relations. They instead vested minds, languages, or symbol systems with the power to organize the amorphous world-in-itself (insofar as they accepted any such notion) into one "world-version" or another. Brazenly leading the offensive against the notion of unconceptualized reality, Nelson Goodman asserts the following:

Talk of unstructured content or an unconceptualized given or a substratum without properties is self-defeating; for the talk imposes structure, conceptualizes, ascribes properties. Although conception without perception is merely empty, perception without conception is blind (totally inoperative). Predicates, pictures, other labels, schemata, survive want of application, but content vanishes without form. We can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols. (1978: p. 6)

Not only had reality become a thing of our making, it turned out that a plurality of makers meant a plurality of realities. Facts or truths for world-makers of one kind may not be facts or truths in a reality of someone else's making.

Many also turned away from canonical accounts of *truth*. Mind-independent, correspondence truth was deemed an inadequate or incoherent theory about the nature of reality. If one takes every statement to be either true or false irrespective of epistemic

properties of cognizers, then one probably entertains some notion of a ready-made world serving as truth-maker to those statements. Getting rid of the world-in-itself meant that no story involving a unique set of true truth-bearers "corresponding" to the ready-made world could be tolerated. One or more of the standard notions about truth had to be scrapped to make way for the semantics of some form of relativistic world-view. Michael Dummett is one of those who takes the debate between realists and anti-realists to hinge on semantic issues:

Integral to any given version of realism are both the principle of bivalence for statements of the disputed class, and the interpretation of those statements at face value, that is to say, as genuinely having the semantic form that they appear on their surface to have. Rejection of either one of these will afford a means of repudiating realism and will constitute a form of anti-realism, however restrained, for statements of the disputed class (1991: p. 325)

Debate about the nature of truth and other semantic issues has seemed, since the "linguistic turn" of the early 20th century, to dominate the attention of the disputants and, in the eyes of some, to have rightfully supplanted prior formulations of arguments on these matters. The thought appears to be that talk about theories of truth, reference, and the like allows a perspicuous and unambiguous debate about the nature of the world. The subtle and gradual change in the way that this particular species of dialectical warfare is conducted has had an odd effect on the overall battle, the combatants involved, and even the topography of the battlefield.

It has, of late, become increasingly difficult to understand precisely what all the fighting is about and precisely who it is that is fighting for which cause; or even to distinguish the one army's uniforms from those of the opposition. Hilary Putnam, for example, claims to be allied with the realist camp, but his internal (or pragmatic)

"realism" appears to many to be the work of an infiltrator from the opposition's lines.

Donald Davidson rejects the notion of alternative conceptual schemes, one of the primary weapons in the relativist's arsenal, but does so, in part, because of his rejection of the distinction between a representational scheme and the thing represented. Is this a rejection of the distinction between the world-itself and our representations of it - a rejection of theory-neutral reality? Michael Devitt (1984) seems to think so. James Harris (1992) seems to think not. And J. E. Malpas concludes his "Ontological Relativity in Quine and Davidson" with the claim that "we can make sense of the Davidsonian and Quinean insistence on both the absoluteness of truth and the relativity of ontology" (1989: p. 178). Is Davidson lobbing grenades at both encampments?

The battle threatens to splinter into skirmishes involving ill-defined enemies and objectives. Chapters II and III of this dissertation are, therefore, intended (in part) as something of a reconnaissance mission on behalf of those who are uninvolved, but not at all uninterested, in the conflict. What exactly is it that relativists are fighting for? Why the hostility toward the realist's world-in-itself? What exactly is this world-in-itself anyway? Is it really worth fighting over? Can't we all just get along? Chapters II and III also present arguments intended to expose some factions within each camp as defenders of untenable positions. Furthermore, I argue that a good deal of the antagonism between realists and relativists is unnecessary and largely motivated by misunderstandings of exactly what it is that each side holds dear.

In chapter IV I attempt a novel synthesis of the realistic and relativistic doctrines left standing after the arguments of chapters II and III. I have dubbed the new

metaphysical view, *holistic realism*. In making the case for holistic realism, I argue that neither conceptual relativity nor objectivity about the world-itself is eliminable from a comprehensive theory of reality.

Finally, in chapter V I attempt to show that "holistic realism" really is a species of *realism* (though one of its primary ingredients is a powerful dose of a type of relativism). The final chapter also attempts to anticipate and answer a number of the objections that will inevitably be made by realists, relativists, and some others who stand outside the fray. In the rest of the introduction, I will sketch the structure of each chapter.

## **Chapter II: What Is Wrong (And Right) With Relativism**

There appear to be many varieties of relativism. In chapter II, I offer a distillation of the central elements of relativism, insofar as any of it pertains to the rendering and debate of philosophers that are concerned with the nature of reality and the relationships between reality and our representations of it. The culmination of my taxonomy may startle some readers. I conclude that there are but two general types of relativism about which the metaphysician need be concerned. The appearance of a relativistic potpourri the literature regarding worlds, world-versions, truth, meaning, paradigms, conceptual schemes, etc. is, to some extent, illusory (or, at least, eliminable). One can either embrace relativism about: 1) the world-itself, or 2) our representations of reality. I will call the former *noumenal* relativism, and the latter *phenomenal* relativism (in deference to Kant's considerable influence upon the last few centuries of the general dispute).

For example, relativism about truth (what I will call *alethic* relativism) is a

species of phenomenal relativism. It is a theory about our representations of reality. If this type of phenomenal relativism is appropriately restrained (it is suggested in chapters II and III, and demonstrated in chapter IV), we find that it is compatible with a certain brand of realism. I argue in chapter II that virtually all of the more prominent versions of relativism are really just different species of phenomenal relativism.

I then argue that no version of noumenal relativism is tenable and that the only palatable form of phenomenal relativism must be *limited* in a particular way. We can make sense of relativism only against a backdrop of objectivity. Full-blown relativism, as Socrates observed so many centuries ago, dissolves into either incoherence or self-refutation. Modern day relativists that attempt to defend the robust thesis that "everything is relative" will find themselves impaled upon one or the other horn of the ancient dilemma that Socrates presented in his rebuttal of Protagoreanism. The full-blown relativist cannot claim that her thesis is objectively (or absolutely) true without undercutting the very thesis she seeks to defend. She must, therefore, assert the *relative* truth of her thesis. In doing so, however, she incurs the debt of an account of just what "relative truth" is supposed to be (and why anyone should care about it).

We should not, however, begin composing a requiem for relativism *tout court*. I conclude chapter II with a suggestion as to the shape of a workable version of limited phenomenal relativism built upon a foundation of objectivity. This relativistic thesis is to be asserted as *objectively* true (paradoxical though that may seem to some). Much of what there is to say about reality is only assertable relative to some way of carving up the world into particulars, relations, classes, etc. Furthermore, there are a plurality of equally

viable ways of ordering the world. What is and is not a *viable* parsing of the world, turns out to be a function of what is objectively "out there".

Once we grasp the fundamental distinction between *noumenal* and *phenomenal* relativism, and also come to see the viability of a *limited* form of phenomenal relativism (as opposed to either noumenal relativism or *robust* phenomenal relativism), it becomes clear that the conflict often supposed to exist between realism and *any* form of relativism is illusory. It becomes clear, that is, once we understand the fundamental tenets of realism and dispel a few common suppositions about its entailments.

### **Chapter III: What Metaphysical Realism Is - And Is Not**

Fundamentally, metaphysical realism is the thesis that the non-cognizing parts of the world exist and have their nature independently of any mental aspect of any cognizer. The world is *just* there, awaiting discovery. A number of metaphysicians have taken the commitment to a mind-independent world to entail uniqueness, bivalence, or correspondence truth. Putnam, Dummett, and others have generated noteworthy arguments aimed at undercutting one or another of these theories about the nature of truth, and all have subsequently concluded that their efforts have undermined metaphysical realism as well.

In chapter III, I attempt to dispel the common view that metaphysical realism entails some one or all of the theses of uniqueness, bivalence, and correspondence truth. The thesis that a unique world exists independently of cognition is compatible with a variety of theories about truth. The realist *need* not accept uniqueness, bivalence, or

correspondence truth (though none of these appears to be *precluded* by metaphysical realism), and attacks upon these cannot suffice as a refutation of metaphysical realism.

I then argue that there is no entailment relation in the opposite direction (i.e. from any of the aforementioned theories about truth *to* metaphysical realism). Uniqueness, bivalence, and correspondence truth all appear to be available to anti-realists of various stripes. For example, Berkeleyan or constructivists can help themselves to any of these theses. The alleged entailments between metaphysical realism and various theories about truth turn out to be illusory because - and this is precisely the mistake that surprisingly many of the doctrine's critics have made - metaphysical realism is not a *semantic* thesis.

Metaphysical realism is also not susceptible to attack via any form of incommensurability thesis. Some have proposed that the realist cannot countenance incommensurable world views or representations of reality - where the hallmark of incommensurability is taken to be non-intertranslatability. This view seems to be, at least in part, a function of the incorrect supposition that a unique, mind-independent world can admit of, at most, a single correct and complete description (or representation).

I conclude chapter III by contrasting the realist Richard Boyd's response to the incommensurability arguments (against metaphysical realism) with my own response to that challenge. Boyd maintains that "competing" representations of reality must, differences notwithstanding, all couple to a unique set of causal structures lying "out there" in the world. These objective causal structures allow for multiple representations insofar as different areas of inquiry are designed to take note of different features of them, or to take note of different causal relations between various parts of the world's unique

causal structure. But it seems arbitrary to allow conceptual relativism to penetrate through schemes of object individuation, ordering, weighting, and event individuation, while insisting upon a *unique* set of causal structures that are (somehow) immune to the same sort of relativization to conceptual framework. The view that causal structures are somehow "beneath" conceptual schemes and exempt from their impact, while not allowing the same for features of the world as fundamental as the individuation of objects and events (presumably *the elements of* causal structures) seems unmotivated and *ad hoc*. Ontological bedrock must be found elsewhere.

#### **Chapter IV: An Alternative Metaphysic**

Chapter IV begins with a survey of uses of the term "conceptual framework" and related terms commonly found in the literature. We find that a conceptual framework imposes a scheme of categorization, individuation, weighting, or otherwise provides leading principles for parsing or ordering the object of a particular inquiry.

An understanding of the function of a conceptual framework is best achieved through consideration of cases involving alternative conceptual frameworks and the distinct parsings they impose upon a particular object of inquiry. Consider the following illustration:

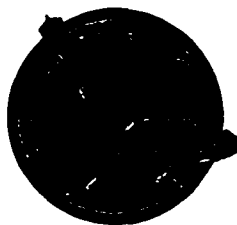


Figure 1

There is no fact of the matter about the scoring of the darts in the positions indicated in Figure 1 until some scheme or framework is specified within which point values are assigned to the various areas of the dart board. The nature of the scoring depends upon which game is being played. Questions such as, "Which dart scored the most points?" make sense only after one has specified the rules of the game. If one is playing a game that is organized in such a way as to award the maximum number of points to darts hitting the center circular area (the "bull's-eye"), then there is a particular fact of the matter as to which of the above darts has scored the most points. If, however, one is playing some game in which points are amassed by hitting numbered sections of the board in sequence, then the bull's-eye is worthless if it has not been hit in the appropriate sequence, whereas some other area of the board is the designated target area for a particular throw and is the only "valuable" area on the board. The rules of each game are "scoring schemas" or "scoring frameworks". Relative to one, there is a particular set of facts about scoring the darts, whereas relative to the other, there is an entirely different set of facts. It would not make any sense to ask what the appropriate scoring for the darts should be *irrespective* of any scoring scheme whatever. Nor is it appropriate to inquire how the scoring should go *in the absence of* any particular game at all.

Similarly, conceptual frameworks are prerequisites for any particular inquiry insofar as the objects of inquiry are parsed or organized in accordance with some organizational scheme. The Necker cube is a good tool for gaining an understanding of

what I intend the term "conceptual framework" to mean.

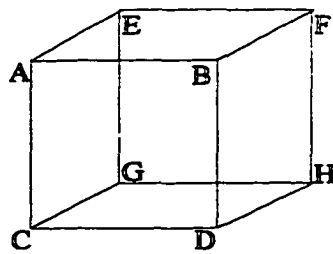


Figure 2

According to one way of looking at or "organizing" the cube in Figure 2, ABCD is its front face. According to another way of organizing the cube, EFGH is its front face. These two *ways of organizing* Figure 2 are competing *conceptual frameworks* relative to inquiries such as, "What is the front face of the above Necker cube?"

My notion of a conceptual framework is modelled on the notion of a frame of reference. No sense can be made of inquiries concerning (for example) an object's length, position, or velocity, in the absence of some specification (or, more often, presumption) as to the frame of reference from which the inquiry is to be conducted. Furthermore, frames of reference do not require observers or cognizers in order to exist. It is crucial to note that a conceptual framework is understood throughout this dissertation to share this type of cognition-independence. We cognizers encounter them, stumble onto them, and sometimes even voluntarily adopt them, but we do not, in any sense, construct them or cause them to come into being.

It should also be noted that any divergence between conceptual frameworks makes sense only *relative to* some inquiry or other. To ask, as many philosophers do, whether a particular group uses "the same conceptual framework" as does some other group, is to

ask an ill-formed and incomplete question. It is very much like asking whether the Empire State Building and the Eiffel Tower are "similar". It is only by reference to some particular inquiry that one may sensibly ask about which conceptual framework is operative (just as one may ask about two things being *similar* only relative to some property or feature).

The notion of diverging conceptual frameworks is then applied to a debate concerning Leibniz' principle of the identity of indiscernibles and the proper interpretation of descriptions of possible worlds. Max Black's putative counterexample to Leibniz' principle is challenged on the grounds that it serves its purpose only *relative to* some way of describing or ordering the possibility in question (i.e. only relative to one conceptual framework's parsing of the case - a *world-version*). Ian Hacking has constructed an equally viable ordering of Black's possible world (i.e. an equally viable world-version) as a palatable alternative to Black's description of the case. As it goes with inquiries concerning Black's possible world, so goes it with any number of inquiries about the facts that obtain in the actual world.

I then challenge two distinct lines of attack upon the sort of conceptual relativity alleged to be at work in the Black/Hacking debate. First, Donald Davidson's well-known rejection of the coherence of the notion of a conceptual scheme (and, therefore, of a divergence of schemes) is explained and rejected. I argue that either: 1) Davidson's conditions for conceptual diversity are too strong in that they preclude intuitively plausible instances of homolingual conceptual diversity (i.e. conceptual diversity without a diversity of languages), or 2) Davidson's arguments are directed against a strawman.

Next, I argue that Chris Swoyer's challenge to the relativist about truth can be met, and I use the Black/Hacking debate as an illustration. Swoyer argues that it cannot be the case that both: 1) Two conceptual frameworks assign some truth-bearer differing truth values, and 2) the two conceptual frameworks deal with the same subject matter. In chapter IV, I introduce *ontological arrays* as the objective, framework-independent underpinnings of alternative world-versions. An ontological array is a part of the world-in-itself that is the object of a particular inquiry. With respect to the Black/Hacking debate, the ontological array is the possible scenario of which Black and Hacking offer competing descriptions. Putnam's exploding boiler case is also used as an illustration, as is the recurrent Necker cube case. In each case involving divergent conceptual frameworks and, thereby, a plurality of world-versions, there is some ontological array that is being ordered into one or another world-version in accordance with some conceptual framework. I then argue that there is no conceptual difficulty associated with a statement's being true relative to one world-version, but false relative to another, and with the conceptual frameworks that are responsible for those two world-versions both dealing with one and the same ontological array.

Ontological arrays, conceptual frameworks, and the world-versions that are the product of the "coupling" of frameworks to arrays, constitute the fundamental, objective "furniture of the universe". A plurality of equally viable world-versions are objectively, *mind-independently* "out there". The metaphysical realist is correct in her claim that the world's particulars are not dependent upon minds for their existence or nature. The limited phenomenal relativist, however, is also correct in her assertion that there is no

uniquely correct description of a fixed totality of fact. This construal of the marriage of metaphysical realism and conceptual relativity is presented as both novel and explanatorily powerful. I have dubbed it *holistic realism* because the objective facts that obtain internal to each world-version are a function of the intrinsic features of the "coupling" of ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks (themselves objective features of the world). The nature of ontological arrays, conceptual frameworks, and world-versions can only be fully understood insofar as the notion of each is, in some sense, complementary to the others in the construction of an overall theory of reality.

#### **Chapter V: Ontological Bedrock, Objections, And Replies**

The metaphysical account presented in chapter IV is a version of metaphysical realism. The hallmark of realism is the mind-independent existence of the world and its parts. If the holistic realist is asked whether any particular non-intentional thing (e.g. rock, bird, ocean, star, etc.) exists independently of the mental, her response is in the affirmative (provided, of course, that she is not being asked about imaginary entities). Any particular actual rock, bird, or ocean that one refers to is an element of some world-version. World-versions are mind-independent entities that result from the coupling of ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks. Ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks are mind-independent things-in-themselves. All three types of entity - world-versions, ontological arrays, and conceptual frameworks - satisfy the realist's demand for objective, mind-independence of the world and its parts. The world just is the agglomeration of all ontological arrays, conceptual frameworks, and world-versions.

Any element of a world-version (e.g. any particular object that we might find in any one of the world-versions that we encounter) is a piece of the mind-independent world, and the nature of that piece of the world is fixed independently of the mental. Its nature is fixed by the intrinsic features of the ontological array that is the object of the inquiry in question and the conceptual framework that "couples" to it to generate a particular world-version. In chapter V, I provide an interpretation of Max Black's counterexample and of his debate with Hacking from the holistic realist's perspective.

Holistic realism solves the problems that beset both classical metaphysical realism and full-blown relativism. It is not saddled with the theses of uniqueness, bivalence, or correspondence truth, and is, therefore, compatible with a limited phenomenal relativism (i.e. the plurality of world-versions held dear by many kinds of relativist). There are a plurality of world-versions and many (though not all) inquiries admit of a plurality of equally correct answers as relativized to one or another world-version. The objectivity of conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays provides the needed grounding for a viable relativization of truth and fact to world-versions. It is this ontological bedrock that enables the holistic realist to sidestep the incoherence or self-refutation dilemma that disables the full-blown relativist. The holistic realist's metaphysic can support the objective truth of the relativistic thesis - precisely the defense of relativism that the full-blown relativist is not entitled to. Holistic realism gives us the best of both worlds.

The dissertation concludes with the consideration of a number of likely objections. I attempt to give each of the most plausible and serious objections to holistic

realism a fair hearing, and then I respond to each. The final arguments are reserved for making the case that neither of the classical world-views are adequate for dealing with the sorts of interesting cases that are discussed throughout the dissertation. Only holistic realism can reconcile conceptual relativity with the mind-independent world-in-itself . Without it, no palatable explanation can be given for the nature of the reality with which we are confronted. Contrary to popular belief, realism and relativism are not antagonistic doctrines. Holistic realism is the intertwining of what is best in each of them.

### **Methodology**

Before proceeding to the main body of the dissertation, a few notes regarding methodology and organization are in order. I begin chapters II and III by looking at how a number of noteworthy philosophers use the terms "relativism" and "realism." A particular kind of difficulty arises in each case. There is no established consistency in the various uses of those terms. "Relativism" has been used to refer to indefinitely many theories or schools of thought in a wide variety of fields of inquiry. I found that laying out the kinds of relativism that are relevant to the project of this dissertation, required a certain amount of stipulation. The taxonomy of relevant relativistic theories at the beginning of chapter II, employs a number of terms that have gained some currency in recent philosophical debate. The meanings of the terms as used in the taxonomy, however, do not always reflect current use - often, because *there is no* one current use. A particular denotation of those terms is simply imposed by fiat.

Similarly, the use of terms such as *metaphysical realism* in chapter III is, to some

extent, idiosyncratic. I do not use this term in the way that Putnam, Horwich, and others have recently been using it. I use "metaphysical realism" in the way that I do because: 1) it seems to me the most apt name for the thesis that I am interested in articulating and defending in chapter III, and 2) though a number of philosophers use the term *metaphysical realism* in their writings, they are not all using it in the same way.

The most conspicuous case in which a term is used idiosyncratically in this dissertation, however, is the use, in chapters IV and V of *conceptual framework*. What I mean by "conceptual framework" is decidedly *not* what any previous author has meant by that term. In chapter IV, I consider how a number of different philosophers use "conceptual framework". It seems to me that the central feature of a conceptual framework, across all of the various uses of the term, is that it denotes a way of ordering or categorizing something. But most of the philosophers that I encounter also think that a way of ordering or categorizing something has to involve cognizers (language users, etc.) as the locus of the categorization. To put it crudely, most of these philosophers shove conceptual frameworks into the mind. This is a crucial difference between my world-view and those of philosophers in both the traditional realist's and relativist's camps. I decided to continue using the term "conceptual framework" to refer to (roughly) a way of ordering or categorizing things, but to jettison the insistence on locating them inside the heads (or minds) of cognizers. It is still not clear to me that this is the most prudent way to express my world-view, but, to put it crudely again, I wanted to be able to say something like, "Just take these conceptual frameworks out of people's heads and put them 'out there' in the world, and you will have understood a crucial feature of the world-

view that I am presenting." In these three cases in particular (i.e. uses of "relativism", "realism", and "conceptual framework"), I hope that the reader will forgive my idiosyncrasy.

I do not suppose that this marriage of metaphysical realism and conceptual relativity is a pristine match made in heaven. Like any marriage, it will likely require adjustments and compromise (not to mention the approval of the relevant authorities). But, like any marriage, it must begin with the coming together of two that would become (in some sense) a single, unified whole. This dissertation tells a story in which metaphysical realism and conceptual relativity meet, fall in love (or, at least, cease hostilities), and live happily ever after.

## Ch II. What Is Wrong (And Right) With Relativism

Relativism comes in many stripes. The debate (or family of debates) about the nature of reality is often hampered by the absence of any clear account of the various types of relativism and the relationships among them. In this chapter, I attempt to provide such an account. Although in later sections of this chapter I will argue for substantive positions on relativism, I remain neutral about the viability of any particular type until I have first catalogued the most important ones. My aim, at first, is simply to bring some degree of order to the age-old debate between relativists and their antagonists by providing a useful taxonomy of the types of relativism about which metaphysicians are most intimately concerned. These center around theses regarding: 1) the world, and 2) our representations of the world. In the end, these are the only two fundamental kinds of relativism that are relevant to the metaphysical debates. Narrowing the field in this way will, I hope, help to curb the currently widespread charges of misrepresentation and "strawmanning" that fly back and forth between relativists and their antagonists.

### 2.1 Types And Taxonomy

Protagoras said that man is the measure of all things. Critical response from the realist camp was sharp. Plato's Socrates assaulted not only the Protagorean doctrine of *homo mensura* (man is the measure), but sought further to belittle and reproach Protagoras personally for his intellectual irresponsibility and dishonesty. It was unfathomable to Protagoras' critics that he could actually have believed what he was

claiming. Modern-day discussions of relativism still evoke reactions ranging from disbelief and perplexity to out-and-out contempt and charges of intellectual duplicity.

Compare a jab from Plato with one delivered by Harvey Siegel some 2500 years later:

If what every man believes as a result of perception is indeed to be true for him; if, just as no one is to be a better judge of what another thinks is true or false, and, as we have said more than once, every man is to have his own beliefs for himself alone and they are all right and true—then, my friend, where is the wisdom of Protagoras, to justify his setting up to teach others and to be handsomely paid for it, and where is our comparative ignorance or the need for us to go and sit at his feet, when each of us is himself the measure of his own wisdom? Must we not suppose that Protagoras speaks in this way to flatter the ears of the public? (*Theaetetus*, 161d-e)

...the relativist must appeal to nonrelativistic criteria, and assert relativism nonrelativistically, in order to make the case for relativism. This is self-defeating for the relativist. But to fail to assert and defend relativism in this (nonrelativistic) way is to fail to join the issue with the nonrelativist who asserts that relativism is false (or incoherent). So the relativist can defend relativism only by rendering it incoherent. Conversely, to defend relativism relativistically is to fail to defend it at all. For if relativism is right, the very notion of rightness, and indeed that of rational defense, is given up, and so it cannot coherently be claimed that relativism is right or rationally defensible. In short, to defend relativism is to defend it nonrelativistically, which is to give it up; to 'defend' it relativistically is not to *defend* it all. (Siegel: pp. 230-31)

At first glance, the claims of relativists are often seen as jarring affronts to common intuitions about knowledge, truth, reality, etc. Charges of incoherence or self-refutation are common; in fact, such charges represent the bulk of the typical realist's response to the doctrine. The more thoroughgoing or full-blooded the relativism, the more difficult it is for many to take the position seriously. Thus, Donald Davidson (1973/74) says of one species of relativism that it "is a heady and exotic doctrine, or would be if we could make good sense of it" (p. 66). Siegel concludes the above-cited "Relativism, Truth, And Incoherence" with the assertion:

The basic Socratic insight that relativism is self-refuting, and so incoherent, remains a fundamental difficulty for those who would resuscitate and defend the ancient Protagorean doctrine or a modern variant of it (p. 253)

It will, therefore, be instructive to sort through some of the features of relativistic doctrine which prompt such persistent repudiation. It may also be interesting to examine why relativism has remained so remarkably resilient and successful in acquiring adherents in the face of the sort of charges which purport to drive a stake through its heart. After all, consider what similar objections have done to the popularity of doctrines such as radical skepticism, solipsism, and verificationism.

As one begins to investigate the matter, however, it quickly becomes clear that there is no single, overarching doctrine that is *relativism*. There appear to be relativisms galore. Furthermore, it is exceedingly difficult to get a handle on the relationships among the many varieties of relativism. Hence, it has become standard fare to find both objections to, and defenses of, "relativism" being dismissed as strawman attacks or confused misrepresentations.

For example, Putnam, in his replies to Jeffrey Johnson's "Making Noises in Counterpoint or Chorus: Putnam's Rejection of Relativism," accuses Johnson of confusing issues of "semantical" relativism with those pertaining to "epistemological relativism" and derides Johnson's alleged view that relativism is (of all things) an *empirical* hypothesis. Similarly, Joseph Margolis insists throughout the prologue to *The Truth About Relativism* that every standard attack on relativism *tout court* really should be understood as directed against a species of the doctrine which he calls *relationalism*. Relativism, according to Margolis need not (and should not) be formulated as relationalism. Once the appropriate distinctions are made, it allegedly becomes clear that relativism, properly understood, is not self-referentially or otherwise incoherent. In many

instances, the debate suffers for want of clarity about precisely what is at issue. It would seem advisable then to lay out, with as much clarity as the subject admits, those varieties of relativism that are most important (or are most frequently perceived to be relevant) to the construction of a viable theory of reality.

Let us take stock of what those engaged in the debate have to say about what they seek (as relativists) to defend or (as realists) to dismantle. The following are a number of characterizations of relativism, either *tout court* or of some species of the doctrine (some philosophers are more concerned to make such distinctions than are others):

I think of this book [*Ways Of Worldmaking*] as belonging in that mainstream of modern philosophy that began when Kant exchanged the structure of the world for the structure of the mind, continued when C.I. Lewis exchanged the structure of the mind for the structure of concepts, and that now proceeds to exchange the structure of concepts for the structure of the several symbol systems of the sciences, philosophy, the arts, perception, and everyday discourse. The movement is from unique truth and a world fixed and found to a diversity of right and even conflicting versions or worlds in the making. (Goodman, 1978: x - brackets mine)

**Constructivism** has three elements. We have come across the first two already in Kant:

- (1) The only independent reality is beyond the reach of our knowledge and language; it is the noumenal world of things-in-themselves.
- (2) The known world is partly our construction; it is the phenomenal world of appearances, created by the imposition of our concepts on things-in-themselves.

Because of (1), Kant is a Weak Realist. Because of (2), he is an anti-Realist (for the known world is the world of physical entities like stones, trees, and cats). The third element is **relativism**, which is not found in Kant:

- (3) The concepts used to construct a known world differ from (linguistic, social, scientific, etc.) group to group, and hence the worlds of groups differ. Each such world exists only relative to an imposition of concepts. (Devitt, 1984: p. 157 - emphasis mine)

According to the different forms of radical relativism, basic epistemological notions such as truth, evidence, reason, rationality, and perhaps most importantly, the *method* of inquiry are relative to a context, frame of reference, paradigm, or cognitive scheme. (Harris, 1992: p. xv)

In its strongest form, relativism is the basic conviction that when we turn to the examination of those concepts that philosophers have taken to be the most fundamental—whether it is the concept of rationality, truth, reality, right, the good, or norms—we are forced to recognize that in the final analysis all such concepts must be understood as relative to a specific conceptual scheme, theoretical framework, paradigm, form of life, society, or culture. (Bernstein, 1983: p. 8)

The central relativist idea is that what is true for one tribe, social group or age might not be true for another tribe, social group or age. If that were so, it would appear to license one to talk about the different tribes, social groups or ages as inhabiting different worlds, as relativists have been notoriously prone to do. Schematically expressed the relativist thesis is:

something,  $s$ , is true for  $\psi$  and  $s$  is false for  $\phi$ .

But what is the something? The trick is to find some one thing the truth of which can vary giving us an interesting version of relativism without lapsing into incoherence. (Newton-Smith, in Hollis and Lukes, 1982: p. 107)

There is a sense in which relativism is a formal thesis, a thesis about the nature of truth or about constraints on the use of the values "true" and "false" or similar truth-like values - an alethic thesis...But the use of "true" is inseparable from our theories about what we mean by knowledge and the apprehension of particular truths; and our notion of that connection is similarly inseparable from our theories about the nature of the knowable world. So, although it is helpful to treat relativism as an alethic doctrine, there is no way of disjoining the alethic and the epistemic, or the epistemic and the ontic; a fortiori, there is no way of giving conceptual priority to alethic questions over epistemic and ontic ones. (Margolis, 1991: pp. 7-8 - emphasis mine)

Earlier in this century the special theory of relativity was sometimes taken as a model for relativism, though because of misunderstandings of the theory this often led only to confusion. Nevertheless, there is something to be said for the paradigm. On Einstein's view such qualities as mass and velocity, once believed to be invariant or absolute, are now seen to be relative to inertial frameworks. To say that such qualities are relative is to say that they call for one more argument place or parameter than was formerly thought to be needed, and as a first approximation we may view relativism as the thesis that some concept  $\phi$  requires relativization to some parameter  $\pi$ . (Swoyer, in Krausz and Meiland, 1982: p. 85)

In order to proceed with the argument, it will be necessary to identify what various forms of "relativism" have in common. The most basic common denominator appears to be the contention that assertions cannot be judged true or false in themselves, but must be so judged with reference to one or more aspects of the total situation in which they have been made. (Mandelbaum, in Krausz and Meiland, 1982: p. 35)

And the list could go on and on.

Consider the first two of these passages. Goodman can easily be interpreted as antagonistic to the idea of the *world-in-itself* or of unconceptualized reality. If this interpretation is appropriate, and Goodman denies the existence of *any* reality independent of facts about cognizers, then his brand of relativism involves not just our *concepts* of reality, or even just our notions of truth and justification, but it is a relativism with respect to the world (or that which *is*) itself.

Contrast (this interpretation of) Goodman's constructivistic metaphysic with Devitt's characterization of constructivism (the second citation on the above list). Element (1) of Devitt's account of constructivism asserts the existence of a mind-independent reality like that of Kant's noumena. That independent reality is the way it is *simpliciter*. It is the (noumenal) world-in-itself. These two contrasting versions of relativistic constructivism (though Goodman, I shall argue, may not actually be committed to the former) are not coextensive in their spheres of application. Goodmanian constructivism, interpreted as a rejection of the world-in-itself (as opposed to a rejection of our *concept* of the world-in-itself), denies the independent reality asserted in (1) of Devitt's characterization of the "same" doctrine. Perhaps Devitt's brand of constructivistic relativist need not make any particular claims about fundamental ontology. Then again, one might argue that element (2) forces a constructivist, as characterized by Devitt (himself a realist), into some relativism even about the world-in-itself. If we are to come to some understanding of the relationship between the theoretical commitments of the first kind of relativist as opposed to the second, we must first get clearer about the domain over which the respective theories are to range. Claims

about truth, conceptualizations of reality, and fundamental ontology seem to be deeply related, but the nature of the relationships among them is neither obvious nor uncontroversial.

As we move further down the above list of passages, we find characterizations of relativism as a thesis about truth, about rationality, about cultural norms, etc. We read perplexing claims about the world and are forced to wonder whether those claims are directed against the world-in-itself, the "known world", the world-as-conceptualized by a particular group, etc. We must also wonder as to the nature and constituency of the various worlds or world-versions.

And if the above are an insufficient indication of the proliferation of relativisms, Michael Krausz and Jack W. Meiland (1982) inform us under the index heading "relativism" to "*see agent's-group relativism, appraiser's-group relativism, conceptual relativism, cultural relativism, epistemological relativism, ethical relativism, historical relativism, long-run relativism, metaethical relativism, normative relativism, objective relativism, ontological relativity, radical relativism, relativistic metaethic, short-run relativism, strong relativism, subjective relativism, value relativism, vulgar relativism, weak relativism*". Still other authors have used the term "relativism," (with or without appending an adjective) to indicate still further doctrines, theories, tendencies, or intellectual movements. Hence, one could easily and quickly become bogged down in an exegetical morass of interpretation and taxonomization. This might be a worthy and interesting project, but for current purposes and interests, such an endeavor would be unnecessarily tedious.

It seems advisable to forego any attempt to ferret out some semblance of a consistent set of canonical doctrines from piecemeal, author-to-author exegesis (especially when authors commonly object to one another's use of a given term or the domain of a given theory). So, I will instead simply stipulate working definitions for the types of relativism that will be of concern here. Those types of relativism that concern the metaphysician (as opposed to the ethicist, epistemologist, etc.) will involve: (1) the nature of reality, (2) our relationship to the world, (3) the character of our representations of reality, (4) the relationship between our representations of reality and reality itself, and (5) the nature of truth-bearers and the relationships between them, the world, and us. I will develop a taxonomy of the relevant types of relativism and spell out the important relationships (e.g. entailments, intertheoretic commitments) which obtain among them. Doing so may uncover some instances, where some debate has gone awry due to a misrepresentation (or uncharitable interpretation) of the nature, extent, and sphere of application of one or another variety of relativism.

### 2.1a Ontological Relativism

We could take Einstein's theory of relativity as a rough template for characterization of a kind of relativistic framework. Doing so, we can understand relativism with respect to any  $\phi$  as the thesis that an accurate characterization of  $\phi$  requires its relativization to something or other. In any particular case, the relativist claims that  $\phi$  is not the sort of thing which admits of a non-relational analysis (what may have seemed non-relational turns out to be relational). Let us use *conceptual framework*

as a catch-all for any parameter to which any  $\phi$  is to be relativized. In the case of *ontological* relativism, we will find proponents of the doctrine claiming that a complete and accurate account of some (or, even, *all*) aspects of the world - of that which *is* or that which *exists* - are in need of relativization to some parameter or another.

A *robust*, or full-blooded ontological relativist (an ontological relativist "all the way down") claims that *no* part of the world, no *fact*, no *thing-that-is-the-case*, is immune from the requirement of relativization. Nothing simply exists, or is the case *simpliciter*; rather everything that is, every fact or object or thing, exists or obtains only *relative to* some conceptual framework or other. The robust ontological relativist claims that there is no unique, objective, framework-independent fixed totality of fact. There is nothing that just *is* the world (noumenal, phenomenal, or otherwise). That which exists for one individual, group, society, historical epoch, technological community, conceptual scheme, etc., may or may not exist for another one. For the robust ontological relativist, there is no such thing as a purely objective fact.

Robust ontological relativism, which countenances *no* objective reality, just *is* constructivism as construed along the lines of the above-mentioned interpretation of Goodman. All that exists is (in some sense or another) a *construct* - made from concepts, symbol systems, languages, theories, etc. I think that, contrary to many reports, there are few (if any) robust ontological relativists.

One might adopt the more moderate stance of the *limited* ontological relativist and claim that there are objective facts and utterly independent things-in-themselves that do not require relativization to anything at all, but that, nevertheless, there is some distinct

set of facts or things which obtain or exist only *relative to* some parameter or another.

Devitt's characterization of constructivism should be understood as a characterization of *limited* ontological relativism. On his view, the noumena are granted independent existence and do not require relativization to any conceptual framework. The noumena are the way they are *simpliciter*. The phenomenal world is, however, a construction that is dependent upon, and relativized to, the imposition of some set of concepts.

### 2.1b Conceptual Relativism.

Closely related to ontological relativism, and frequently conflated, confused or otherwise muddled with it, is what I will call *conceptual* relativism. We may take conceptual relativism to be the doctrine that there is no privileged, uniquely correct parsing of reality or of the world (of *that which is*); there is no one right *representation* of the world. The conceptual relativist claims that a categorization, systematization, parsing, or any other imposition of order on the world itself is correct, accurate, complete, etc., only *relative to* some conceptual scheme or set of organizational principles. As there are a variety of equally viable, coherent, and legitimate conceptual schemes, so too are there a variety of equally viable, coherent, and legitimate parsings of reality or, as Goodman calls them, *world-versions*. One might take the above Goodmanian constructivistic line and insist that the imposition or projection of a conceptual scheme is literally *constitutive* of all reality (i.e. that what *exists*, *only* exists in virtue of the imposition of a set of conceptual categories). In that case, one will obviously find it exceedingly difficult to disentangle the claims of conceptual and ontological relativists. One need not, however,

take the constructivistic line. One may posit a framework-independent world-in-itself underpinning the world-versions that are generated from one or another conceptual perspective. Ontological relativists claim that the world and its parts exist only relative to something, whereas conceptual relativists are only committed to a plurality of ways of organizing or ordering the world.

### 2.1c Alethic Relativism.

Next we should consider *alethic* relativism or relativism about truth. The alethic relativist claims that there is no uniquely correct truth value for propositions (statements, utterances, beliefs, or whatever one takes the bearers of truth values to be) independent of relativization to some further parameter such as those mentioned above. Thus, we must talk of something's being *true for* some individual, group, linguistic community, conceptual system, etc (i.e. for some conceptual framework). A proposition which is true for a user of one conceptual framework, may or may not be true for a user of a different one. For example, some proposition *p* may be true for some community *c*<sub>1</sub>, but either false or, at least, *not* true (because, perhaps, inexpressible) for some distinct community *c*<sub>2</sub>. It is the alethic mode of relativism that seems to generate the most consistent attack. The *robust* alethic relativist claims that *no* proposition (belief, etc.) is true *simpliciter*, but that all propositions are true (or false) only relative to some conceptual framework or other. The *limited* alethic relativist, on the other hand, allows that there is *some* group of propositions that are true (or false) non-relativistically. The limited alethic relativist might, for example, claim that the proposition, "There is a mind-independent reality" is

true simpliciter, whereas (say) the proposition, "There are exactly three objects in this room" (as in Putnam, 1987: pp. 16-21) is true relative to one conceptual framework but false relative to another.

*Robust* alethic relativism is frequently charged with incoherence or self-refutation and any *limited* form of alethic relativism is typically charged with being ad hoc and with arbitrarily designating some privileged class of truths that have no need of the relativist's additional argument place or parameter. I will examine these charges in § 2.5.

#### 2.1d Knowledge Relativism.

One more type of relativism should be mentioned before the relationships among the four types are explored. *Knowledge* relativism is a species of epistemological relativism. *Epistemological* relativism denies any uniquely correct or privileged standards of rationality, justification, knowledge, or other categories for epistemic assessment. Suppose, for example, an individual has a certain body of evidence and forms a belief on the basis of it. Her belief might be justified by the evidence with respect to one conceptual framework, but not with respect to another. The same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for cases involving rationality and knowledge. One is justified or rationally warranted in holding a belief, or knows the propositional correlate of the belief, only *relative to* some conceptual framework. The *robust* epistemological relativist denies that justification, rationality, or knowledge exist *simpliciter* for any beliefs (or other appropriate doxastic states) at all, whereas a more *limited* epistemological relativist allows some privileged class of doxastic items that admit of some kind of absolute

warrant (e.g. beliefs relevant to purely analytic fields such as mathematics, geometry, deductive logic, etc.). Throughout the remainder of this chapter, I will be concerned primarily with epistemological relativists about *knowledge*.

### 2.1e Relativism And The "Fundamental" Four Types

The forms of relativism listed above are not exhaustive of all types of relativism with which philosophers have been concerned. For example, philosophers have spoken of cultural, moral, or aesthetic relativism. But although such types of relativism are important, I will argue that they supervene on, or are reducible to, some one, or some combination of the four doctrines defined above.

If the *cultural* relativist is taken to assert a variability of truths across cultural divides, then she is an *alethic* relativist who asserts that the additional parameter to which *truths* are required to be relativized is, somehow, the culture within which the agent is embedded. If the cultural relativist claims that truth values from culture to culture may be redistributed in virtue of the variability of conceptions of reality from culture to culture, then she is a *conceptual* relativist who claims that *culture* is the relevant additional argument place required for complete accounts of reality. Cultural relativists are simply a sub-class of conceptual, alethic, and/or knowledge relativists.

Some types of *moral* relativist may hold that truth for a range of propositions is as it is *simpliciter*, but assert the relativity of truth for propositions involving moral claims. Such a moral relativist is clearly a species of *limited alethic* relativist. She limits her relativism to propositions within the *moral* universe of discourse, and would seem to be

free to embrace some type of realism about a host of other metaphysical or semantic issues. Much the same thing can, of course, be said of the *aesthetic* relativist. Setting a domain of relative truth or fact may be nothing more than the adoption of some degree of conceptual, alethic, epistemological, or ontological relativism.

If I am right that the major forms of relativism are largely or completely reducible to, supervenient upon, or otherwise dependent upon the "fundamental" four here listed, it is natural to ask about a further pruning of the "fundamental" four. In the next section I will consider this.

### Section Summary

There is no standard use of the term "relativism" or of terms generated by appending some adjective to "relativism" in the literature and no agreement about what sorts of relativism there are or how they can most usefully be distinguished. Furthermore, there is no canonical interpretation of the claims of relativists or any standard view about the domain or sphere of application of relativistic theory. As a working taxonomy, I have suggested:

- 1) ontological relativism (relativism about the world-in-itself)
- 2) conceptual relativism (relativism about parsings or orderings of reality)
- 3) alethic relativism (relativism about truth)
- 4) knowledge relativism (relativism about knowledge)

All "relativisms" of interest to the metaphysician, I have suggested, are likely to be reducible to, or supervenient upon some one of these "fundamental" four or some combination of them.

## 2.2 Pruning the "Fundamental" Four

The ontological relativist asserts that what exists only exists *relative* to something or other. The conceptual relativist asserts that there is more than one viable parsing of reality - more than one skinning (or conceptualizing) of the ontological cat. There would appear to be a straightforward entailment from ontological to conceptual relativism. If there are indefinitely many viable worlds-in-themselves, then surely there are equally many (or more) viable conceptions or parsings of reality (i.e. world-versions). Not that there must be a plurality of viable parsings of any particular *one* of the many realities, but there are at least as many world-versions as there are worlds. The first of the relationships from one relativistic type to another is, uninterestingly enough, this simple entailment ( $O \rightarrow C$ : ontological relativism entails conceptual relativism). That is, if there is more than one world-in-itself, then there is more than one viable *conception* of the world.

Similarly, if there is more than one viable world-version, then there is more than one set of truths (though not necessarily any that are *in both and* true for one but false in the other). What is true for one world-version may or may not be true for another. Ontological relativism, therefore, entails alethic relativism as well as conceptual relativism. A plurality of *worlds* means a plurality of world-versions and a plurality of

truths *about* those world-versions. The same again must be the case for ontological relativism's entailment of knowledge relativism. Each world-version carries with it its own set of facts and its own set of true propositions to be known. Agents can know things that are part of a true description of some world or world-version to which they have epistemic access. Cognizers that have epistemic access to different world-versions, but not to each other's world-version, can each know things that are not knowable (because not the case) relative to the other's world-version. (Ontological relativism, therefore, entails both alethic and knowledge relativism as well as conceptual relativism ( $O \rightarrow [C \& A \& K]$ ). But what of the relations between these latter three theories, and what of entailment from any one or any combination of them to ontological relativism?

### 2.2a Does Conceptual Relativism Entail Ontological Relativism?

First, let us inquire as to entailments from conceptual, alethic, or knowledge relativisms to ontological relativism. There is no incoherence in a conceptual relativist (of even a pretty thoroughly robust variety) adopting a hard-line ontological realism. Such a conceptual relativist claims that whatever its ultimate nature, the world-in-itself exists *simpliciter* and with no further requirement of relativization to any parameter whatever. For the conceptual relativist of this stripe, we all live in the same *world*, but there may be indefinitely many ways of dividing up, categorizing, or ordering that world into types, tokens, particulars, thises, and thats (i.e. indefinitely many world-versions). The cookie-cutter metaphor of classical realism is useful for understanding how one could conjoin conceptual relativism to ontological realism. Imagine an amorphous blob

of dough. The dough itself is to be imagined as existing independently of any use we may make of our various cookie-cutters or devices for carving and shaping it. It just *is* (without relativization). Now, what else can be said of it? Well, not much (without pushing too hard on the analogy) until one chooses a way of carving the dough into parts, categorizing the parts which one has carved, etc.

The conceptual relativist who also embraces ontological realism, thinks of the world-in-itself as playing the role of the dough, and conceptual frameworks as playing the role of cookie-cutters. Ask, "What exists?" and she replies, "The world." Ask, "No, no...What exists *in* the world?" and she replies, "Well, that depends upon the way in which one's conceptual scheme carves up reality." The *robust* conceptual relativist claims that we can say nothing about the world-in-itself (other than trivialities such as that it exists), without adopting some conceptual scheme or another. One becomes a more *limited* conceptual relativist as one enlarges the sphere of things which one claims are the case irrespective of one's conceptual framework. Once we clearly distinguish ontological from conceptual relativism, it should become clear that there are far more philosophers willing to defend the latter than the former. Conceptual relativism does not entail ontological relativism.

### 2.2b Does Alethic Relativism Entail Ontological Relativism?

What of the relationship between alethic relativism and ontological relativism? If truth requires relativization to some parameter, does it follow that reality itself exists only relative to that parameter? Some philosophers seem to think that there is a

straightforward and obvious entailment from alethic relativism to ontological relativism (i.e.  $A \rightarrow O$ ). Devitt, for example, makes the case that the absence of absolute, framework-independent truth is a necessary condition for objectivity and mind-independence of the world. That is, Devitt holds that alethic relativism must be false if ontological relativism is false:

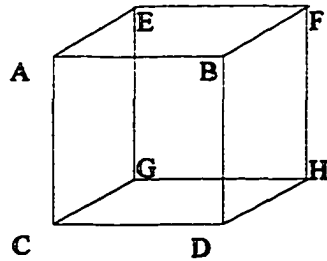
Finally, there is one straightforward link between Realism and truth. Whether truth is deflationary, correspondence, or epistemic, Realism requires that it be '*absolute*'. If truth were only relative, then we could use the equivalence thesis to derive relativistic anti-Realism: *s* is not true absolutely, but only relative to *x*; so it is not the case that *p* absolutely, but only *p* relative to *x*. (1984: p. 46)

The view that relativism with respect to truth entails relativism with respect to *the world* is a product of acceptance of the equivalence thesis (i.e. *S* is true iff *p* - where *S* is the name of a sentence and *p* is the sentence named), conjoined to the view that the *p* on the right of the biconditional expresses or denotes a state of affairs in the world-in-itself. Given that the world is, via some relation such as correspondence or satisfaction, the maker of truth, it seems fairly obvious and trivial that if a proposition's truth requires relativization to some parameter (e.g. *S* is true only relative to some conceptual framework), then the world which makes it true may do so only relative to that same parameter (e.g. the fact *f* which proposition *S* picks out, obtains only relative to some conceptual framework). But I think that this suggests that alethic relativism is importantly related to *conceptual* relativism rather than ontological relativism. I shall attempt to make the case that although *ontological* relativism is not, in fact, entailed by alethic relativism, some form *conceptual* relativism is.

Consider the following inquiry: How many objects are there in the universe? Is the fact (or facts) of the matter here simply dependent upon the world-in-itself, or does the answer to our question depend upon some system for individuating particular objects? If it is not the world-in-itself which makes propositions true or false (save those propositions *about* the world-in-itself or *about* unconceptualized reality), but rather the world *as ordered* or *as parsed* in one way or another, that is truth-maker for most propositions, all that follows from relativity of a proposition's truth-value is a relativity of the world-as-conceptualized (i.e. of world-versions). Ernest Sosa makes the case against the entailment from conceptual and alethic to ontological relativism (though he does not use these terms or the present taxonomy) in his analysis of the defects of Putnam's pragmatic (or internal) realism:

It is true that our talk and even, granted, our *thought* is in fact largely perspectival. It may well be, moreover, that the perspectival character of our thought is not eliminable except (at best) with a very high practical and intellectual cost. But from the fundamentally and ineliminably perspectival character of our thought it does not follow that reality itself is fundamentally perspectival. Everything that is true relative to a perspective and everything that is false relative to a perspective may be as it is as a necessary consequence of the absolute and nonperspectival character of things. (1993: p. 608)

For a simple illustrative example, one might argue that a proper characterization of the features of Gestalt figures requires relativization to "perceptual stance" (or "observational perspective"). So, perhaps it is true relative to some observational perspective that face ABCD of this Necker cube is its "front" face:



But it is simultaneously true relative to some distinct observational perspective that ABCD is not the cube's front face (EFGH is). This type of relativization is perfectly compatible with the supposition that the cube itself exists and has an objective nature irrespective of any observational perspective. Similarly, the following example of Putnam's nicely illuminates the plurality of schemes for individuating objects that is available for answering our earlier question.

Putnam asks us to consider a world in which there are (or, more precisely, which we would standardly *describe* as a world in which there are) exactly three particulars:  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ , and  $x_3$ . Now, a Lesniewskian mereologist would, according to Putnam, describe the *same* world as containing exactly seven objects because of her acceptance of mereological sums as objects. From this perspective, the world in question is described as containing the following objects:  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ ,  $x_3$ ,  $x_1 + x_2$ ,  $x_1 + x_3$ ,  $x_2 + x_3$ , and  $x_1 + x_2 + x_3$ . Until one specifies one or the other scheme for individuating objects, there is no way of answering the question, "How many objects are there in the world under consideration?" There does not appear to be any fact of the matter, irrespective of some conceptual scheme, that entitles either perspective to priority over the other. That is, neither our standard view nor the Lesniewskian view is more "the correct" way of

individuating objects. Both are equally viable. There are, therefore, equally viable alternative answers to the question regarding the number of objects in the possibility under consideration.

In this and similar cases, one might contend that the world has a set of objective, ontologically fundamental, framework-invariant features (e.g. there is *some* number of objects) *and* also a set of framework-relative features (e.g. three for "us" and seven for Lesniewskians). The truth of propositions about the latter sort of fact is thus relative to some world-version or another (i.e. reality as parsed in one or another of the appropriate, viable ways). The truth about the former sort of fact is as it is *simpliciter*, because the world-in-itself is as it is *simpliciter*.

What follows from alethic relativism is not ontological but rather conceptual relativism. If (some) truth is relative, then (some) truth makers obtain only relatively. But the relatively obtaining truth makers can be in *different* world-versions - but *the same* world. The same, of course, holds in the reverse. Relativity of truth makers (to world-versions) entails relativity of truth. But all this relativization can be grounded in one, objective *world*. We have, therefore, established a mutual entailment between alethic and conceptual relativism (Conceptual $\leftrightarrow$ Alethic). We have further established that neither one nor the other (nor both conjointly) entails ontological relativity.

### 2.2c Does Knowledge Relativism Entail Ontological Relativism?

What may we then say of the final of our four "fundamental" types. From the foregoing, it should be clear that the relativist about knowledge need not accept any measure of ontological relativity. The independent existence of the world-in-itself is in no way incompatible with the doctrine that claims about an individual's having knowledge of some proposition *p* require an extra argument place in order that they be well-formed (i.e. there is no incompatibility given the doctrine that only a world-as-ordered, or a *world-version* may serve as a truth maker for propositions outside the privileged class of propositions about the world-in-itself or the world *simpliciter*).

It is quite common (among philosophers, at least) to take the possession of knowledge as requiring possession of a *true* belief (plus some kind of *warrant* for the belief). The alleged difficulty is as follows: If having *knowledge* of *p* entails that *p* is *true*, then a relativist about knowledge is committed to relativism about *truth* as well. Relativism about truth leads straightforwardly to ontological relativism (since *the world* is truthmaker). The relativist about knowledge must, therefore, accept relativism with respect to the world-in-itself as well. Obviously, the answer to this charge is to be found in the foregoing discussion of *alethic* relativism, where I argued that one need not take all truth makers to obtain absolutely in order that one avoid ontological relativism.

We have seen that alethic relativism does entail *conceptual* relativism (and vice-versa), but this need not involve its proponent in Goodmanian constructivism or any other sort of *ontological* relativism (if there are others). It need not do so because the truth-maker for some propositions is a world-as-ordered or a *world-version*. One can know

that S is true relative to world-version<sub>1</sub>, while knowing that S is *not* true relative to world-version<sub>2</sub>, although the world-in-itself underpinning the two world-versions is itself invariant, objective, and mind-independent. The relativist about knowledge is, therefore, committed to *alethic* relativism and, thus, to conceptual relativism. The reverse also holds. With relativity of world-versions comes a relativity of truths to be known. Only relative to some conceptual framework or other are there any particular truths (save trivial ones about the world-in-itself) to be known.

## 2.2d And Then There Were Two

We can summarize the entailment relations between the various types of relativism as follows:

$$\text{ontological} \Rightarrow \{\text{conceptual} \Leftrightarrow \text{alethic} \Leftrightarrow \text{knowledge}\}$$

And there are no other entailments between them. That is, the entailment relation does not run from the first bracket to the left nor from any *one* of the latter three "fundamental types" to ontological relativism (i.e. relativists of the latter types *need* not be - though they *may* be - ontological relativists). In taxonomizing relativisms, the fundamental distinction to be made is that between relativism about the-world-in-itself and relativism about world-*versions*. For simplicity's sake, and in deference to Kant's considerable influence over the development of relativistic theory, we may collapse the "fundamental" relativistic types into the *noumenal* (ontological) and the *phenomenal* (conceptual/alethic/knowledge).

## Section Summary

The ontological relativist is committed to conceptual, alethic, and knowledge relativism because world-versions, sets of true propositions, and knowledge of members of those sets all co-vary with the variability of the world-in-itself (as relativized to one or another parameter). If one is committed only to the relativity of some portion of the world-in-itself (i.e. one is a *limited* ontological relativist), then one is thereby committed to a correspondingly limited conceptual/alethic/knowledge relativism. No relationship holds in the reverse. That is, neither conceptual, alethic, nor knowledge relativism (nor any combination of the three) entails any form of ontological relativism - though conceptual, alethic, and knowledge relativism all mutually entail each other. For simplicity's sake, given the mutual entailments of the three *non*-ontological relativisms, we may simplify our taxonomy still further. All relativisms are either *noumenal* (pertaining to the world-in-itself) or *phenomenal* (pertaining to world-versions, their attendant truths, and knowledge of them).

### 2.3 A Pair of Relativists - What Stripe?

It will be useful at this point to look at the positions of two prominent relativists and see what exactly their respective brands of relativism commit them to. If anyone is a hard-core, no-holds-barred relativist out-to-here, it is Nelson Goodman. The following passage from "On Starmaking" is written by a philosopher who is not shy about declaring his advocacy of a thoroughgoing relativism:

Scheffler contends that we cannot have made the stars. I ask him which features of the stars we did not make, and challenge him to state how these differ from features clearly

dependent on discourse. Does he ask how we can have made anything older than we are? Plainly, by making a space and time that contains those stars. By means of science, that world (indeed many another) was made with great difficulty and is, like the several worlds of phenomena that also contain stars, a more or less right or real world. We can make the sun stand still, not in the manner of Joshua but in the manner of Bruno. We make a star as we make a constellation, by putting its parts together and marking off its boundaries. (1980: 213)

It seems that time, space, and everything that falls under their cognizance, are matters of our making. The entire spacetime continuum would appear to exist, not in and of itself, but only relative to our constructive efforts. We *make* it the way that it is. Presumably our efforts might have been such as to have given the universe a different history and a different current status. If this is not *noumenal* relativism, what more could be required?

At some small remove from Goodman (how far removed is an open question) there is Hillary Putnam who, unlike Goodman, resists the moniker "relativist" and instead professes to offer a new version of *realism*. The interesting feature of his metaphysic is its alleged synthesis of *realism* and *conceptual relativity*. His advancement of *internal* (or pragmatic) *realism* has all but gotten him drummed out of the realist's union. Once a member in good standing, he has now been dubbed a "renegade" and has been cast down among the "worldmakers" In this section, I will set out each philosopher's metaphysical view and see where in our foregoing taxonomy each belongs.

### 2.3a Goodmanian Relativism

Is the conceptual relativist committed to the existence of indefinitely many realities or worlds? Not when reality or the world is construed as *that which exists simpliciter* (i.e. without relativization to any further parameter). Recall discussion of the cookie-cutter metaphor and our conception-independent dough. The option of a mind-

independent, neutral reality underlying the available ontological parsings or world-versions is available to the conceptual relativist. That is, the conceptual relativist may be also a weak (or what Devitt (1984) refers to as a "fig-leaf") realist. Even the arch-relativist Goodman allows that the "world-in-itself need not be denied to those who love it." He simply denies such a world any particular sets of facts, categories, kinds, etc. For Goodman, the world-in-itself is (quite literally) an uneventful and uninteresting place, but he often seems to allow its mind-independent existence - thereby leaving open the possibility that he actually embraces some kind of ontological realism while advancing either a *limited* noumenal relativism or, perhaps, a robust phenomenal relativism:

We cannot test a version by comparing it with a world undescribed, undepicted, unperceived, but only by other means that I shall discuss later. While we may speak of determining what versions are right as 'learning about the world, 'the world' supposedly being that which all right versions describe, all we learn about the world is contained in right versions of it; and while the underlying world, bereft of these, need not be denied to those who love it, it is perhaps on the whole a world well lost. (1978: p. 4 - emphasis mine)

Perhaps Goodman contends that the world "undescribed, undepicted, unperceived" is "well lost" in the sense that there is simply nothing that one can *say about* it or *do with* it other than to assert its existence (and a handful of uninteresting trivialities about it). It is not unreasonable to understand him as advancing some such contention. The reasons for such an interpretation may be found scattered about his discussion of a shift in frame of reference as constituting a shift in world (see § 4. ), as well as his talk of the slippery distinction between world-versions and worlds:

To speak of worlds as made by versions often offends both by its implicit pluralism and by its sabotage of what I have called 'something stolid underneath'. Let me offer what comfort I can. While I stress the multiplicity of right world-versions, I by no means insist that there are many worlds—or indeed any; for as I have already suggested, the question whether two versions are of the same world has as many good answers as there are good interpretations of the words "versions of the same world". The

monist can always contend that two versions need only be right to be accounted versions of the same world. (p. 96 - emphasis mine)

What does Goodman mean by blurring the distinction between worlds and world-versions? Apparently, he takes all alleged descriptions of "the world" to be framed, actually, within the language and conceptual scheme appropriate to some world-version or other. Talk of "the world" is really just talk of some world-version. Since versions are all we are capable of talking about (aside from trivial claims such as "the world exists," etc.), why not "lose" talk of the world-in-itself and embrace talk of world-versions as our only way of talking about "the world" at all? On this sort of interpretation, Goodman is not a *noumenal* relativist at all. He is a noumenal realist espousing a fairly (perhaps verging on *entirely*) robust *phenomenal* relativism. The world-in-itself, for what it is worth, is "out there," but in order that one say anything non-trivial about it, one must express oneself from within the confines of some world-version. Therein lies Goodman's *phenomenal* relativism. What is true, and what can be known, is a function of the particular parsing of the world which the cognitive agent imposes upon "the given" via the imposition of some set of conceptual categories. Goodman may very well allow the world-in-itself its independent existence, while simultaneously dismissing conceptions of it as "empty".

Though this kind of "charity" is exceedingly difficult given Goodman's insistence on being taken literally about his "worldmaking", I should like to allow the possibility that Goodman insists only upon the literal making of world-versions (a problematic view in its own right). Admittedly, there are textual hurdles that make one strain a bit more

than I would like in order to extract my "charitable" interpretation. Here is one such passage from Goodman's "On Starmaking":

The worldmaking mainly in question here [in challenging Scheffler's (1980) attack on the conceptual "construction" of entities such as stars] is making not with hands but with minds, or rather with languages or other symbol systems. Yet when I say that worlds are made, **I mean it literally**; and what I mean should be clear from what I have already said. (Goodman, 1980: p. 213 - brackets and emphasis mine)

Remembering Goodman's rejection of the distinction between worlds and versions, one wonders if he might not mean that interesting and contentful *versions* of the "something stolid underneath" are literally made, as opposed to that which many would call the *world-in-itself* (or worlds-in-themselves) being made. In any event, Goodman's case is a difficult one to diagnose. The motivation for the "charitable" interpretation offered here comes largely from the apparent absurdity of what has been described as *noumenal* relativism, as well as the presence of fairly *obvious* and *devastating* objections to it (which will be discussed in § 2.4). One wonders how plausible it is that an exceptionally able philosopher could fail to notice such conspicuous peril. There are clearer cases in which a philosopher accused baldly of relativism should, nevertheless, be given the benefit of the doubt as far as *noumenal* relativism is concerned.

### 2.3b The "Renegade" Putnam's Relativism

Even if I am mistaken about Goodman and it turns out that he does, in fact, insist upon the relativity of not only viable conceptions of reality, but of the *world-in-itself* (i.e. if he is committed to *noumenal* relativism), it is clear that other philosophers of the phenomenally relativistic stripe are *not* committed to it. The later Putnam, for example,

is readily interpretable as a relativist of some kind or another, but it is not so easy to interpret his writings as endorsing the view that there is nothing at all "out there" which exists independently of any facts about cognizers or which simply exists in-itself - in the absence of any additional parameter *with respect to which* it exists. Putnam's brand of relativity turns out, upon careful inspection, to be merely of the *phenomenal* type.

The later Putnam (early 70's and on) argues that there are many different ways of categorizing, carving up, or otherwise ordering reality. A user of one conceptual scheme or framework will impose one ordering upon reality whereas a user of a distinct scheme will prescribe another. Without the imposition of one scheme or another, reality has no particular set of features, properties, relations, etc. Truth (for Putnam, *warranted assertability*<sup>1</sup>) is, therefore, relative to the imposition of some scheme or another. In this respect, Putnam's metaphysical view is indistinguishable from Goodman's. In spite of all such relativity, however, Putnam believes users of any conceptual framework to be constrained. The set of facts peculiar to a particular framework (i.e. a world-version) is determined, in part, by an independent, brute, "given" that is external to any framework.<sup>2</sup> He insists that the facts which are found only *internal* to one conceptual scheme or another, are, nonetheless, *objectively* the case - *given* the scheme in question. Though one might be inclined to think that the terms "objective" and "given" may not consistently

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<sup>1</sup>Putnam (1981, 1987, and elsewhere) argues for the rejection of the distinction between: 1) propositions with truth conditions, and 2) propositions that merely have warranted assertability conditions. A "true" proposition, for Putnam, is indistinguishable from one which is warrantably assertable within the parameters of an "ideal" theory generated by a community of cognizers under "ideal" epistemic circumstances. Putnam takes the suggestion that such a theory of reality might be wrong or inaccurate to be literally incoherent.

<sup>2</sup>How *the given* accomplishes the constraint function is one of the central and most debilitating difficulties facing constructivists who strip the world-in-itself of all facts and features - § 2.4.

and coherently be used as they are in the preceding sentence, Putnam argues that they can and should be so used (in chapter IV, I also defend the consistency of the view that objective reality does not preclude - limited - phenomenal relativism). Although, for Putnam, we can not make sense of the notion of a thing-in-itself, we are not prohibited from employing the notion of objectivity as governing and delimiting the world-versions which emerge for users of any particular conceptual framework:

Internal realism is, at bottom, just the insistence that realism is not incompatible with conceptual relativity. One can be both a realist and a conceptual relativist. (1987: p. 17)

He requests that we:

Consider 'a world with three individuals'...  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ ,  $x_3$ . How many objects are there in this world? (1987: p. 18)

And provides us with the following analysis of that "world":

Suppose, for example, that like some Polish logicians, I believe that for every two particulars there is an object which is their sum. (This is the basic assumption of 'mereology', the calculus of parts and wholes invented by Lezniewski.) If I ignore, for the moment, the so-called 'null object', then I will find that the world of 'three individuals' (as Carnap might have had it, at least when he was doing inductive logic) actually contains seven objects:

World 1  
 $x_1, x_2, x_3$

World 2  
 $x_1, x_2, x_3, x_1+x_2,$   
 $x_1+x_3, x_2+x_3,$   
 $x_1+x_2+x_3$

A world à la Carnap

('Same' world à la  
Polish logician) (1987: p. 18)

His analysis of the scenario leaves us with two fundamentally different world-versions, each of which is constrained to be as it is, not by consensus or convention, but by an external "way that the world," (of which Carnap's and Lezniewski's accounts are *versions*) is in-itself:

One last point before I leave these examples: given a version, the question, 'How many objects are there?' has an [objective] answer, namely 'three' in the case of the first version ('Carnap's World') and 'seven' (or 'eight') in the case of the second version ('The Polish Logician's World'). Once we make clear how we are using 'object' (or 'exist'), the question 'How many objects exist?' has an answer that is not at all a matter of 'convention'...**Our concepts may be culturally relative, but it does not follow that the truth or falsity of everything we say using those concepts is simply 'decided' by the culture...**

If this is right, then it may be possible to see how it can be that what is in one sense the 'same' world (the two versions are deeply related) can be **described as** consisting of 'tables and chairs' (and these described as colored, possessing dispositional properties, etc.) in one version and as consisting of space-time regions, particles and fields, etc., in other versions. To require that all of these must be reducible to a single version is to make the mistake of supposing that 'Which are the real objects?' is a question that makes sense **independently of our choice of concepts**. (p. 20 - brackets<sup>3</sup> and large-font emphasis mine - all other emphasis is the author's own)

So, something is "out there," but there is no way to describe, depict, organize, or say anything at all about it (other than that it is "out there") until one adopts some conceptual scheme or other for the imposition of some kind of categorization and ordering of it. Putnam is, at heart, a *conceptual* relativist (and, thereby, committed to *phenomenal* relativism of some - apparently pretty thoroughgoing - kind). In this and similar examples, Putnam is implicitly embracing a distinction between *that which is in-itself* and our various conceptions and orderings of it, while simultaneously (and this is the difficult part) holding that notions of the former are only intelligible and contentful from within the perspective of some one of the latter. The distinction to which he obliquely alludes is drawn along something like the same lines as that with which I am concerned in making the distinction between noumenal and phenomenal relativism. In insisting upon the legitimacy of a plurality of parsings or orderings of reality, one need not (though one

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<sup>3</sup> It is clear from the surrounding text that Putnam intends to assert that there is an *objective* fact of the matter as to how many objects there are in the "world" under consideration and that objectivity is not incompatible with the inherently perspectival or conceptually-relative nature of description.

may) embrace a plurality of worlds-in-themselves. Putnam's truth and falsity are not "simply 'decided' by culture" because the world-in-itself plays a role in fixing facts (e.g. about number) *given* a conceptual scheme.

The theories of conceptual, alethic, and epistemological relativism (even when taken all together as *phenomenal* relativism) are metaphysically neutral with respect to the issue of ontological pluralism, or relativity of the world-in-itself (i.e. *noumenal* relativism). To assert the foregoing, however, is not to absolve Putnam or Goodman of the theoretical equivalent of sin. Both, I shall argue, have gone too far in their phenomenal relativism and have rendered the world-in-itself far too bare to allow it to perform the constraint function essential to a metaphysic which embraces any type of coherent relativism.

### Section Summary

Nelson Goodman, perhaps the most radical of the well-known contemporary relativists, appears to be committed to the *literal* construction of *worlds* by cognizers. I argue that, appearances to the contrary, Goodman's constructivism only pertains to world-versions. Since he rejects the distinction between worlds and versions, it is exceedingly difficult to place Goodman in our relativistic taxonomy. Charity, however, bids us interpret his talk about the literal construction of *worlds* as aimed really at world-versions.

Hilary Putnam clearly thinks that something exists for which cognizers are not responsible and that they have not constructed, but he also takes the line that we cannot

say anything about it until we adopt some conceptual scheme. Any description of reality is, therefore, a description from some *perspective on* that reality. Putnam does, however, take some neutral, underlying reality to be responsible for what the facts are *given* some conceptual scheme.

#### 2.4 Noumenal Relativism And Two Conceptual Difficulties

The *robust* noumenal relativist denies *any* distinction between the "world-in-itself" and the world-as-constructed-by or as-conceived-from-the-perspective-of some cognizer, linguistic community, background theory, etc. The world-as-ordered-by-conceptual-framework- $C_i$  is as close to a "world-in-itself" as one can get, not because of conceptual constraints upon cognizers, but because of the absence of any reality independent of the conceptual activities of cognizers. For the robust noumenal relativist, the mind-independent world-in-itself is, quite literally, a *fiction*. World-versions are generated only by the conceptual constructions of cognizers, and those constructions are a function of the conceptual categories inherent in cognizers or in their community-based language and theory. Goodman, as a nearest approximation to a proponent of the doctrine, tells us that worlds are made only from other worlds which are already "on hand". Each world is made only from a reorganization (in virtue of the manipulation of symbol systems, languages, conceptual reordering, and the like) of the worlds already available to the cognizer or the community:

The many stuffs—matter, energy, waves, phenomena—that worlds are made of are made along with the worlds. But made from what? Not from nothing, after all, but from other worlds. Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already on hand; the making is a remaking. (1978: p. 6)

If we understand Goodman to be expressing a robust noumenal relativism (an interpretation which, I have urged we should resist - though I have conceded that resistance is, at times, difficult), we are drawn inexorably to a number of questions about the nature of the ontological commitments that such a theorist must accept. All of the charges to be brought to bear against relativism in the following two sections have received more thorough treatment and more complete articulation elsewhere (e.g. Siegel, 1986; Elder, 1983; van Inwagen, 1993; Harris, 1982). My aim is merely to offer a general indication of problems for the standard versions of relativism and to offer some motivation for a retreat to a *limited phenomenal* relativism.

#### 2.4 a The Constraint Problem

If there is literally *no* world-in-itself apart from the constructions of cognizers, or apart from the imposition of some set of conceptual categories and principles of ordering reality, then how is it that cognizers generate the world-versions which they do? That is, if there is no "given" or no existence *simpliciter* (i.e. without need of relativization or construction), how is it that any *constraint* at all is imposed upon cognizers' "worldmaking"? What is to prevent some cognizer or community from "making" a world filled with (say) dragons, witches, squared-circles, or nothing at all? Goodman illustrates his brand of constructivism with a discussion of the phenomenon of apparent motion (1978: pp. 71-74), and his analysis of it leads him to the conclusion that whether the motion perceived is "merely apparent," or qualifies as actual motion, depends upon the conceptual framework from within which the perceiver approaches the phenomenon

before her. But whichever world-version the subject in the study constructs, there seem invariably to be features common to each of the subjects. Why should this be so?

Goodman neglects to ask why (for example) the cognizer perceives anything at all as opposed to nothing. Similarly, why does every subject in the study perceives spots of light as opposed to each cognizer having experiences which are wildly disparate from those of the others, or that are entirely tied to the idiosyncratic features of each individual cognizer's psychology? Why is it in general that the many different world-versions attendant upon a particular inquiry or investigation seem to have so much in common?

Ptolemy saw a sun revolving around the earth whereas Copernicus' world view involved a rotating earth executing revolutions around the sun. Goodman (on the radical interpretation) denies any independent existence to "something stolid underneath" underpinning the distinct world-versions in this and similar cases, but argues instead that the two "competing" world-versions, while somehow related, are not conceptualizations of something distinct from themselves (i.e. a world-in-itself), but are, rather, worlds-in-and-of-themselves with no ontologically deeper substratum. He denies that there is any reality *simpliciter* "beneath" the versions. The sorts of question that Goodman must then answer are the following: Why did Ptolemy and Copernicus each perceive the sun and perceive it as being in motion with respect to the earth? Why (in a different case) do Goodman's Eskimos and New Englanders both end up in a world with cold, white, crystalline H<sub>2</sub>O in it when the world of the latter is constructed with the concept *snow* whereas that of the former is constructed without the concept of the single, uniform type *snow* but with a sundered plethora of types in its stead? What is it about the world-

versions "already on hand" which dictated these features of their perceptual experiences? From where do those world-versions "on hand" acquire their particular features? What constrains the various constructions and projections which serve as world-versions? Why do they have the features (and facts) which they do? It seems that Goodman (or whomever advocates a robust noumenal relativism) may answer in only one of two ways. The first is to vest the world-in-itself with the intrinsic features necessary to perform the constraint function (the option I explore in Ch. 4); but to do so is, obviously, in violation of the robust noumenal relativist's rejection of the existence of any world-in-itself (external to world-versions). The only remaining alternative involves the constraint function being performed by *world-versions* "already on hand". We are therein led to consideration of a second conceptual difficulty for the robust noumenal relativist.

#### 2.4b The Emergence Problem

If reality is *entirely* a construct or the product of projection on the part of cognizers, then how is it that there came to be cognizers in the world? On the constructivist view, the world is dependent upon the conceptual activities of cognizers - either as individuals or as constituents of something like a linguistic community. Cognizers and linguistic communities, however, are parts of the world. How is it that cognizers ever emerged in order that the various world-making projects might be instantiated? If the robust noumenal relativist is not entitled to the world-in-itself, then she must produce some construct within the boundaries of which we are to find the architects of the various world-versions. It would appear that she must posit the existence

of some world-version(s) as underpinning the existence of cognizers (having eliminated the anti-constructivistic expedient of positing an independent world-in-itself). It is obvious, however, that the *robust* noumenal relativist (the constructivist "all the way down") can not allow the existence of world-versions *prior* to the existence of cognizers - for how are world-versions to be generated prior to the existence of cognizers if one does not allow a cognizer-independent world-in-itself into one's theory of reality?

The problem of constraint forces the robust noumenal relativist to vest that function in constructs of some kind that cognizers find already "on hand". Constructs, however, presuppose constructors. Whence come these antecedently active constructors? Hence, the only dodge of the constraint problem leaves the robust noumenal relativist facing the *emergence* problem. Where did cognizers come from? Are *they* constructs? If so, where did the first constructor come from? The chicken-and-eggishness of the robust variety of constructivism prompts Devitt's terse dismissal:

Finally, there is an old problem for relativism which is like the fatal flaw of foundationalism: arbitrarily excluding from the scope of the theory something dear to the theorist's heart. In this case, why do the languages, concepts, cultures, and so forth that do the worldmaking not themselves exist only relative to...? Relative to what? Themselves? The 'texts' themselves start to shimmer and lose their reality. (1984: pp238-239)

Robust noumenal relativism is susceptible to still further (and, perhaps, still more damaging) objections which we will investigate in their application to more tenable versions of relativism. I will bring the charges of incoherence and self-refutation to bear upon species of relativism that enjoy a greater number of adherents and a more plausible

claim to intelligibility. As for the robust doctrine presently under consideration, we need fear its proliferation no more than we need fear the proliferation of Shakerism<sup>4</sup>.

#### 2.4c Limited Noumenal Relativism

So, if *robust* noumenal relativism is untenable or unintelligible, why not a *limited* noumenal relativism which embraces some kind of existence *simpliciter* or world-in-itself, while denying independence or non-relativized existence to anything outside the privileged class of independent entities? For example, why not a kind of relativism which posits minds (and, perhaps, their conceptual categories) as the only brute elements of the independently-existing world-in-itself. The mind then constructs a reality in accordance with its conceptual categories and the "known world," as conceptual construction, is born. On this limited relativism about the world-in-itself, we have a privileged class of brute entities (i.e. minds), but the rest of the ontology is much as the *robust* noumenal relativist would have it. Rocks, trees, contracts, societies, etc., all exist "in-themselves" only in virtue of some construction or other type of conceptual exertion on the parts of minds. Note that we do not quite have a description of Berkeleyan idealism, as there is no God exerting a regulatory influence over the constructions of minds (so that they will all generate "the same" world). We do not yet have Kantian transcendental idealism either, since the minds in the reality we are describing are, *themselves*, the sole noumenal entities without any external brute existence playing any

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<sup>4</sup> Shakers are a Christian sect that reject the moral legitimacy of sexual intercourse under any circumstances. Oddly enough, they remain a very small group.

role in the generation of the "known world". We just have brute minds and the worlds which they construct. The limited noumenal relativist need not explain the *emergence* of minds upon the scene - minds *just* are. The rest of reality is "constructed" by minds. The emergence problem which scuttles the *robust* noumenal relativist loses its force against the *limited* noumenal relativist. But the limited noumenal relativist is not vindicated yet.

#### 2.4d That Other Problem - Constraint Again

Even if we allow the limited noumenal relativist to sidestep the emergence problem with the arbitrary, ad hoc insertion of brutally existing minds into her ontology, we have as yet been given no answer to the constraint problem. Why is it that the minds which brutally exist proceed to construct the particular worlds which they do? Surely, any set of conceptual categories is consistent with the mind's generating indefinitely many different worlds or world-versions. Why the one, or *ones*, that we have? If there are many, why so much commonality? Answers to these questions seem apt to lead either to something like a Berkeleyan deity and its regulatory role, or to some kind of a Leibnizian monadology (the details of which, frankly, make the relativistic ontology here under consideration seem straightforward and obvious), or to a Kantian metaphysic wherein the power to perform the constraint function is somehow vested in a noumenal realm distinct from minds and their conceptual categories. The first option involves an ad hoc resolution to the constraint problem (God) and a host of new difficulties attendant thereupon. The second option leads to a metaphysic so convoluted and bizarre that even if it were viable, prudence might demand that articulation or analysis of it be suppressed

for the psychological well-being of metaphysicians the world over. It is very difficult to find the physical world among "windowless" monads, of varying degrees of "clarity", that do not causally interact with one another. With all these "little universes" one wonders where the world that we all (at least *seem* to) share is to be found. Furthermore, the Leibnizian world-view is no less dependent upon God than is the Berkeleyan view. The third option vests the power of the construction of worlds in minds which, by ad hoc stipulation *just exist* in and of themselves, while the constraint function is *somehow* performed by a noumenal realm about which we are able to say and to know *nothing at all*.

No variety of noumenal relativism can simultaneously escape the constraint and emergence problems. The price of escape is resort to an ad hoc insistence upon something-we-know-not-what that (we-know-not-how) constrains "worldmaking". Noumenal relativism of *any* stripe seems hopeless. Let us, therefore, cross over to the other side of the tracks (where, I think, most relativists really live anyhow) and inquire into the viability of some version of *phenomenal* relativism.

### Section Summary

Noumenal relativism is undermined by the constraint and the emergence problems. The robust noumenal relativist can not give adequate answer to either of the following two questions:

- 1) Why do world-versions turn out as they do (in particular, why do they all have so much in common)?

- 2) Where did minds come from if there were no world-versions or facts prior to the existence of minds?

The limited noumenal relativist offers an entirely ad hoc answer to the second question and is forced into some untenable (and probably ad hoc) answer to the first. Goodman certainly suffers from both maladies whereas constraint seems the greater problem for Putnam. Noumenal relativism suffers from other problems as well, but since these afflict *phenomenal* relativism, I will examine them in my discussion of it.

### 2.5 Difficulties With Robust Phenomenal Relativism

In this section, I make the case that *robust* phenomenal relativism actually entails *noumenal* relativism and is, therefore, not viable. Furthermore (and, perhaps, more importantly), even if we ignore that entailment, robust phenomenal relativism is self-refuting if it is not incoherent for roughly those reasons that Socrates suggests in the *Theaetetus*. I understand Socrates to be confronting Protagoras with a particular sort of dilemma about a defense of the relativistic thesis. Finally, I briefly suggest a defense of a version of *limited* phenomenal relativism constructed so as to allow for the mind-independent world-in-itself that holds so much intuitive appeal for realists.

#### 2.5a Robust Phenomenal Relativism Entails Noumenal Relativism

The robust phenomenal relativist holds that there is *no* objective, framework-independent truth, knowledge, or ordering of reality. Such matters make sense only as relativized to some further parameter such as culture, historical epoch, conceptual

scheme, etc. So, whether or not one's world-version is "right" or "appropriate" is purely a function of the governing principles of the conceptual framework within which one is operating. What is and is not true is a function of the world-version with which one is dealing, what is and is not knowable is a function of what is and is not true (which, as just noted, is in turn relative to one of the aforementioned parameters).

The most obvious difficulty with robust phenomenal relativism is that it precludes objectivity of even the very most fundamental matters of ontology. For example, the robust relativist is committed to the position that *no* proposition, not even: "Something exists," or "There is an objective world-in-itself" is *simply true* irrespective of the conceptual framework from within which the proposition is to be evaluated. If "Something exists" is true only relatively, then *something exists* only relatively (by Tarski's equivalence thesis:  $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff  $p$ ).

*Any* theory of truth must accommodate all unproblematic instances of the equivalence schema. No "theory of truth" can be accepted if it does *not* entail that the proposition (statement, utterance, etc.)  $\langle p \rangle$  is true if and only if  $p$  obtains. Theories may differ greatly over what it is for some  $p$  to obtain. The classical realist posits  $p$  as an objective, mind-independent fact or state of affairs in the world-itself. She holds that  $\langle p \rangle$  is true if and only if it "corresponds to" the *objective* fact  $p$ . Philosophers who take truth to be something that is inherently tied to epistemic facts about cognizers will reject  $p$ 's mind-independence, but must nonetheless hold that  $\langle p \rangle$  is true if and only if  $p$  is the case. They simply have different ideas about what  $p$ 's being the case amounts to. No one will accept a theory of truth as adequate if it allows that either:

1)  $\langle p \rangle$  might be true though  $p$  does *not* obtain, or

2)  $\langle p \rangle$  might not be true though  $p$  *does* obtain

So, if "Something exists" is true, then *something exists*, and if *something exists*, then

"Something exists" is true - no matter what one's theory of truth happens to be.

The robust phenomenal relativist (alethic strand) must hold that *every* proposition is true only *relative to* some parameter or other. But, given the equivalence thesis, it follows for *every* proposition that its truth-maker (the  $p$  on the right of the biconditional in the equivalence schema) obtains *only relative to* some parameter or other. Otherwise, there will be some case like 1 or 2 above. Consider the following substitution instance of Tarski's equivalence schema:

S: "Something exists" if and only if *something exists*.

The robust relativist *must* hold that S is true (otherwise she holds some unintelligible "theory of truth"), and yet she is also committed to the *relative* truth of "Something exists" (to say nothing of problems attendant upon her commitment to the *relative* truth of S). She is, therefore, committed to the thesis that *something exists* only relative to some parameter or other.

Similarly, if "There is an objective world-in-itself" is *true* only relative to some conceptual framework, then *there is an objective world-in-itself* only relative to some conceptual framework. Can any  $\phi$  exist objectively with respect to some  $\pi_i$ , but not somehow objectively (or not at all) for some distinct  $\pi_j$ ? Is "relative objectivity" a coherent notion at all? Peter van Inwagen seems not to think so:

If Andrew [the anti-realist] can find no "replacement" for truth but "fits in with my own, personal experience," then (assuming that Andrew isn't really proposing that everyone use

"fits in with Andrew's experience" as a replacement for truth), he is proposing a theory according to which the philosopher who says "Objective truth and falsity exist" and the philosopher who says "Objective truth and falsity do not exist" are not in disagreement. And this is an absurd consequence. (van Inwagen, 1993: p. 68)

And robust phenomenal relativism seems to entail that the objective world-in-itself exists only *relative to* something. In short, *robust* phenomenal relativism entails *ontological* or *noumenal* relativism and, as we have already seen, *that* thesis is entirely unintelligible. But there are still further difficulties for the robust phenomenal relativist.

### 2.5b Incoherence or Self-Refutation

Even supposing one could somehow sidestep phenomenal relativism's entailment of noumenal relativism, a number of philosophers have argued that the thesis of robust relativism (especially its alethic strand) collapses under its very own insuperable problems independent of any it acquires through its entailments.

Socrates was, perhaps, the first to charge the doctrine with self-refutation (i.e. in order that it be true, it must be false). His charge is offered in response to Protagoras' (alleged) assertion that "man is the measure of all things--alike of the being of things that are and of the not-being of things that are not" (*Theaetetus* 152a). This assertion was interpreted (by Plato, Socrates, and Aristotle) as an expression of Protagoras' commitment to a thoroughgoing relativism about truth (as is indicated by Socrates' subsequent comments to *Theaetetus*). Plato's *Theaetetus* (152a-171d) shows his argument against Protagoras proceeding as follows:

- 1) You hold that what seems to me to be true *is* true for me, and that what seems to be true to you *is* true for you.

- 2) I believe that doctrine to be false (i.e. it seems false to me).
- 3) If the doctrine you have put forward is true, then it must be false (because it *seems* so to me and what seems so to me *is* so).
- 4) Hence, if your doctrine is true, then it is false.
- 5) Hence, your doctrine can not be true - it is self-refuting.

Of course, the standard charge against Socrates' objection to Protagoreanism is that it crucially ignores the relativization of truth *to the individual*. Protagoras (so the counterobjection goes) has claimed that relativism is true *for him*. He is also committed to the thesis that if you do not believe it, then it is not true *for you*. Thus far we have no self-refutation nor even a contradiction. Relativism is true *for Protagoras* and it is not true *for Socrates* (Trp & ~Trs). This does not amount to relativism being both true *and* not true in the same respect, but merely to its being true relative to one individual and not true relative to another. Socrates' objection, therefore, misses the mark because it illicitly imports the objectivist's or realist's version of truth in generating the alleged paradox. In short, the objection begs the question against Protagoras.

Jack Meiland has noted Plato's (or Socrates') apparent failure to see the role of the relativizing locution "true for..." in the Protagorean doctrine:

Plato's own attempt, in the *Theaetetus* to show Protagorean relativism to be self-refuting appears to be radically defective due to Plato's dropping of the relativistic qualifier (the "for me" in "true for me") at crucial points. (Meiland, 1979: p. 54).

A number of other authors have expressed similar concerns about the Socratic charge of self-refutation (see Jordan, 1971; Swoyer, 1982). But can a theory about the nature of truth (i.e. alethic relativism) be, itself, only true or false relative to some parameter or other? Is it not relevant that Socrates challenges Protagoras to defend the viability of the

very Protagorean doctrine itself? Socrates does not choose just any arbitrary proposition and make the case that it must be both true and false given relativism; he makes that case against the Protagorean articulation of relativism *itself*.

Socrates' charge is essentially in the form of a *dilemma*, one horn of which branches into a subsidiary dilemma. The overarching dilemma is as follows: Either the doctrine of relativism is *absolutely* true (in which case it is self-refuting) or it is only *relatively* true. I will argue that if Protagoras opts for the second disjunct (as, apparently, he must), he gets caught in the following dilemma: Either relative truth rests on absolute truth (and so relativism is, as before, self-refuting) or it collapses into mere belief (in which case, its assertion as a doctrine of *truth* is incoherent).<sup>5</sup>

The diagram below may help to clarify the nature of the Socratic dilemma for robust relativism:

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<sup>5</sup>What sorts of response are actually open to Protagoras? Is the response suggested by Meiland (and others who claim question-begging) really adequate? There is some evidence that Socrates was aware of the rejoinder that he is begging the question, and that he carefully constructed his attack so that he should not be guilty of doing so:

No, he [Protagoras] will say, show a more generous spirit by attacking what I **actually say**, and prove, if you can, that we have not, each one of us, his peculiar perceptions, or that, granting them to be peculiar, it would not follow that **what appears to each becomes—or is, if we may use the word 'is'—for him alone to whom it appears...**For I do indeed assert that the truth is as I have written. Each one of us is a measure of what is and of what is not, but **there is all the difference in the world between one man and another** just in the very fact that what is and appears to one is different from what is and appears to the other. (*Theaetetus*: 166c-d)

Socrates appears to be aware that Protagoras means to assert the *relative* truth, or truth-for-X, of that which is believed by X, or of that which *seems to be so* to X. He seems to have developed his objection with the proper understanding of Protagoreanism in mind. Even if he did not, and has merely stumbled onto this line of objection, it is not thereby any less true that Protagoras seems to have himself a dilemma to deal with.

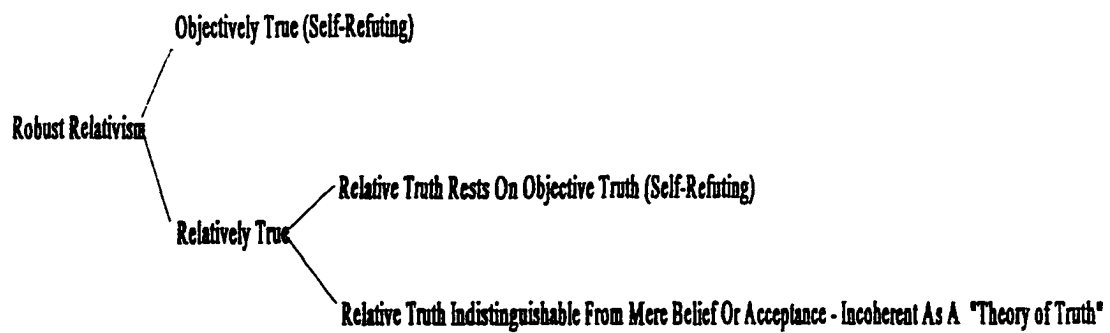


Diagram: The Socratic Dilemma for Robust Relativism

### 2.5b-1 The First Dilemma

If the robust relativist is to defend the relativistic thesis, then she must do so in (broadly speaking) one of two ways. She must make the case either that the relativistic thesis is true *simpliciter* (objectively, absolutely), or that the thesis is true in the *relative* sense. Obviously, the first disjunct is unacceptable to the *robust* relativist as it involves the affirmation of a non-relativized truth (of which, by the robust relativistic hypothesis, there are none). It must be that the robust relativist is defending the *relative* truth (the truth-for-X; replacing X with whatever relativistic parameter you will) of the relativistic thesis. Is there any understanding of relative truth upon which a defense of robust relativism may be built?

#### 2.5b-1a What Relative Truth Cannot Be

The relativist must be operating with some account of truth-for-X which does not rest upon, or importantly involve any notion of absolute truth (to which the robust relativist is not entitled). Neither can the relativistic account of truth amount to no more

than some simple epistemic property of the parameter to which truth is relativized. If truth is relativized to individuals (a la Protagoras), the truth of  $\langle p \rangle$  for  $X$  must be something other than the presence of  $X$ 's belief that  $\langle p \rangle$ . If " $\langle p \rangle$  is true-for- $X$ " amounts to no more than " $X$  believes that  $p$ ", then the relativistic notion of truth is entirely uninteresting. Any proposition's truth is a trivial consequence of its being believed. Given such an account of truth, there can be no dispute and no productive discourse about the superiority of relativism as opposed to any "competing" hypothesis about truth, knowledge, conceptualizations of reality, etc. If whatever any philosopher believes is true-for-her, the issue cannot even be joined by theorists in opposing camps .

Socrates is aware of the difficulties that Protagoras faces if he attempts to defend the relative truth of relativism where the doctrine's "relative truth" means no more than its being believed by some agent:

...if, just as no one is to be a better judge of what another experiences, so no one is better entitled to consider whether what another thinks is true or false, and, as we have said more than once, every man is to have his own beliefs for himself alone and they are all right and true—then, my friend, where is the wisdom of Protagoras, to justify his setting up to teach others and to be handsomely paid for it, and where is our comparative ignorance or the need for us to go and sit at his feet, when each of us is himself the measure of his own wisdom...for to set about overhauling and testing one another's notions and opinions when those of each and every one are right, is a tedious and monstrous display of folly if the Truth of Protagoras is really truthful and not amusing herself with oracles delivered from the unapproachable shrine of his book. (*Theaetetus*: 161d-162a)

Socrates is getting at a fundamental problem for the relativist. If relative truth is not just, at root, the same thing as absolute truth, then it had better not end up being tantamount to mere belief. If so, how is it that the relativist means to "defend" her view; for that matter, how is it that the opponent of relativism is to "attack" the view? What does it mean to say that one theory of truth is, in any interesting sense, *superior* to another if the "truth" of

any particular matter is simply decided for each disputant by virtue of that disputant's particular beliefs?

Furthermore, the relativist who defends such a doctrine is not offering a coherent *theory of truth* at all, but is merely articulating a triviality about beliefs. The relativist asserts:

1) Whatever X believes is true-for-X

But if being "true-for-X" amounts to no more than being *believed by X*, or *seeming so to X*, then 1) amounts to:

1a) Whatever X believes is believed by X.

Obviously, 1a) is a trivial and uninteresting truth. It is hardly a *theory of truth* (or of anything else for that matter). This type of "relativism" no longer entails the assertion of any *relative truth* at all. This type of "relativism" is not *relativism*. The relativist, therefore, owes us an account of true-for-X which is neither the trivial, uninteresting "thesis" just articulated, nor involves the absolutist notion of truth *simpliciter*. Is there any such account to be given?

### 2.5b-1b What Is Relative Truth?

What, within the just-mentioned parameters, can true-for-X mean? What is there "between" absolute truth and mere belief? One solution, suggested by Meiland, is the simple addition of a third term to the truth relation. Standard "absolute" truth is a two-term relation between statements and the world. On the absolutist interpretation, the expression <p> is true if and only if it *corresponds to the world* in an appropriate way.

Put simply, absolute truth is a word-world relation. Relative truth is, by contrast, a three-term relation involving statements, the world, and some conceptual framework (exemplified by cultures, individuals, historical epochs, etc.) as its relata. Meiland's explicit characterization of these competing conceptions of truth are as follows:

- (1) The concept of absolute truth seems to be a concept of a *two*-term relation between statements (or perhaps propositions) on the one hand and facts (or states of affairs) on the other. But the concept of relative truth, as used by some relativists, seems to be a concept of a *three*-term relation between statements, the world, and a third term which is either persons, world views, or historical and cultural situations.
- (2) The relation denoted by the expression 'absolute truth' is often said to be that of correspondence. The relativist can make use of this type of notion and say that "P is true relative to W" means something like "P corresponds to the facts from the point of view of W" (where W is a person, a set of leading principles, a world view, or a situation). (Meiland, 1977: p. 571)

What we have here is, essentially, a correspondence relation which obtains between, not a statement and the world, but between a statement and some world-version ("the facts from the point of view of W").

Harvey Siegel correctly points out that Meiland is still really just offering a two-term evaluation of truth (see 1986: pp. 234-240), and then dismisses the account on the grounds that it must either co-opt an absolute conception of truth or else it will fail to be anything more than truth-in-virtue-of-so-seeming. In effect, Siegel's charge is that Meiland's account fails to prevent relative truth from collapsing into mere belief if truth-for-X is not just a pseudonym for truth *simpliciter*.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>6</sup>Peter van Inwagen (1993) makes a similar argument regarding this dilemma for the anti-realist about objective reality. He asserts that it is incumbent upon the anti-realist to find some "substitute for objective truth" which all the "good" claims have and all the "bad" claims lack. That substitute must amount to more than "fitting in" with one's own personal experiences. Until the anti-realist does so, one can make no sense of her position.

As we have seen, the robust relativist is not entitled to any world-in-itself or world-independent-of-cognition. For the robust relativist, even propositions such as "There exists a world-in-itself" are only true or false relative to some individual, culture, historical period, etc. Therefore, when Meiland claims to offer a *three*-term truth relation that obtains between statements, the world, *and* some additional relativistic parameter, while it does not rest on an absolutist conception of truth, he makes two mistakes.

First, as Siegel points out, Meiland's truth relation holds between statements and the world-as-construed-by-X. True-for-X is just a *two*-term relation between words and world-versions:

On the relativist conception, the world is not distinguishable from the third relata (either persons, world views, or historical and cultural situations). What are related by the alleged three-term relation are statements and the-world-relative-to-W (where W is a person, a set of leading principles, a world view, or a situation - in short, where W is the third relata). On the relativist conception, the world cannot be conceived as independent of W; if it is so conceived, the relativist conception collapses into an absolutist one, for it is granted that there is a way the world is, independent of statements and of W's. This is precisely what the relativist must deny, however. So Meiland's three-term relation collapses into a two-term relation, between statements and the-world-relative-to-W, or, in Goodman's terminology, between statements and world-versions. This point can be seen in Meiland's remarks about the relativist's ability to utilize the notion of relations of correspondence...Grant Meiland the use of relations of correspondence: what correspond are not statements, independent facts, and some W, but rather statements and facts-from-the-point-of-view-of-W. Thus Meiland's three-term relation turns out upon inspection to be a two-term relation. (Siegel, 1986: pp. 234-235)

This point, in itself, is not terribly problematic for Meiland. Whether his truth relation involves two or three terms is an ancillary matter. In setting up world-versions as truth makers, however, Meiland lands back in the same predicament from which he sought to extract himself with his "three"-term conception of relativistic truth.

In the absence of an objective, invariant, mind-independent reality there can be no constraint upon the world-versions that cognizers create. The versions created need not

have any particular features or be any particular way so as to conform with objective *fact* (there is no such thing). A world-version is *as you like it*. When an unrestrained construct serves as truth maker for propositions, a statement is true if the *constructor* has "made" a world-version to which the statement corresponds. Without constraint, a world-version just is a set of facts which *seem*, to a particular cognizer or community, to obtain. That is, a statement is true if it *seems so* to the version-maker. The robust relativist's truth collapses into mere belief.

There can be no legitimate dispute between the relativist and the absolutist if the relativist "defends" relativism by claiming that relativism "fits in" with her world-version. In fact, such a claim, as we have seen, cannot serve as the expression of a *theory of truth* at all. The robust relativist, it would seem, can neither embrace absolute truth nor offer a coherent account of relative truth in its place. If the onus of providing a viable alternative to absolute truth (truth *simpliciter*) is on the relativist, then the original Socratic charge of self-refutation stands until some such alternative is concocted. We may understand the Socratic charge as follows: Protagoras' claim must be false in order that it be true. This is inescapable unless he has got some coherent, non-absolutist notion of truth. Protagoras did not offer an adequate response, and it is not clear that any *robust* relativist *can* offer an adequate response. If world-versions are entirely of our unconstrained making, then they simply are however we believe them to be - any set of facts may obtain so long as we believe them to. Therefore, the role of unconstrained world-versions as truth-makers establishes no firmer a foundation for "relative truth" than does simple belief. If relativism is to be saved or made tenable at all, its only hope lies with some version of

*limited* phenomenal relativism. Something must be the case absolutely, and some proposition(s) must be *true* absolutely.

Perhaps there are some things about which it is incoherent to assert relative truth or relative ontological status. Other matters, however, seem not to admit of the kind of analysis upon which the absolutist would insist while, on the other hand, answering very nicely to relativistic analysis. The limited phenomenal relativist must do justice to that which is the case absolutely while also making the argument that some things are the case only relatively.

### Section Summary

The first difficulty with robust phenomenal relativism is that it entails noumenal relativism and, as I have argued above, noumenal relativism of any variety is utterly hopeless. More importantly, the robust phenomenal relativist cannot defend her thesis. To claim that it is absolutely true is self-refuting while the claim that it is only relatively true makes any attempted "defense" of relativism futile while making the doctrine of relativism (as entailing some theory of truth) incoherent. Socrates had Protagoras pegged, and modern-day formulations of relativism fare no better against the Socratic dilemma. The only potentially viable form of relativism is one which limits the sphere of relative fact and truth in a principled way, and embraces some sphere of *objectivity*.

## 2.6 Introduction to a Limited Phenomenal Relativism

As Chris Swoyer points out in the introduction to "True For," truth seems to end up as "the Achilles' heel of relativism" (p. 84). It is truth that generates the aforementioned dilemma in which the robust relativist is forced into either incoherence or self-refutation. It is also an apparent conceptual difficulty involving truth that leads Davidson, Swoyer, and Blackburn to the conclusion that two conceptual frameworks cannot be both different enough to assign differing truth values to a single proposition and similar enough to express the same thing by the proposition being assigned different truth values (see Davidson, 1973/74; Swoyer, 1982; and Blackburn, 1994; as well §4.4 of this work). Relativistic accounts of truth tend to generate difficulties with our understanding of their very formulation as relativistic accounts *of truth*. One always seems to be left wondering what "relative truth" has to do with *truth*. Surely, a doctrine as captivating as relativism has been to so many can be made to be, at the very least, coherently assertable as the type of doctrine which it is purported to be.

Given the antinomies that seem inevitably to arise with robust relativism due to the doctrine's exclusion of *any* absolute truth, why should the relativist not embrace a limited version of relativism that allows for *some* objective truth and fact, while insisting simultaneously upon the relativity of matters outside the privileged, absolute class? If the foregoing arguments against robust relativism are effective, we may have to conclude that relativism cannot be made sense of in the absence of "islands" of realism. That is, there must be something that *just* is the case in order that relativizations terminate somewhere, and avoid the aforementioned conceptual difficulties. We cannot allow *all* things to be

the case only relatively, or we shall be undone by some one or more of the objections raised against the robust relativists (e.g. constraint, emergence, self-refutation, incoherence, etc.). We must prevent our relativism, however initially plausible it may be in some of the relativist's favorite cases, from chewing its way through all of reality and penetrating right down to the world-in-itself. There must be objective "ontological bedrock".

Why not, in particular, defend some version of the *relativistic thesis* on absolutist grounds? The most promising course for the relativist to steer appears to be that which insists upon the *objective* truth of the thesis that *some* propositions are only relatively true and insists also that they are true in virtue of being appropriately related to disparate *world-versions*. This move has the immediate effect of blocking Socratic-style self-refutation objections directed against the relativistic thesis itself. Relativism (in its limited form) is true in precisely the way that the absolutist demands that it be. Relativism is true *absolutely*! Socrates' dilemma is defeated when we take hold of the horn that the robust relativist is forbidden from taking by her rejection of *any* objective truth.

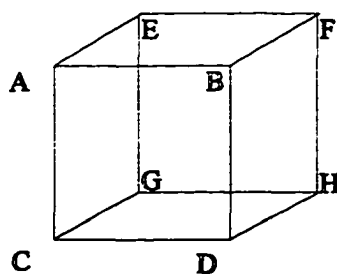
So, the first and most obvious objection to the *robust* relativist loses its force against the *limited* relativist. Instead, the standard charge against any attempt to limit the scope of the relativistic thesis is that so doing is invariably ad hoc and arbitrary. It is incumbent upon the limited relativist to provide a principled distinction between that which is the case only relatively and that which is the case absolutely. Simple stipulation will not do for distinguishing the objective from the non-objective. There are hosts of

questions to be answered if the limited relativist is to be taken at all seriously: Why is the relativistic thesis true absolutely whereas other propositions are true only relatively? Why need we accept *any* relative truth at all if we once allow some sphere of non-relative truth? Furthermore, how can the limited phenomenal relativist answer the charge that relative truth is mere belief if it is not absolute truth? This challenge must still be answered.

In what follows, I shall present the rough outline of the case that there is nothing wrong with limiting the class of relative truths or facts and that, furthermore, we cannot do *without* the relativization of truth for certain types of propositions. That is, I will suggest how a skeletal case for *limited alethic* relativism (and, thereby, *limited phenomenal* relativism) might be made. In chapter IV, I expand upon the suggestion raised here and construct a metaphysic that embraces a limited phenomenal relativism.

What both Meiland and Siegel appear to have missed (as have hosts of other theorists concerned with the debate) is that there are different ontological "levels" of truth-maker for different types of propositions. In some cases it is the world-in-itself which serves as truth maker, while in others it is only some world-version which makes a proposition true or false. Let us reconsider a simple but powerful illustrative example mentioned earlier in this chapter (it is an illustration to which I return in Chs. III and IV).

What are we to say is the *front* face of this Necker Cube?



Is the proposition (call it *F*), "The front face of the above Necker cube is ABCD" *true* or is it *false*? The answer is that ABCD is the front face *given* one observational perspective (call it *O*<sub>1</sub>), but it is *not* the front face given a distinct observational perspective (*O*<sub>2</sub> - given which, EFGH is). That is, *F* is true *relative to one description* (or one cube-version) and false *relative to another*, and there is nothing more, and nothing "deeper", to say about the truth-value of the above proposition. We have not only found a proposition which *admits* of relativistic truth-valuation, but we have actually found one which *requires* it. Is there an objective, perspective-independent truth of the matter? If one were to assert that *F* is absolutely true (or false), one would be ignoring the alternative (and equally viable) observational perspective.

No such thing, however, is the case with respect to the following propositions: 1) "ABCD is the front face of the Necker cube *given O*<sub>1</sub>" and 2) "The above cube admits of a plurality of descriptions". The first proposition is true regardless of one's "cube-version," because the facts *internal* to a version are as they are *simpliciter*. Propositions like 1) and 2) neither require nor admit of relativization (see § 4.5). Similarly, it is an objective fact that the above cube can be described or parsed in more than one way. Regardless of one's cube-version, it is the case that the cube *admits of* being described in some other way. Admitting of various descriptions, and thereby grounding the relative truth of certain

classes of propositions, is an inherent, objective feature of parts of the world such as the above Necker cube. It is, therefore, *objectively* true that propositions about certain matters are only *relatively* true. The trick is to non-arbitrarily distinguish the relatively true propositions from the objectively true ones. I attempt to build such a distinction around a more interesting case of perspectival or description-relative truth (of a non-trivial variety) in chapter IV (§§ 4.2-4.5). The case discussed suggests a generalization to other descriptions of various parts of the world, and it further suggests how and where the line distinguishing objectively from relatively true propositions may be drawn.

But this is getting ahead of the game. Obviously, the suggestion that the relativist should adopt this limited version of the doctrine leaves a great many issues and objections untouched. There has been no attempt thus far to flesh out the details of this version of relativism or to respond to some of the more obvious complaints that it is likely to generate. These matters will be explored in chapter IV. My intent, at this point, is merely to suggest a possible alternative to the full-blooded relativisms that have been exposed as untenable. For now, let us move on to discussion of relativism's alleged arch-enemy - realism.

### Section Summary

Our current suggestion is that the phenomenal relativist assert the limited relativistic thesis as an objective, absolute truth. Because it is objectively true, some other propositions are only relatively true (i.e. true in accordance with some one of the various appropriate descriptions of reality - or its parts). Note that in the Necker cube

case, neither competing description of the cube is appropriate or adequate simply in virtue of so seeming. Objective facts about the cube determine the available legitimate descriptions (e.g. "ABGH is the cube's front face" is not true for *any* conceptual framework). Again, however, we are jumping ahead to the subject matter of chapter IV. Let us rest (if only for the moment) with the suggestion that limited phenomenal relativism (conceptual, alethic, knowledge relativism) is the only hope for the relativist who would escape the Socratic dilemma. Whether it can, in fact, deliver on promises made here is a matter for later investigation.

### Ch. III: What Metaphysical Realism Is - And Is Not

Given the fastidious nature of much of the literature on realism and anti-realism, one would think that there is, at least, a clear picture of what *the* doctrine of realism is. But just as we encountered a plethora of relativisms in the previous chapter, we will find a multiplicity of realisms. The current project would not, however, benefit greatly from careful taxonomization of the various types of realism. Furthermore, the taxonomy might be considerably more difficult to generate. This is because "realism" has come to be used fairly freely to refer to just about anything that might be construed as antithetical to any of the various types of *anti*-realism, relativism, idealism, conventionalism, instrumentalism, etc. Oddly enough, "realists" are often pigeonholed in accordance with one or another strand of anti-realistic argument, even though the nature of anti-realism would seem to be parasitic upon that of its opponent - realism. John Heil has noted this taxonomic twist:

There are at the outset taxonomic hurdles to be leapt. The labels, realism and anti-realism, for instance, are potentially misleading. They suggest that realism is a particular creed, anti-realism a collection of reactions to it. To be sure, there are philosophers who proclaim themselves realists, but these have in common mostly doubts about one or another version of anti-realism. Anti-realists are the system builders, realists the reactionaries. (1989: p. 65)

Anti-realists have been fairly successful in setting the terms for debate; of course, we thereby end up with not one well-defined debate, but rather a multiplicity of sketchy squabbles relativized to this or that interest. Paul Horwich has made some attempt to map out a portion of the battleground between realists and anti-realists, and, in the opening paragraph of "Three Forms of Realism" presents his motivation for making the

attempt:

The debate surrounding realism is hampered by an aversion to explicit formulation of the doctrine. The literature is certainly replete with resounding one-liners: 'There are objective facts', 'Truth is correspondence with reality', 'Reality is mind-independent', 'Statements are determinately either true or false', 'Truth may transcend our capacity to recognize it'. But such slogans are rarely elaborated upon. All too often the arguments, for or against, will proceed as though the nature of realism were so well-understood that no careful statement of the position is required. Consequently, several distinct and independent positions have at various times been identified with realism, and the debate is marked by confusion, equivocation and arguments at cross-purposes to one another. (1982: p. 181)

As anyone who has spent any time going through the literature can attest, however, Professor Horwich's title is a least a partial concession to the enormity of the taxonomic task at hand. There are many more than *three* forms of "realism". Susan Haack, writing "Realism" only five years later than Horwich's paper, found nine; some of these are theses about the status of scientific theories and some of which are theses about the nature of truth. Surely, six *new* realisms could not have sprouted in only five years. Geoffrey Hellman's "Realist Principles" is another admirable attempt to sort through some of the many different issues at stake between various types of realist and their antagonistists. In that paper, he distinguishes purely ontological formulations of realism from versions involving a variety of semantic and/or epistemological commitments, and notes that opposition to different opponents (e.g. instrumentalists, constructive empiricists, etc.) tends to generate different kinds of realism - each with its own set of "realist principles" designed to set it apart from the opposing viewpoint.

I shall not attempt to corral all the various uses of "realism" and separating their referents off into species and sub-species, mutations and spin-offs. In fact, I believe that most "realisms" have little or nothing to do with the doctrine that I seek to defend. I

intend rather to isolate the central tenets of the doctrine of realism *about the nature of the world*, and I intend to dub that doctrine *metaphysical realism* despite prior uses of that term to designate different theories (e.g. Putnam and Horwich have each co-opted "metaphysical realism" for their own devices). I insist upon realism about the nature of the world being called "*metaphysical realism*" because the nature of reality is supposed to be the subject matter of metaphysics (contrary to distressingly popular corruptions of the use of *that* term as a name for assorted occultish pursuits).

Once metaphysical realism is carefully distinguished from a number of other doctrines with which it is often conflated, it should be clearer that it is a very compelling doctrine. In fact, I hope that it is seen to be so compelling as to be boring. Perhaps it is this very feature of realism which has allowed anti-realists to secure their position as builders of intricate and interesting systems to compete with dull old realism.

Establishing metaphysical realism's romancelessness will be no trivial task given popular tendencies toward conflation and confusion involving the term "metaphysical realism"; enough to cause a fairly simple and intuitive thesis to have grown infamously enigmatic. Therefore, let me reiterate my purpose here is to isolate and defend the doctrine that I have labeled *metaphysical realism* (while taking care that it not be confounded with other doctrines which have too long now caused its good name to be dragged through the dialectical mud).

### 3.1 Realism: The General Idea

Relativism, whether true or not, demands at least a bit of corrective surgery on our intuitions about the nature of reality or of our relationship, as cognizers, to the external world. Whether some particular fact obtains is supposed somehow to be a function of a relationship between the world and something else. The thing that one is interested in discovering cannot be discerned just by "looking at" the world itself. One must also investigate the nature of the mind, or of linguistic practice (or both) to determine how such things influence the results of one's inquiry. The cultural relativist, for example, tells us that we must not ask simply what the world is like, but instead we can, at best, discover what it is like *for* "us" or *for* members of a particular culture or linguistic community. What holds for one community may or may not hold for another. It is difficult, given a relativistic framework, to get at the world itself apart from this or that *representation* of the world. None of the foregoing will bother most relativists; in fact, it is precisely the elusiveness of the world as it is in itself that relativists typically cite as motivation for their position. Before we discover philosophy, however, most of us would find the relativist's conception of reality to be at least a little jarring.

Realism, on the other hand, is not a great deal more (at root) than the expression of fairly standard, prephilosophical intuitions about the world and our place in it. There are a few very common intuitions at the heart of what might be called the "general idea" underlying metaphysical realism:

- 1) The world and its features are as they are irrespective of any of our beliefs, attitudes, perceptions, etc. (leaving aside our trivial and obvious influences on the world - e.g. intentional relations, creation of artifacts, manipulation of physical

objects, etc.).

- 2) The world's existence preceded the existence of minds (except, perhaps, for God).
- 3) The world will (probably) exist after the extinction of minds (except, perhaps, for God).
- 4) Minds are not ontologically constructive (i.e. minds do not *make* the world, its parts, or facts about it - save trivial, obvious exceptions).

The world is one thing, and our representations of it are quite another. Each of the above four claims about the nature of the external world speaks, in one way or another, to one (or both) of what Devitt refers to as realism's two fundamental dimensions: 1) existence and 2) independence (1984: pp. 13-25). By existence, he means that there *is*, in fact, an external (to the mental or phenomenal realm of cognizers) world. By independence, he means that the world does not need to be related to anything at all in order that (non-intentional) facts about it obtain. If philosophical doctrines came with slogans on their boxcovers, metaphysical realism's would read: **The world exists independently of the mental.**

Most of our intuitions about reality seem to comport very well with the metaphysical realist's slogan. Similarly, standard formulations of the general thesis of realism from the philosophical literature line up with most of our prephilosophical intuitions. R.J. Hirst's account of realism in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy* adds little more than the presumption of physicalism and opposition to idealism to the realist's slogan:

The view that material objects exist externally to us and independently of our sense experience. Realism is thus opposed to idealism, which holds that no such material objects or external realities exist apart from our knowledge or consciousness of them, the whole universe thus being dependent on the mind or in some sense mental. (1967: p. 77)

William R. Carter tells us in *The Elements of Metaphysics* that:

If we are *realists*, we will allow that the world is one thing and our representation of the world—our system of beliefs about it—is quite another. (1990: p. 167)

and later:

To be a *realist* is to hold that the world is in some sense independent of even the most credible worldly representations. If we take "the world" to be the totality of all the *facts*, realism is the view that facts are in theory independent not only of what we believe is and is not the case but independent also of our means of verifying our beliefs. (p. 173)

It is important to note that a person can be a realist with respect to the existence and/or independence of some sorts of things while being an anti-realist about others. Generally speaking, the realist about any  $\phi$  claims that  $\phi$  *exists independently* of any facts about cognizers and that  $\phi$ 's nature does not, in any non-trivial sense, require or depend on relatedness to cognizers or minds (save, of course, realism about minds or things that minds "make," such as language, culture, etc.). The realist about propositions, for example, takes propositions to be entities that exist and have their individual natures independently of beliefs, attitudes, utterances, or tokenings by cognizers. The realist about universals thinks that (for example) *squareness* exists and that objects are, or are not, square regardless of their having been perceived or categorized by cognizers. Similarly, the *metaphysical* realist takes *the world*, and its non-intentional (or non-mental) features and parts (and their effects), to exist and to have complete, fully-formed natures irrespective of anything having peculiarly to do with cognition. Facts about the world, its parts, their number, size, shape, relatedness, etc., are all part of the objective, mind-independent "furniture of reality" and are all "out there" waiting to be discovered; they are in no need of *construction* or *conceptual organization* or anything else that

smacks of intentionality (or "mentalness").

The notion of objective reality, as understood by most metaphysical realists, is laid bare by their suggestion that certain things *just* are the case, where the force of "just" is to indicate the aforementioned independence from the mental. As in, "That is *just* the way it is whether you believe it - or like it - or not." Peter van Inwagen offers the following as a simple, intuitive example of the sort of thing that metaphysical realists have in mind with talk of independence:

Here is an example of a fact that most people would say was in no way dependent upon the existence of the human mind or any activity of or fact about the human mind:

Mount Everest is 8,847.7 meters high.

Let us call this fact 'F'. F would seem to be a pretty good example of a fact that most people would take to be in any reasonable sense independent of human mental activity. (1993: p. 60)

He then goes on to articulate the thesis that Mount Everest would have been exactly the size and shape that it in fact is, even had no human beings or other cognizers evolved - or come to be (for those who distrust evolutionary theory). This seems to be right in line with prereflective intuitions about such cases. Did not Mount Everest, in fact, exist long before there were any people around to know, believe, conceptualize, or do anything else about it? If one is a metaphysical realist, the answer is "Of course!" accompanied, perhaps, with a raising of the eyebrow. Given the guiding principle of reflective equilibrium, realist's can claim, at least, that their version of the nature of reality does less violence to the world-view with which we all came to philosophy than does that of competing relativistic or otherwise anti-realistic models. Berkeley's insistence to the contrary notwithstanding, the metaphysical realist is (for the most part) just defending the

naive ontological outlook.

At heart, metaphysical realism is not much more than the thesis that the lesson of examples like van Inwagen's is generalizable to any part or section of the whole world (leaving aside the domain of the intentional). One might think that such a seemingly straightforward theory would admit of fairly little malleability in interpretation. Surprisingly, however, not everyone has the same understanding of what exactly the metaphysical realist claims or even what domain the theory is intended to cover. A number of semantic and epistemological theses have been assumed to be either direct entailments of the doctrine, or actual part and parcel of it. In fact, finding any consensus regarding exactly what the thesis of metaphysical realism is, remains one of the first challenges facing anyone wishing to weigh in on one side or the other. There has been substantial disagreement over what the metaphysical realist is committed to in her defense of both the objective *existence* and of the *independence* of the world and its parts.

One understanding of metaphysical realism, in particular, has gained a special degree of prominence, and a good deal of the debate between realists and relativists has focussed on it and its theoretical entailments. In the next section, I will lay out this version of realism and will argue that the metaphysical realist need not (in fact, should not) accept it. This particular understanding (or, perhaps, family of understandings) of realism gone by a number of names, but for our purposes, the term *classical metaphysical realism* (*classical realism*, for short) will do as well as any.

### 3.2 Classical Metaphysical Realism

Metaphysical realism has a powerful intuitive appeal when the examples presented involve the actual physical world of particular objects (one may have one's doubts about the objectivity and independence of universals, propositions, numbers, etc.).

Most of us agree when Devitt tells us:

Realism about the ordinary observable physical world is a compelling doctrine. It is almost universally held outside philosophical circles. From an early age, we come to believe that such objects as stones, trees, and cats exist. Further, we believe that these objects exist even when we are not perceiving them, and that they do not depend for their existence on our opinions or on anything mental. (1984: p. 60).

And few who are not wedded to some sophisticated philosophical theory would hesitate to agree with Hugo Meynell when he claims:

There were apparently rocks, birds, and trees, a sun, stars, and planets, with the qualities and relations which we find them to have, before there were human beings; but human beings have been able to get to know about them. (1995: p. 336)

One need not, of course, be a physicalist simply because one is a realist. One may, for example, think that universals or propositions (or something) are non-physical but nevertheless exist independently of any facts about cognizers or the mental. Plato was a realist about the forms, but the Platonic heavens are not supposed to exhibit any of the physical magnitudes. Berkeley was a realist about God - so was Descartes. Since physicalism has become, however, the dominant theory regarding the nature of that which is alleged to be objective and independent of the mental, an investigation into the world view of the physicalistic realist is likely to be most useful to the current debate over the fundamental nature of reality and the proper understanding and evaluation of realism. The presumption of physicalism will underlie the remainder of the current investigation into the doctrine of realism, but at the end I will indicate how the lessons we learn would

apply to non-physicalistic versions of realism.

If the world and its parts *just* are the way they are (independence), it would seem that any theory about the nature of the world will either *correctly* depict or describe the world or it will fail to do so. One need not worry about any additional argument place or parameter in one's evaluation of claims regarding the nature of the world. That is, one need not concern oneself about the possibility that a theory about the world is correct *for* one individual (group, culture, conceptual framework, etc.) but, somehow, *not* correct *for* another. There is one physical world and there is *one way* it is (i.e. it has one set of facts, and some theory either gets those facts right or it does not). Roger Trigg seems to be of the opinion that the metaphysical realist must embrace some such *uniqueness* about the correct theory of nature:

Experience can give rise to alternative theories, but if we realize that theories are about something, then either reality is as the theory says or it is not. It has determinate character, even if we do not know what it is. This is a metaphysical assertion, but it expresses the only alternative to the view that all is in fact indeterminate chaos, a view which would make the practice of science a pointless activity. As a result, alternative conceptual systems cannot be accepted as all resting correctly on the same base in reality. Unless they can be combined in some way, and are not genuine alternatives, they are disagreeing about the actual characteristics of reality. (1980: 112)

As far as Trigg is concerned, if there is one world and that world exists independently of any facts about cognizers, then there can be only one correct representation of, or theory about, that world. Two or more theories about the nature of the world either make the same claims about it, or at least one of them must be wrong somehow. This is the *uniqueness hypothesis* characteristic of classical realism which a number of philosophers seem to think must follow from the world's independent existence (the two fundamental principles of realism).

Putnam also takes standard formulations of realism as entailing some similar uniqueness hypothesis concerning theories about the nature of reality. The realist must assert that a hypothesis either "gets it right" or "gets it wrong," *period*, without concerning herself about whether the theory is right or wrong *for* so-and-so. Putnam suggests that metaphysical realism should be understood as the conjunction of a number of theses about truth:

In various places I have described metaphysical realism as a bundle of intimately associated philosophical ideas about truth: the ideas that truth is a matter of Correspondence and that it exhibits Independence (of what humans do or could find out), Bivalence, and Uniqueness (there cannot be more than one complete and true description of Reality)...(1988: p. 107)

Some of his attacks on metaphysical realism are, in fact, directed solely against semantic theories such as correspondence truth and uniqueness. The model theoretic argument, for example, is designed to uncover the impossibility of ever finding a relation between any consistent theory and the world such that that relation can serve as truth-maker to a unique theory (see Putnam 1981: "Models and Reality").

Still others have taken the line that realism is, at its core, a semantic thesis which demands uniqueness and bivalence of its assignments of truth values to some class of statements. Dummett, for example, claims that:

The very minimum that realism can be held to involve is that statements in the given class relate to some reality that exists independently of our knowledge of it, in such a way that that reality renders each statement in the class determinately true or false, again independently of whether we know, or are even able to discover, its truth-value. (1982: p. 55).

The following is a very brief, armchair diagnosis of the motivation for interpreting realism in the way that these philosophers do.

First, there is something like the argument for uniqueness just mentioned. One

world admits of but one correct, complete theory. Any statement about reality either is or is not part of the "one true theory".

The demand for bivalence, it would seem, is parasitic upon the demand for uniqueness. The general idea seems to be that since there is one world and it is *one way*, any representation of the world or theory about it must either get it right in a particular respect or the theory must get it wrong somehow. Thus, there is only one ideal theory that gets everything right and accurately represents the world as it *just* is. Every well-formed statement of any theory is, therefore, either true or false as each statement makes some claim about the world and the world either is or is not as the statement claims.<sup>1</sup> That is, any statement of any theory is either a part of the ideal theory, and true, or it fails to be a part of the ideal theory and is false.

Hence, Putnam comes by his idea that the theory of correspondence truth is constitutive of the theory of metaphysical realism. Statements in the ideal theory are distinguishable from those not in the ideal theory because the former bear the correspondence relation (however that relation is to be cashed out) to the world, whereas statements not included in the ideal theory are false precisely because they do *not* correspond to the world. The realist can countenance only one true theory about reality, all of the statements of which correspond to the world. The correspondence relation distinguishes the true statements from the untrue ones. Any particular statement either

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<sup>1</sup>In fairness to the classical realist who accepts inherently vague (or "fuzzy") facts about the world, one might wish to add that only sufficiently determinate statements are thought by this species of classical realist to exhibit bivalence. So, for example, the statement, "It is now twilight," as uttered at certain times of day is neither true nor false, but only because its meaning is not sufficiently determinate ("twilight" does not pick out a determinately-bounded event). Nothing at all about relativity follows. For such a classical realist, it is objectively the case that there is no determinate line of demarcation between day, twilight, and night.

does or does not correspond to reality. So, any statement either is or is not true.

Uniqueness, bivalence, and correspondence truth, are all supposed by such philosophers (some realists and some anti-realists) to follow from the world's cognition-independent existence (the two fundamental, core principles of realism).

In what follows, I shall argue that classical realism is, as opponents such as Putnam and Dummett claim, an untenable theory of reality. I will then argue that realism does not entail uniqueness, bivalence, or correspondence truth, and will make the case that arguments against this particular species of realism do not serve as arguments that the world lacks independent existence as characterized by our prephilosophical intuitions about reality. That is, the failure of *classical* realism does *not* entail the failure of metaphysical *realism*.

### 3.2a The Problem With Classical Realism

What is wrong with classical realism? The simple answer is this: It precludes conceptual relativity.

Most of us are willing to accept some kind of relativity in describing at least *some* parts of reality. For example, few believe that the propriety of rules of etiquette are not relative to something like a society or a culture. If we are concerned with describing an act as an exhibition of either good or ill manners, surely, at least in many cases, we must admit that the act is in accordance with the principles of etiquette for one society and not so with those of another. Few of us think that there is anything much "deeper" to say in our evaluation of the details of conduct. If one belches loudly after a dinner as a guest in

a home in Dallas, one is probably going to be judged to be unmannerly, whereas one might be judged to be unmannerly for *not* doing so within some European cultures. Many of us would agree that the judgment of the relevant group, or the principles of etiquette as they are in the culture in question, *make it the case that* (or are at least *constitutive of the fact that*) the act under consideration exhibits good manners - or not. What is a fact about etiquette in one society may or may not be a fact about etiquette in another. Surely, at least *that much* conceptual relativity (if my reader will permit so loose a use of that term) is not to be denied.

Like some others, I am impressed by the similarity of the cases of etiquette and aesthetics. It seems to me that whether (for example) the Mona Lisa is beautiful is a type of fact that is fixed only relatively to observers or aesthetic paradigms or some such parameter. That is, the observer's assessment of the case is *constitutive* of the painting's being *beautiful for that observer*. I suppose then, that I would defend some version of the common sense thesis that "beauty is in the eye of the beholder" (i.e. facts about beauty obtain only relative to observers - or something like that). The case of aesthetics is, of course, more controversial than the case of etiquette - though I must confess ignorance as to why that should be so.

But none of the business about etiquette or aesthetics need concern the classical metaphysical realist. Every formulation of the doctrine should be understood as involving some kind of caveat regarding intentional or peculiarly mental facts. Relativity about whether something tastes like chicken need not be at all surprising or troublesome to the classical metaphysical realist. Matters of taste, beauty, etiquette, etc., are all

commonly accepted to be (in some sense) *inherently* relational and can (for the most part) be accommodated as resting (somehow) upon objective, mind-independent facts underpinning the relevant relations. The sort of relativity appropriate to aesthetic judgment is eliminable in favor of some "deeper" description of reality and the objective facts underpinning relations between observers of a particular type, state, etc., and physical objects of a particular structure, reflectancy, etc. Relativity at one level of description is either benign as it stands, or can be "gotten rid of" by resort to ontologically "deeper," objective facts. For example, the question of whether or not something tastes like chicken is entirely a function of objective facts concerning the relationship between the microstructure of the item being tasted and the neurophysiological make-up of the relevant organs in the body of the organism doing the tasting. It is no more troubling or surprising to the classical realist that such things require relativization than it is that Socrates is taller than Plato while he is shorter than Simmias. *Relative* height *had better* require relativization to some other thing. Of course, Socrates' height relative to Plato or to Simmias is a function of *objective* facts about how tall each of them is. Who would ever have thought that the question, "Is this too loud?" would admit of anything other than an answer that is relativized to someone's tastes or interests. So why not allow the same for gustatory tastes, aesthetic tastes, social tastes, etc. All such relativity rests on objective facts about the relationship between the perceiver and the part of the world being perceived.

The classical realist can get away with a good deal of hand-waving about cases of the above sort. Troublesome cases will involve ineliminable relativity about matters

which are not typically thought to involve minds or their perceptual judgments at all. Examples where there is ineliminable relativity regarding the existence or the features of physical objects or systems might be particularly troubling to the classical metaphysical realist's demands for uniqueness and bivalence. If there is need of conceptual relativity for complete descriptions of even the simple, non-presumptively-intentional features of reality (e.g. rocks, trees, cats, etc.), then the classical realist has a problem. If we cannot tell a complete, framework-neutral story of what rocks, trees, and cats are like, where they can be found, how many there are, etc., then classical realism and its demand for uniqueness and bivalence must be scrapped.

Let us take van Inwagen's intuitively plausible example of a fact that is entirely independent of minds or cognition as a test case:

F: Mount Everest is 8,847.7 meters high

What of uniqueness and bivalence with respect to F? The classical realist would appear to be committed to F's being either true or false *simpliciter*, and to F's either belonging to *the* correct description of a particular part of the world or not. Is F part of a uniquely correct description of reality? That is, does every correct description of reality (that part of it that includes Mount Everest) involve F? Furthermore, is F determinately true or false? The answer in each case would appear to be "No". "Mount Everest is 8,847.7 meters high" is *true* relative to "our" frame of reference (i.e. the frame of reference of an observer that is not in motion with respect to Mount Everest) and is *false* relative to an observer flying past the earth at great speed. Relative to the frame of reference of the latter observer, Mount Everest is (what "we" would call) length contracted; it is shorter

than 8,847.7 meters for that observer. If the assignment of one height is correct relative to one frame of reference and the assignment of some other height is correct relative to another, and if there is no neutral, underlying, frame-invariant height of Mount Everest (and there isn't), then the demand for *uniqueness* of "the correct" description of the mountain (at least as it pertains to Everest's *height*) must be given up. Similarly, the idea that any correct theory of the nature of the world must include F needs to be left by the wayside. We have, in the case described, (at least) two descriptions of the mountain, with different assessments of its height in each case, neither of which seems entitled to claim priority or superiority to the other. If one intends to offer any assessment of Everest's height, it is impossible that one do so without adopting one or another frame of reference. There is no viable predication of height to the mountain that is not relativized.

Similarly, how much shall we say does some particular observer O of Mount Everest weigh? Well, before we can answer that question, we need to know whether that observer is standing at the base of the mountain or at its uppermost summit, or somewhere in between, or on the moon, or in a spacecraft unencumbered by proximity to any strong gravitational fields, etc. Is there a unique fact about the weight of O, or is O's weight relative to her location in the universe (itself, a feature of O that is, at least, arguably, an inherently relational one)? Are these the sorts of results that a classical realist expects of reality, or do they challenge the classical realist's account of the nature of the world?

The first response on behalf of the classical realist is that the relativity of attributes such as height and weight is unproblematic because of frame-invariant

transformation laws which enable any observer, regardless of her frame of reference to calculate (for example) the height of Mount Everest *from any particular frame of reference whatever*. It is *determinately* (i.e. objectively) true or false that Mount Everest is 8,847.7 meters high from this or that particular frame of reference. Similarly, it is determinately true or false that observer O weighs (say) 200 lbs. *given* her position within any particular gravitational field. The uniquely correct theory of reality encompasses all the determinate truths about the world *from* each of the relevant frames of reference, observational perspectives, or descriptive standpoints (i.e. all of the world-versions resultant from all the different conceptual frameworks - see §4.1). These cases are not different in kind from those involving aesthetic or social tastes. "Surface" relativity gives way to underlying objective facts. So classical realism, complete with its uniqueness and bivalence hypotheses, is untouched by such putative counterexamples. The allegedly problematic cases all result from the asking of incomplete or ill-formed questions. Ask about length, weight, etc., where the appropriate parameters are all specified (i.e. frame of reference, location relative to gravitational field, etc.), and the realist has no difficulty in giving a determinately true or false answer.

But this response will not do. The ideal description of reality, envisioned as a description that encompasses all framework-relative descriptions, does not contain a uniquely correct description (for example) *of Mount Everest*. It contains indefinitely many descriptions, all correct "in their own right," of the mountain (or of some section of spacetime which admits of description as a mountain - see §4.5). A slew of correct (relatively speaking) descriptions in conjunction with rules for transforming one into any

one of the others does not amount to a single, underlying, framework-neutral description. When one is told that Mount Everest is 8,847.7 meters high from frame of reference  $f$ , one is being told as much about the frame of reference as about the mountain. Is information about the one distinguishable from information about the other? Though the realist is right to assert the mind-independent existence of something which may be described as a mountain that is 8,847.7 meters high, the *classical* realist makes the mistake of positing a *unique* description of that something. There are, in fact, a plurality of "correct" descriptions about any proper part of the universe as individuated by any particular conceptual framework. The world *just* exists - true; but any attempt to describe any piece of that world (such as a mountain, planet, galaxy, rock, stick, bird, etc.) is necessarily a description from within some frame of reference, observational perspective, etc. (i.e. some conceptual framework).<sup>1</sup>

Further problems are raised for the classical realist by attempts to describe causal relationships between physical objects or systems. Such relationships are notoriously difficult to separate from our interests and background assumptions about what does and does not count as a causal explanation for a particular event. What, for example, causes the event of the tearing of the anterior cruciate ligament in some particular athlete's knee?

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly enough, though this matter must wait for elaboration in chapters IV and V, there is, I believe, a uniquely correct *complete* description of the world *taken in its entirety*, though there is not any uniquely correct description of any single, framework-relatively individuable physical piece of it. Anything that admits of a plurality of descriptions *when individuated or picked out in accordance with one conceptual framework*, does *not* admit of any uniquely correct description at all. There are entities, however, which do *not* admit of a *plurality* of descriptions at all - irrespective of shifts in conceptual framework. Such entities (ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks - see chapters IV and V) *do* admit of description or representation that is uniquely correct and bivalent. There is, therefore, a sense in which I defend some uniqueness hypothesis, but (though this may sound paradoxical) the ideal description of the world has conceptual relativity at its very core.

Well, it might be found out that the athlete in question had some peculiar type of imperfection in the tissue comprising the ligament, and thus it might readily (and not incorrectly) be concluded that the imperfection *caused* the tear during normal activities associated with the play of the game (e.g. stopping, turning, jumping, landing, etc. in a basketball game). The athlete was stopping short to put up her trademark jumpshot when the imperfection caused the ligament to rupture. That seems a perfectly respectable causal explanation of the event. Of course, the exact same event might be described such that the stopping short or the attempt to jump *caused* the tear to the ligament. Had there been no stopping or jumping, the imperfection in the ligament would have remained (for all intents and purposes) causally inert. What are we to say if the athlete's father claims that "playing that damned game" caused the tear, and subsequently caused his poor daughter to be in agony. Is the father *just* wrong in such a case, or is he wrong *given* a particular kind of explanation space or explanatory perspective regarding "background" conditions?

Perhaps the incompetence of the team physician in diagnosing such imperfections might be cited as the cause of the unfortunate incident. While we are at it, why not cite the invention of basketball, the establishing of the school team, the athlete's decision to play that day, or any number of other "antecedent conditions" including the athlete's birth, and the big bang (birth of the universe that is) as "causes" of the torn ligament? It is not at all clear that the distinction between *cause* and *background condition* is something to be found "out there" in the world as opposed to its being found internal to the various representations or *theories* of what is "out there" in the world and what sorts of

relationships obtain between an event and those that preceded it.

For that matter, it is not at all clear that there is a uniquely correct way of individuating events (indeed, one might go so far as to claim that there clearly *is not* any such thing). If there are indefinitely many ways of parsing the antecedents of any particular event into, on the one hand, causes and, on the other, background conditions, then there would seem to be no uniquely correct account of the causal relationship between any particular antecedent, A, and the subsequent event, E (let alone difficulties attendant upon relativity of ways of individuating events).

Similar arguments about conceptual relativity have been notably made with respect to the attributes of number (Putnam, 1987); motion (Goodman, 1978); individuation of objects (Quine, 1968); spatiotemporal geometry (Hacking, 1975) and just about any other physical magnitude one might like to consider. In §4.2, I even consider a case in which it looks as though questions as to the *existence* of a particular iron globe in a particular possible world admit of no uniquely correct answers (some of Goodman's, Putnam's, and Hacking's arguments make appearances in various parts of chapters IV and V also). There is no hope of finding uniquely correct descriptions of anything like the rocks, trees, birds, mountains, etc., that classical realists habitually point to as paradigmatic cases where our intuitions tell us that facts about such things *just* are as they are. Uniqueness must be jettisoned as must bivalence, at least about propositions that lack the appropriate parameters for relativization (e.g. "Mount Everest is 8.847.7 meters high", "The imperfection caused the ligament to tear", "There are three objects on this table" - see §4.1, etc.). If we understand classical metaphysical realism as being

incompatible with the idea that alternative conceptual schemes can *correctly* describe reality, then classical metaphysical realism must be rejected. So, classical metaphysical realism is a failed theory of reality. But what has the failure of *classical* metaphysical realism got to do with the success of *metaphysical realism*?

### 3.3 What Metaphysical Realism Need Not Be

One could assert merely the mind-independent existence of *something*, without committing oneself to any theory about *what* it is that exists, or the *nature* of the mind-independent world, and in so doing, proclaim oneself a realist. Such a minimalist theory of reality, while it (strictly speaking) accords with the fundamental principles of realism (as given above), is virtually contentless save its expression of opposition to idealism and radical brands of constructivistic anti-realism.

*Minimalistic realism* (as I will call it) is, in fact, compatible with theories of reality which many philosophers who count themselves anti-realists would embrace. After all, most constructivists (for example) allow that *something* external to representations and cognition *exists*, but deny that we can have any concept of it, or can *describe* it in any non-trivial way. If a constructivist could be also a minimalistic realist, then realists who are antagonistic to constructivism must build more content into their theory to draw a clearer line between themselves and constructivists. If realism is to be an interesting theory, worthy of juxtaposition against idealism and constructivism, it must have enough content to generate some ontological commitment that is incompatible with rival, anti-realistic theories.

What is needed is a definition of metaphysical realism that captures the two fundamental principles with which any theory worthy of the title "realism" must accord, while building in enough information about the ontological commitments of the theory to make it interesting, non-trivial, and incompatible with constructivism or idealism. One plausible attempt to articulate a doctrine of metaphysical realism with the appropriate features has been made by Michael Devitt:

*Realism:* Tokens of most current common-sense and scientific physical types objectively exist independently of the mental. (1984: p. 23)

So, rocks, trees, cats, stars, electrons and oceans exist and have their natures independently of any facts pertaining to cognizers or their efforts at conceptualizing or building representations of reality. The world and its parts *just* exist, and facts about the world *just* obtain, regardless of what "we" think. Mount Everest exists and has the features that our best theory ascribes to it, and it exists and has those features independently of any representation of the world constructed by cognizers. The same holds for any other non-intentional piece of the world (everything from acorns to zebras).

In this section, I argue that the above account of realism has the following properties:

- 1) It comports very well with our prephilosophical intuitions about the nature of reality and our relationship to it
- 2) It does not (contrary to standard interpretations) entail or necessarily involve uniqueness, bivalence, or correspondence theses about truth (nor is it entailed by any of these theses)
- 3) It is compatible with conceptual relativity and relativistic truth in an important way that classical metaphysical realism is not (contrary to insistence by Devitt himself that truth

must be "absolute" for the realist).

4) It is untouched by incommensurability theses.

Metaphysical realism, so construed, is malleable enough to accommodate substantial conceptual relativity while retaining the mind-independent existence of the world that is crucial to distinguishing realism from its competitors. Though Devitt himself is committed to a number of theses about truth which are susceptible to a variety of attacks, his commitment to those theses is *not* a function of his commitment to the version of metaphysical realism articulated above.

### 3.3a Prephilosophical Intuitions

1) Metaphysical realism entails that the realist is committed to the belief that *most* of the entities posited by current folk and scientific theory really exist and that their existence and nature is in no interesting or non-trivial way dependent upon anything having to do with cognizers.<sup>1</sup> The realist who claims that there are electrons should be understood as asserting the mind-independent existence of entities that have (roughly or mostly) those properties ascribed to them by our current theory about the nature of the micro-physical world. Similarly, the realist who makes a claim about Mount Everest and its attributes (e.g. van Inwagen), should be understood as asserting that the mountain exists and that its features are the way that they are irrespective of anything having to do with minds, cognizers, observation, or anything mental. Mountains and electrons are *just*

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<sup>1</sup>Bearing a particular relation (e.g. being to the left of Dole) to some cognizer or set of cognizers (for example) is the sort of property that involves a trivial dependency upon cognition or the mental.

there.

The function of the word "most" in the above definition is to allow that *some* of our beliefs, and even of our best current theories are defective. Given that the metaphysical realist is committed only to a belief, at time  $t$ , in most of the posits of our best theory at time  $t$ , it follows that at any given time  $t_i$  the realist can allow that *some* of the entities posited by the best theory at  $t_i$  do *not* actually exist or are *not* correctly described by the best theory current to  $t_i$ . So, while *some* theoretical posits might not exist, or might not have the nature ascribed to them by theory, the world, for the most part, is full of the things "we" think it is. Rocks, sticks, dogs, cats, dirt, stars, water, oxygen, electrons, etc., are all "out there," and we are, for the most part, correct about what they are like.

The more cautious realist may wish to reserve her assent for claims regarding "common sense" entities or elements of the observable, macro-scopic world (e.g. rocks, trees, etc.), while taking a sceptical or agnostic stance on claims regarding the posits of "deep" scientific theory of the structure of the micro-physical realm. Devitt refers to such philosophers as "Common-Sense Realists" while not a "Scientific Realist" (1984: pp. 23-24). It is not the central tenets of realism that trouble the (exclusively) common sense realist, it is the extension of the domain of the theory to the unobservable world that she finds problematic. Realism about the observable world is not incompatible with scepticism about the unobservable world.

It is doubtful that many people who have not read fairly extensively in the philosophical literature and caught such bugs as scepticism or constructivism would

entertain any serious doubts as to the veracity of most of our simple "folk" theory about the nature of the world. If reflective equilibrium governs our assessment of theories about the nature of reality, it would appear that metaphysical realism has the virtue of forcing us only a short conceptual distance (if any) from our native intuitions. It is not at all clear that the same can be said of its competitors. As we turn now from concerns about its comportment with our prephilosophical intuitions, we will find that realism's independence from any particular theory of truth is a bit more slippery matter.

### 3.3b Independence From Truth

2a) Metaphysical realism is a doctrine that asserts the cognition-independent existence of the external world. It is a theory about the nature of the world itself. Where, we should ask, is there a necessity for a metaphysical realist to entertain any particular theory of truth at all beyond a simple disquotational or deflationary account (i.e.  $\langle p \rangle$  is true iff  $p$ ) - itself a trivial component of *any* theory that is offered as account of truth? That is, why would one think (as do Putnam, Horwich, Dummett and others) that a metaphysical realist is committed to correspondence, uniqueness, bivalence, or any combination thereof? What, on the face of it, has a theory about the nature of the world itself to do with these theses about truth? The alleged entailment from one to the other rests upon an unwarranted assumption about the realist's commitment to a particular kind of truth-maker. That assumption is that the truth-maker is, *in every case*, simply *the world*. Such-and-such proposition (or sentence) is true if and only if the *world itself* exists with such-and-such features or has such-and-such characteristics. That is, there is an assumption

that the truth relation always involves the same type of relata in the following sense:

Truth-bearers either are or are not appropriately related *to the world itself*. We see this

assumption in the following passage from Hugo Meynell's "On Realism, Relativism, and

Putnam":

The metaphysical realist has to argue for the kind of independence which I have asserted, while meeting the difficulties which have led so many, in defiance both of common sense and of what are at first sight the implications of science, to argue for dependence. How may she proceed? I believe that there are two crucial propositions which provide the clues that are needed: (1) it must be the case that we can make true judgments, and judgments for good reason, since the contradictory is self-destructive; and (2) the real world is nothing other than what true judgments *are* about, and what judgments for good reason (i.e. , arrived at by a thorough application of the three types of mental operation which I mentioned above) *tend to be about*. (1995: p. 338 - emphasis mine)

In "The World Well Lost," Richard Rorty polemicizes against the alleged realistic

principle that "it is the world that determines truth" (p. 660), and accuses realists of an

equivocation between "the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal

of intellect" and "a name for objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone" (p. 663).

He suggests that the latter is surreptitiously substituted for the former (the world itself)

when the realist needs a truth-maker that we can get a cognitive grasp of.

The problematic inference on the part of realism's opponents seems to go something like this:

- 1) The world itself is the sole truth-maker for each and every true statement.
  - 2) Realists hold that the world and its characteristics are as they are independently of cognition.
  - 3) Any statement either rightly says how some portion of the world itself is or it fails to do so.
  - 4) Statements that rightly say how some portion of the world itself is are true, those that fail to do so are not true.
-

- 5) Hence, each statement is either true or else it is false (bivalence) insofar as it succeeds or fails in rightly saying how the world itself is independently of the mental (correspondence), and there is only one complete set of true statements (uniqueness), namely that set that constitutes the ideal theory of reality.

So, the argument goes, the claim that there is an objective, mind-independent world commits one to the theses of uniqueness, bivalence, and correspondence truth.

Let us take a moment to break this all into smaller, more easily digestible morsels. First of all, the opponent of realism will point out that the realist believes that there is but *one* actual world and it is but *one* way (and the way that it is is independent of anything mental). A statement says that the world is some one way (in some respect) or that it is some other way. Surely, the difference between statements that are true and those that are not is that the true statements rightly say how the world is and the ones that are not true do not - this is all but trivial. The realist must, therefore, accept *bivalence* for, at least, any statement with sufficiently determinate content. If a statement says something sufficiently determinate, it either rightly says how the fixed, mind-independent world is or it fails to do so. In the former case, it is true and, in the latter, it is false.

Secondly, those statements that "rightly say" how the world is must stand in some relation to the world that those statements that fail to "rightly say" how the world is do not. It is standing in the *correspondence* relation to the world itself that makes a statement true and failing to do so that makes a statement false. Statements either correspond to the world or they do not (however correspondence is to be cashed out).

Finally, the realist can accept only one complete set of true statements, namely the set of those that stand in the correspondence relation to the world. Hence, the realist's

commitment to a unique, mind-independent (i.e. "ready-made") world entails that there must be a *uniquely correct theory* of the way that that world is. Those statements that rightly say how the world is (i.e. that correspond to it) are part of the ideal theory and those that fail to rightly say how the world is (i.e. that fail to correspond to it) are not part of the ideal theory. A unique world admits of only one correct description.

If one can show that any one of the theses of bivalence, uniqueness, or correspondence truth is false, then the metaphysical theory that entails it must be false as well. So Putnam argues that we cannot make sense of correspondence truth while Devitt inveighs against bivalence - both taking their efforts to have undermined the doctrine of metaphysical realism. I think that this strategy is wrongheaded because I do not think that metaphysical realism entails any of these three theses about the nature of truth. The basic reason for this is that the realist is not committed to the world itself being the sole truth-maker for truth-bearers.

Why should the metaphysical realist be committed to the idea that *the world* serves as sole truth-maker for statements (taking these to be the truth-bearers). The realist *could* (though, I would argue, she should *not*) insist that statements are made true by being appropriately related to *world-versions* as described from one or another cultural perspective (i.e. the metaphysical realist could be a cultural relativist about truth). That is, the realist could draw a line between the world itself and world-versions, and then assert that truth is a matter of the relatedness of statements to world-versions and is not dependent upon any relation to the world at all. Thus, uniqueness and bivalence would have no special attraction for such a realist, and the correspondence relation would have

to incorporate relativization to culturally constructed world-versions. This is not at all, I think, an attractive option for the realist, but it seems to be one that is not immediately excluded by the existence and independence dimensions of realism (its two fundamental tenets). A realist who takes this line will run afoul of the problems attendant upon radical phenomenal relativism (see Ch. II). In particular, she will run into either the incoherence or the self-refutation horn of the dilemma posed in the previous chapter. She will find that she must either "defend" her thesis relative to her own world-version (incoherence), or that she must defend her thesis by reference to some non-relativized standard of truth (self-refutation). She is not, however, any less a realist for having slipped into a mistake about truth.

A more tenable position for the realist (one to which I am inclined), is the adoption of a *deflationary* account of truth, wherein truth is not taken to be a property of propositions that is in need of philosophical analysis at all. The deflationist takes the import of the truth predicate to be exhausted by the conjunction of all the unproblematic cases of the Tarskian equivalence thesis, and by its role in the formation various expressions and the satisfaction of logical need. On this view, the predicate "is true" serves only the functions of allowing for the formation of certain kinds of generalizations (e.g. "Everything that Adam Smith said is true") and expediting the expression of infinite conjunctions (e.g. "The Law of Excluded Middle is true"); it does *not* attribute a property to propositions (the position is laid out and explicated very nicely by Horwich, 1990; Field, 1986; and Kirkham, 1995). Since anything alleged to be an account of truth must, at a very minimum, entail all uncontroversial instances of the Tarskian equivalence

schema, the metaphysical realist is not committed to any one of them (e.g. correspondence) simply in virtue of the acceptance of all appropriate sentences of the form "S is true iff *p*" where S names the statement expressed by *p*.

This position leaves, as an open question, the nature of the ontological commitment associated with the right half of the biconditional in the equivalence thesis. The thing designated by *p* may be an element of *the world* or of some *world-version* (or sometimes one of these and sometimes another - as I suggest in chapters II and IV), or it may not *designate* anything at all. Deflationism about truth is entirely neutral with respect to metaphysical concerns. It might be that all true statements *correspond to* the world, but it is *not* by virtue of this correspondence that they are *true* (according to the deflationist). In saying that such-and-such "is true," one is not attributing any property, as one would be in saying that such-and-such "is radioactive". One is simply using the truth predicate to facilitate the expression of something or other, often something which could not otherwise be expressed without adverting to an infinite conjunction (e.g. assenting to the Law of Excluded Middle). Nothing about metaphysical realism conflicts with deflationism about truth. One *can be* both a metaphysical realist and a deflationist about truth. There is, therefore, no entailment relation from metaphysical realism to any of the aforementioned theses about truth.

What about any reverse entailment, from any one of these theses to metaphysical realism?

2b) It is commonly thought that correspondence theorists must be committed to metaphysical realism. I see no reason to think this the case unless one's understanding of

the correspondence theory requires that statements correspond to a mind-independent reality in order that they be true. But such a requirement is simply question-begging. If one makes metaphysical realism *constitutive* of the correspondence theory of truth, then the latter does indeed entail the former. But such a requirement is a gratuitous addition to the correspondence theory in the context of a dispute about its ontological entailments. The correspondence theory appears to be compatible with a variety of metaphysical theories.

Why could not (for example) a constructivist also be a correspondence theorist about truth? All that is needed to consistently hold both doctrines is the insistence that facts are (in some sense) constructs and that statements are made true by their *correspondence to the facts*. Richard Boyd, in fact, makes the case that constructivists can not only embrace correspondence truth, but can even consistently help themselves to *causal* theories of truth and reference (typically taken to be the most plausible physical mechanisms underwriting correspondence to reality):

With respect to the question of semantic commensurability the sophisticated constructivist can certainly accept any philosophically and historically plausible diagnosis to which a realist might be attracted. *Indeed, and this is the important point, the constructivist can appropriate the causal theory of reference as an account of the ground of judgments of coreferentiality made within any given research tradition, so that she can say and defend anything about the referential semantics of actual scientific theories which a realist can say and defend.* Of course she will hold that the reference-determining causal relations are themselves social constructs, but since that is something she says about all causal relations, no special problems need infect her conception of semantic commensurability. (19 92: p. 153)

The same can, of course, be said for uniqueness and bivalence. There is no reason that an idealist or constructivist (so long as she thinks that there is only one idealistic or constructed world or world-version to serve as truth-maker) cannot also claim uniqueness

of correct descriptions of reality and bivalence of the truth value of statements about the world. So long as the truth-maker is a single, monolithic entity (e.g. ideas in the mind of God, or that which would be accepted by the ideal community of inquirers, or whatever), the truth bearers will exhibit bivalence and uniqueness, and they might certainly be held to be true in virtue of their correspondence to reality (though reality is deeply mentalistic given either constructivism or idealism). Berkeley could well have embraced uniqueness, bivalence, *and* correspondence theses while remaining staunchly idealistic.

If uniqueness, bivalence and correspondence truth do not entail realism, then it seems very unlikely that *any* theory about truth does. Certainly, no theory involving the epistemic properties of cognizers as a component (e.g. coherence or pragmatic theories) will entail realism, and, as has already been argued, deflationary accounts of truth are metaphysically neutral.

In short, it appears that metaphysical realism neither entails, nor is entailed by, any particular theory of truth. Realism and truth are independent issues. This should not be altogether surprising, since realism is a theory about what the world is like, whereas theories of truth are accounts of what it is for statements (propositions, beliefs, utterances, or whatever truth-bearers there may be) to have a particular kind of property, or for the predicate "is true" to be able to play a particular kind of role in the formation of expressions. Although it is very natural to take *the world itself* to be truth-maker for a range of common, intuitive cases, it is not at all clear or uncontroversial that *all* truth-bearers are made true by being related to *the world itself* as opposed to world-versions. If they do not have to take the world as an argument in every truth-making relation, realists

are not shackled to any particular theory of truth.

Putnam, and others who take metaphysical realism to involve some particular account of truth (e.g. Horwich, 1982; Dummett, 1984; Trigg, 1980), seem to be building something into the doctrine that they are not entitled to include. One need not embrace uniqueness, bivalence, or correspondence truth in espousing metaphysical realism (or vice-versa), and objections against any of those theories of truth are not relevant to an evaluation of metaphysical realism. It is important that metaphysical realism be distinguished from alethic or semantic theories if we are to be clear about how to evaluate its legitimacy as a theory of the nature of the world.

2c) Philosophers who assume that metaphysical realism entails some particular epistemological theory about what sorts of things we can know - or cannot help but know, make a similar mistake. Realism involves a separation of sorts between the world and our representations of it. So the theory is not without consequences for our investigations into the nature of the world. For the realist, the purpose of our investigations is, often, the uncovering of facts about the way that (mind-independent) reality is. The way to conduct such investigations is not to focus on the mind and its internal structure, but rather to focus the mind on the world. One should look at it, touch it, smell it, roll it around on one's tongue, etc. The world is "out there" and our inquiries into it require that we somehow bridge the gap between it and ourselves. In *Against Relativism*, James F. Harris depicts realism as a theory governing the goals and methodology of scientific inquiry:

The inheritance received from Galileo and those who followed his lead in the remainder of the seventeenth century is a form of *realism* according to which the world or reality is understood to be a certain way, and the task of the scientist is to discover the most accurate theory for describing it. According to this realist understanding of the nature of scientific inquiry, reality is metaphorically "out there" -- "beyond" or "beneath" scientific theory...(1992: p. 23)

Harris' understanding of realism's consequences for scientific inquiry does, in fact, accord with vulgar intuitions about the scientific enterprise, but the metaphysical doctrine of realism is not *constituted* by any particular theory regarding scientific inquiry or about how one is to find out what the nature of the world is.

Metaphysical realism is neither a semantic nor an epistemological thesis (except insofar as it claims independence of the world from our knowledge or beliefs about it), and the mere claim that the world exists independently of the mental is compatible with any number of epistemological theories from a fairly radical skepticism, to a Davidsonian thesis that it is impossible for us to be radically wrong about the nature of the reality in which we live. In fact, Robert Almeder argues in "Blind Realism," that it is impossible that we are not, in large measure, correct about the nature of the mind-independent world-in-itself, although we cannot justifiably pick out *which* of our beliefs *do* accurately describe the external world. He traces a line of argument back through the early Putnam to Strawson and then Peirce. All three suggest that only realism can account for the predictive success of science without having to resort to the miraculous or the coincidental.

We must, therefore, be correct about some (in fact, much) of the world, but we cannot be certain about precisely which parts of our theory of the world are correct because:

...the occurrence of the sensory phenomena that we would expect if the designated theoretical claims were true might just as easily be the result of other theoretical or nontheoretical claims made in the theory, claims that serve as auxiliary hypotheses or simple observational claims, while the designated theoretical claims are literally false. This hypothesis, for example, would constitute one plausible way to explain the predictive success of Ptolemy's astronomy. While the designated theoretical claims of Ptolemy's astronomy can be viewed as literally false, the predictive success of such claims would need to be a function of other true claims made in the theory. (1987: p. 73)

So, Almeder has staked out the middle-ground between the sceptics and the non-sceptics.

We *know* that we are right somewhere - we just cannot find out where! Although I do not endorse Almeder's position, I see nothing fundamental to metaphysical realism that precludes his holding this particular thesis in conjunction with realism as set out above.

Metaphysical realists merely claim that the world is in no (non-trivial) way dependent upon cognition. They are not, thereby, committed to any further theses about our conceptions of reality or about propositions, utterances, or statements that are intended to characterize the world in one way or another. A sceptical realist might claim to *believe* that tokens of most common sense and scientific types exist independently of the mental while not *knowing* it, whereas a realist who holds some causal theory of knowledge might assert that we can *know* what most (or, at least, many) parts of the world are like if we stand in the appropriate causal relation(s) to those parts. Then again, there is Almeder's position somewhere in between. All three sorts of theorists are *realists*, but they disagree about epistemological matters. They can all be realists because realism is not an epistemological thesis (except insofar as it holds that the world is as it is independently of what we know, believe, etc.).

### 3.3c Absolute Vs. Relative Truth

3) Finally, we should ask what we are to say about the relationship between metaphysical realism as characterized above, and the representations of reality that are generated or encountered by cognizers. If the world, its features, and its facts exist objectively and mind-independently (i.e. they *just* exist), then what follows about the relationship between our representations of the world and the world itself? In particular, what follows about the viability of relativistic as opposed to absolutist theories of our representations of reality? Is there room for conceptual relativity within this metaphysic? Must the realist countenance exactly one correct representation of the nature or structure of reality? Can at least some facts obtain only relatively for Devitt? He appears to think not. Devitt believes that there is at least one entailment from realism to a thesis about truth. He thinks that realists are committed to absolutism about truth and, because of that, to an absolutism about facts. Given his otherwise scrupulous adherence to his second maxim governing debate about realism (i.e. "Distinguish the metaphysical (ontological) issue of realism from any semantic issue" - 1984: p. 3), it is not at all clear why Devitt asserts that realism requires that truth be *absolute*. What he tells us is this:

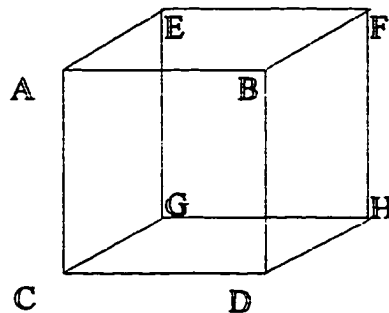
Finally, there is one straightforward link between Realism and truth. Whether truth is deflationary, correspondence, or epistemic, Realism requires that it be '*absolute*'. If truth were only relative, then we could use the equivalence thesis to derive relativistic anti-Realism: *s* is not true absolutely, but only relative to *x*; so it is not the case that *p* absolutely, but only *p* relative to *x*.

Though this link between Realism and truth is close, it is not very significant. It shows that a reason for relativism about truth is a reason for relativism about reality. (1984: p. 46)

But what Devitt refers to as "relativism about reality" is nothing more than *conceptual* relativism (as characterized in Ch. II). The *world itself* need not exist only relatively in

order that there be a multiplicity of viable world-versions to serve as truth-maker for (at least some) truth-bearers. Relativistic anti-realism (i.e. ontological relativity) does *not* follow from relativistic truth or from conceptual relativity. Clearly, the realist who embraces the principles of existence and independence of the external world need not reject conceptual relativity (as has been established in 2.6 and 3.2). Once one embraces some domain of conceptual relativity, it is a small step to a corresponding domain of relative truth.

To see why, let us return to the Necker cube example from chapter II:



The realist claims that the above cube exists independently of the mental (except, of course, insofar as it was drawn by a cognizer - it *need* not have been). *That* assertion - namely: "The above representation of a cube exists independently of the mental" - *is* absolutely true, but other statements about the cube are *not*. For example, the statement, "The front face of the above Necker cube is ABCD" is only *relatively* true.<sup>4</sup> From that,

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<sup>4</sup>For that matter, the part of the universe indicated by "the above cube" need not be described as a *cube* at all, and the proposition, "There is a representation of a *cube* in the above region of spacetime" is *itself* only relatively true. There are some conceptual frameworks which do not divide the universe or its parts up into things such as representations of cubes (see Ch. 4).

however, it does not follow that the cube does not exist independently of the mental. It merely follows that no particular fact about the cube's front face emerges until we have "stepped inside" one or another world-version or description of reality. Perhaps Devitt should have maintained that the realist is committed to at least *some* absolute truth whereas some of her competitor metaphysical theorists are not (e.g. radical constructivists). Without *some* relative truth, however, there can be no room made for conceptual relativity or a multiplicity of correct descriptions of various parts of reality. This is precisely the problem for classical metaphysical realism, as has been amply demonstrated by Goodman, Putnam and others.

Consider again the cases involving relativity of length, weight, shape, etc. discussed in section 3.1. In each of these cases, statements regarding the relevant feature of the object are truth-evaluable *only* relative to some conceptual framework or another. It is true (and objectively so) that Mt. Everest is 8,847.7 meters tall *relative to its rest frame* whereas it is *not* true (and objectively so) relative to some other frame of reference. It makes no sense to ask about Everest's height *irrespective of any* frame of reference. Realists who accept relativity of truth about the height of Mt. Everest and relativity of facts of the matter pertaining to its height (i.e. *conceptual* relativity), need not fear that the world itself will thereby dissolve into relative existence (i.e. they need not fear slipping into *ontological* relativity). Conceptual relativity does not demand that the mountain cease to exist, nor does it demand that the above facts about its height cease to obtain (objectively in both cases). The world itself is *just* there, constraining the nature of the various world-versions generated from this or that conceptual framework.

As has been maintained earlier in this chapter (and will be further defended in chapter IV), conceptual relativity is indispensable to any complete description of the world. The world *just* is as it is - true; but there are a multiplicity of viable descriptions of what is *just* there. The truth of *some* matters, is, at least in part, a function of the particular world-version or description of reality that one adopts or into which one finds oneself involuntarily thrust. The world stolidly underwrites all of this without, itself, being subject to relativization at all.

### 3.3d The Red-Herring of Incommensurability

4) Some metaphysicians assert that there is a link between realism and one or another type of incommensurability thesis. Two or more theories are incommensurable if it is impossible to translate them into each other. It is sometimes asserted that the realist is *ipso facto* opposed to the existence of incommensurable conceptual schemes or world-versions or, sometimes, that the relativist is committed to them. Boyd nicely summarizes a standard sort of argument that incommensurability entails relativistic anti-realism. He notes that philosophers such as Kuhn have sought to establish that:

...the methodological and conceptual distance between successive stages in certain central scientific traditions is so great as to preclude any interpretation according to which they have a common subject matter. If the traditions are historically central enough (and Kuhn's candidates certainly are), the demonstration of such incommensurability would make impossible any defense of scientific realism along any currently developed lines...(19 92: p. 141)

and later:

All of these (and similar) features of revolutionary transformation in science, the constructivist argues, fail to fit the picture of progress leading to increased knowledge of a theory-independent world. We might ask, "What must the world be like if the procedures of normal science are to be discovery procedures?" Since, according to the constructivist,

scientific revolutions cannot be construed as episodes of discovery, we must think of the periods of normal science which they delimit as involving the investigation of quite different sets of socially constructed phenomena. (p. 142 - emphasis mine)

For example, if there are two linguistic communities that employ radically different and non-intertranslatable means of categorizing and organizing experience, then (the argument goes) the two theories cannot have the same subject matter. If each is a theory of the nature of reality as experienced from one paradigm or, more generally, conceptual framework, then the reality that one paradigm deals with cannot be the same as the reality with which the other deals. The inhabitants of the "competing" paradigms, therefore, literally occupy different realities. If our inquiries into the nature of reality, in fact, yield accurate (or approximately accurate) representations of that reality, then two (or more) representations that fail of intertranslatability cannot yield representations of one and the same reality.

The motivation for this view is similar to that underlying the view that the realist must be committed to uniqueness, bivalence, and correspondence truth. If the world *just* is as it is, then there can be only one correct theory of its nature, and any correct theory of reality must be a homolingual part of the "one true" theory or must be translatable into it, in much the same way that an accurate Spanish-language manual on auto mechanics should translate without substantial anomalies into a useful English-language guide to fixing cars. If two theories of reality are not intertranslatable, then either at least one is false, or they do not deal with the same subject matter. Similarly, if two paradigms governing discovery procedures are incommensurable, then those procedures cannot yield discoveries within one and the same domain of inquiry. That is, users of different

discovery paradigms cannot be discovering facts about one and the same world.

Commensurability theses may be divided into (at least) two varieties, *epistemic* and *semantic*. *Epistemic incommensurability* is the thesis that no one is in (or, given a stronger version, ever will be or ever has been in) a position to translate the one theory into the other. Obviously, this thesis need not concern the metaphysical realist. The mere fact that no is (or ever will be), in fact, able to translate the one community's representation of reality into the other's does not preclude the two theories having precisely the same semantic content. Were we to find an ancient text written by scribes from some lost civilization, we would not judge our inability to translate the text into English to be sufficient evidence that the markings in the book were mere scribbles without meaning or import. We would be only slightly more likely to reach this conclusion were the markings to elude all our interpretive efforts until the end of time. We would be far more likely to conclude that our efforts had failed to uncover the meaning of the markings; we would not conclude that there was no meaning to be uncovered.

*Semantic Incommensurability* presents a more interesting challenge to metaphysical realism. By this, I mean the thesis that there could be, say, two (or more) theories of the nature of the world that are both (largely) correct, complete, and that do not admit of intertranslatability - not because of anyone's epistemic limitations or some interpretative failure, but because each depends upon some conceptual apparatus that is in principle unavailable in the other. An objective, mind-independent reality (so the argument goes) could not admit of two non-intertranslatable theories. It might be that no

person is ever in an epistemic position to distinguish *de facto* failures of intertranslatability from failures *in principle*, but I think it quite clear that if the latter do not undercut realism, then the former cannot either. And I think that *in principle* failures of intertranslatability (i.e. semantic incommensurability) do *not* present any special problems for metaphysical realism.

To see why, let us consider the following scenario: There is a species of intelligent, articulate, bat-like creature that inhabits a not-so-distant planet in the Milky Way. These creatures have an echolocation perceptual apparatus very much like a bat's, and their scientific paradigm and its discovery procedures are, in part, a function of this fact, much as ours are, in part, a function of the nature of our visual perceptual apparatus. For example, their scientific enterprise is centered around various sonic regularities to which we humans have no access, just as our discovery procedures involving (say) changes in the color of litmus paper are inaccessible to them. Imagine that these intelligent bats visit our planet and encounter a Ringling Brothers circus. The head bat of the expedition communicates a description of the circus to her home world. She (it?) commissions other bats in the expedition to gather various sorts of information and, perhaps, to conduct a few experiments. All of their findings are communicated to the home world. Imagine that we unwittingly intercept this communication in the form of a series of electromagnetic pulses of some kind. We suspect that it is a message generated by some intelligent power because it exhibits various complex regularities not typically found in nature, and it is repeated a number of times in a regular sequence. We attempt to interpret its meaning.

Is there any reason to suppose that the bat's description is, or even could be, translatable into an English-language description of the same circus? Is it at all plausible that the discovery procedures employed by the bat scientists could be made to "fit" with anything that we would recognize as part of a scientific inquiry? We have no more hope of blindly reconstructing an echolocation-centered account of the goings on of a Ringling Brothers circus than the bats have of (literally) blindly reconstructing the thesis of Hardin's "Color and Illusion". What hope could we possibly have of adequately characterizing the experiences of the bat observers of the circus given the (probably) enormous chasm between their conceptual apparatus and our own? Would the bats' account of that portion of the world that we would refer to as the "juggling act" be translatable into our description of the jugglers' activities? This seems about as implausible as is the bats' coming to share our interest in Escher's work. Neither group has access to the conceptual apparatus that would appear to be required for understanding the other's projects and interests. The bats can not see the pictures and colors that we see, and we can not echolocate or process echolocation input in the way that they do. In any case, the important question is this: What would a failure of translatability entail about the realist's thesis that the world exists independently of the mental?

We have a case in which two world-versions are generated as a result of bringing to bear, on the one hand, the (or a species of the) human conceptual apparatus and, on the other, the bat conceptual apparatus, upon one and the same circus (and the goings on therein). Let us suppose that numerous features of either world-version are inaccessible from the standpoint of those experiencing (*capable of experiencing*) the other. Whether

or not there really would be an intertranslatability problem for ourselves and our bat-like counterparts is beside the point (and, perhaps, beyond my powers of persuasion). Bats have been chosen for this example because of the infamous (alleged) inaccessibility of their cognitive processes from the human standpoint. The reader should feel free to substitute whatever type of alien species she finds to be most palatably alien in its cognitive processes and in its way of individuating particulars, events, categorizing individuals, judging similarity, etc.

Let us suppose, furthermore, that the inaccessibility here obtains *in principle* and not because of any failure to try one or another mode or means of interpretation. That is, let us suppose that not even an omnipotent god could produce human understanding of world-versions that are accessible to intelligent bat cognizers (or vice-versa). Suppose that it is, in principle, impossible to grasp one description of the circus from "within" the conceptual framework that generated the other. Is it somehow problematic that the two "competing" representations serve as descriptions of one and the same thing? Are not the bats perceiving the same circus that we are. True, it "looks" very different to them - so much so that we cannot hope to grasp how it "looks" to our bat counterparts. But what has any of that to do with the realist's thesis that the world is *just* there independently of the mental? There may be a host of facts, relations, properties, etc., that cannot be accessed or conceived from our cognitive perspective, but that are quite central to the bat society's conception of the world (and vice-versa). No doubt, such creatures would have a world-view in which sonic regularities play a central role in ordering reality into particulars and kinds. They are likely to classify individuals by reference to their sonic-

reflective properties. As Nagel points out:

...we know that most bats (the microchiroptera, to be precise) perceive the external world primarily by sonar, or echolocation, detecting the reflections, from objects within range, of their own rapid, subtly modulated, high-frequency shrieks. Their brains are designed to correlate the outgoing impulses with the subsequent echoes...bat sonar, though clearly a form of perception, is not similar in its operation to any sense that we possess, and there is no reason to suppose that it is subjectively like anything we can experience or imagine.  
(1979: 168)

The bat world-version will be full of facts about sonic regularities perceivable by bat-brains whereas "our" world-version is full of facts about (among other things) regularities built around our perception of a particular portion of the visible spectrum. Such facts obtain only relative to one or the other world-version (i.e. they only emerge once a particular way of individuating, categorizing, or otherwise ordering the world is in place) - in much the same way that facts about which is the *front* face of the above Necker cube obtain only internally to one or another way of describing the cube. It would not be right to say that facts about the sonic regularities (that only the bats can perceive) are a part of our world-version, but that we simply do not perceive them. Those regularities are individuated and classified by reference to the functioning of a perceptual apparatus that we do not possess and cannot use. They obtain only in world-versions that are ordered by a particular kind of conceptual framework - one in which properties identifiable by echolocation are central to the organizational scheme.

As far as I can tell, nothing at all follows about there existing separate *worlds*, one for us and another for the bats. There are not two different circuses being observed. There is but one circus that is being perceived from two perspectives or conceptual/perceptual standpoints. No proliferation of worlds is necessary to account for the difference in bat and human world-version, precisely because conceptual relativity

does *not* entail ontological relativity (or anti-realism of any type). All that the case of the circus shows is the need to embrace *conceptual* relativity or the possibility of a plurality of equally viable, legitimate *parsings* of the world (or of parts of the world). But *the world is just there* - though various world-versions can be generated from it.

Metaphysical realists need not fear any form of incommensurability as it can entail nothing more than *conceptual* relativity. Conceptual relativity is metaphysically innocuous.

### 3.3e Boyd's Causal Structures

Richard Boyd agrees that conceptual relativity does not force one to abandon one's realistic scruples. He begins by noting two senses in which conceptual relativity seems uncontroversial:

In the first place, it seems certainly true that for any given scientific discipline, there will be more than one conceptual scheme that could be employed to capture adequately the knowledge reflected in its theories. There is thus a significant measure of conventionality in the broad sense involved in the acceptance of whatever conceptual framework scientists in a given discipline employ.

Moreover, between scientific disciplines there are variations in the schemes of classification and description which are appropriate even when—in some sense—the same phenomena are under study: economists and sociologists must employ different explanatory categories even if they are both studying consumers. The naturalness of concepts and the appropriateness of methods seem to be interest-dependent—to depend on the interests of the investigators. (1992: p. 188)

But a plurality of viable conceptual schemes employed for generating theory and description of the (in some sense) *same* phenomena is, according to Boyd, straightforwardly unproblematic for the realist:

Thus there will always be some arbitrariness—some conventionality in the broad sense—in the choice of conceptual frameworks in any complex inquiry.

This truism is uncontroversial and it certainly poses no problem for the realist who holds that the respects of similarity and difference involved are reflections of socially

unconstructed causal structures... Thus the conventionality of choice of conceptual schemes is apparently something which the realist can cheerfully acknowledge.

and later:

Thus it is unsurprising that the vocabulary and conceptual schemes suited to one sort of inquiry will usually be unsuited to inquiry with different explanatory or predictive aims. Here again there is nothing to trouble the realist. The appropriateness of a scheme of classification depends on the purposes or interests in the service of which it is to be used, but there is nothing here to indicate that the causal structures which the various conceptual schemes map out depend noncausally on human interests and desires or on social practices. That conceptual schemes are "mind-independent" in the way indicated suggests nothing Kantian or Neo-Kantian. (19 92: p. 189).

For Boyd, the viability of a plurality of conceptual schemes is a function of the nature of the mind-independent causal structures inherent in the world itself. Different inquiries will take different conceptual schemes because they will be concerned with uncovering different sets of causal structures and relations in the world. We do not, however, *project* the causal structures *onto* the world, but merely "take notice of" different structures (or different features of the same structures) depending upon the nature of our inquiry and the perspective from which we are conducting it. For example, the neuroscientist is not likely to take note of the same set of causal structures as is the cultural anthropologist even though both are concerned with the questions like, "How has the development of natural language been influenced by kinship relations?" The neuroscientist is likely to be concerned with genetic inheritance whereas the cultural anthropologist is likely to be concerned with social dynamics.

We do not *construct* causal structures. The causal structures are *just* there, waiting to be discovered. What we find in the world is, in part, a function of the nature of the inquiry we are engaged in (and the conceptual framework that goes with it), but our findings are ultimately determined by the world's underlying causal structures as we

approach them from "within" one conceptual scheme or another. For instance, various facts about the relationship between kinship and natural language are "out there" to be discovered. Some are appropriate objects of neuropsychological research whereas others are not but are, rather, suitable objects of anthropological inquiry. The realist need not worry about "conceptual relativity" insofar as it is merely a function of the relative interests and objectives of disparate fields of inquiry.

At this point, however, it would appear that Boyd owes an answer to the following question: Why should we embrace uniqueness about the set of causal structures in the world, if not about representations of other parts of reality? That is, why does conceptual relativity fail to "penetrate" to the metaphysical level at which are found causal structures? Why are causal structures not the type of thing that is relative to conceptual framework? Boyd does appear to claim uniqueness for accounts of the world's causal structures:

For either a realist or a sophisticated empiricist, the causal structures referred to are features of the unique actual world, whereas for the constructivist the reference to causal structures... is reference to causal structures in the world socially constructed...(1992: p. 193)

Is there some unique set of causal structures underpinning our various representations of reality, but not similarly some unique set of (say) objects or relations? It seems that Boyd has arbitrarily chosen causal structures as his objective bedrock for the grounding of whatever conceptual relativism is required for a complete description of reality (one that includes a plurality of conceptual frameworks). They are features of a "unique actual world" and, while this or that inquiry (e.g. economics as opposed to sociology) may take heed only of certain aspects of the underlying causal structures involved (e.g. those

involving consumers), the structures *themselves* are not sensitive to conceptual scheme. They are "beneath" the various viable parsings of the world; they are *just* in the world *itself*.

It is doubtful, however, that there is any more sense in the claim that the world contains this or that causal structure *irrespective of conceptual framework* than there is in the claim that Mount Everest has some particular height irrespective of this or that frame of reference. Once a conceptual framework is specified, then (and only then) can we attempt to answer questions such as, "What causal structures are responsible for the phenomena that we encounter?" Asking such questions without first specifying (or adopting) a conceptual framework is very much like asking about the front face of the aforementioned Necker cube without specifying an observational perspective. There simply is no fact of the matter about which face is in front "external" to any particular perspective.

Are we describing the same causal structures that our intelligent bat counterparts are describing in their communications back to the bat home world? We are both describing the same section of the world itself, but does it follow that the same causal structures will make appearances in our descriptions as will appear in the bat descriptions? It seems likely that the bats will conceptualize causal relations (and the relata involved therein) in very different ways than we will. Their echolocation apparatus may equip them to categorize and individuate causal structures in ways that are, in principle, inconceivable to members of our species - just as they seem likely to encounter all sorts of relations in their world-version which simply are not accessible from within

ours (and vice-versa).

I would like to suggest that the realist's bedrock objectivity is to be found elsewhere. The world itself is *just* there, independently of the mental; but I see no reason to believe that there are not a plurality of equally legitimate ways of carving it into overall sets of causal structures. I see no reason to accept only one set of causal "joints" anymore than there is reason to accept but one set of individuating or relational "joints". It seems impossible to prevent conceptual relativity (once embraced) from penetrating right through *any* phenomena that we encounter. In the next chapter, I suggest a different kind of ontological bedrock against which the seemingly inexorable force of conceptual relativity is broken. Before embarking upon that task though, let us take stock of precisely what it is that metaphysical realism is *not*, in order that we may be clear about why the metaphysic suggested in the next two chapters should be taken to be a species of realism and not some competitor thesis from the relativistic anti-realist camp.

### 3.3f Metaphysical Realism and Phenomenal (C&A&K) Relativity

Metaphysical realism is a doctrine about the nature of the world. It is not dependent upon absolutist theses about representations of reality or theses about truth that are entailed by conceptual absolutism. Realists are entitled to help themselves to the theory of conceptual relativity; but they must do so in a way that is compatible with the mind-independent existence of the world. It is crucial to note that metaphysical realism is *not* a particular kind of theory. It is *not* a *phenomenal* theory (i.e. it is not a theory about semantic facts, our representational abilities, or our capacity to know any particular thing

about reality - see Ch. II). Its domain does not include any thesis about the objective priority or preferability of one or another of the available, viable representations of reality. Once it is specified that one or another world-version is to be taken as the framework within which a particular inquiry is to be understood, we may legitimately ask whether this or that fact obtains. The answer to our question will be a function of the objective, mind-independent features of the world-version specified.

Let there be a plurality of world-versions. In fact, let there be indefinitely many of them. Let there also be an assortment of world-versions that are mutually incommensurable. Furthermore, let there be a wide range of facts and truths that are relativized to one or another world-version. Let the intelligent bats know things which are, in principle, unknowable by us - things about the very same world about which we know things that are, in principle, unknowable to intelligent bats. The metaphysical realist can consistently allow all of these assumptions involving phenomenal relativity without giving away the objective, mind-independence of the world. How the world is experienced is, in part, a function of who or what is doing the experiencing. The nature of the world itself, however, is in no way dependent upon this. The world itself was here and had some nature before there were any minds to do any experiencing. The fact that we, or the bats, or anyone or anything else has particular sorts of experiences is a function of the relationship between the objective nature of the world itself and the conceptual perspective from which it is approached.

## Section Summary

Metaphysical realism is a theory of the nature of the world. It comports nicely with our prephilosophical intuitions regarding what the world is like and what our relationship is to it. It does not entail, and is not entailed by, any particular theory of truth or by any particular epistemological theory (except insofar as it asserts the mind-independence of the world). Therefore, no attack upon the theses of uniqueness, bivalence, correspondence theories of truth, or any theory about what we can or cannot know can show that metaphysical realism is false. Nor do incommensurability theses interfere with one's ability to consistently hold on to the doctrine of realism. Though Boyd recognizes the compatibility of realism and conceptual relativity, he takes that compatibility to reside in conceptual-scheme-independent causal structures. I see no reason to suppose that causal structures are not themselves relative to conceptual schemes if we once allow that there are a plurality of schemes for categorizing and dividing up the world into particulars and relations. In the next chapter, I will make the case that the metaphysical realist must accept a fairly thoroughgoing phenomenal relativism if she is to offer a descriptively adequate account of the nature of the world and its relationship to the experiences of cognizers of various kinds. I will also present an account of what sense there is in which one may legitimately say that all the world's various parts exist independently of the mental.

Let us now turn to an investigation of the relationships between the world itself, conceptual frameworks, and world-versions. In presenting the argument that all three must be understood to be objective, mind-independent entities, we will uncover the core

principles of *holistic realism*, and will find that it is quite different from, and incompatible with, classical realism. It is not, thereby, any less a version of *metaphysical realism*.

## Ch. IV: An Alternative Metaphysic

Given the difficulties with classical metaphysical realism and with full-blown relativism discussed in the previous two chapters of this dissertation, it appears that some palatable alternative is wanted. The alternative should account for all the phenomena that have rightfully encouraged and captivated classical realists (on one front) and the various brands of relativist (on the other). That is, whatever (if anything) is *right* about classical realism and whatever (if anything) is *right* about relativism should be accommodated by any putative alternative, while all of the aforementioned difficulties with each (i.e. whatever is wrong about them) should be deflected, circumvented, or otherwise disposed of. The overarching project of this chapter is the presentation of precisely such an alternative to the two classical paradigms discussed in chapters II and III of the dissertation. The alternative herein offered shall be referred to as *holistic realism*.

### 4.1 Carving Nature at the Joints

Conceptual frameworks (or schemes), and related notions, have become a commonplace in the writings of metaphysicians, philosophers of science, linguists, historians of science, and others working in the humanities and the social sciences. However, the relevant families of terminology are not used in the same way by those working in different fields - or even by those colleagues under one and the same intellectual umbrella. In fact, a survey of any substantial sample of the relevant literature would seem to indicate a large heterogeneity in the theoretical role of "conceptual

frameworks" (or "schemes").

#### 4.1a Conceptual Frameworks In The Literature

We can trace the evolution of the notion of a conceptual framework - and ideas that are either synonymous with it or, at least, intimately associated in theory and practice (e.g. "conceptual scheme", "paradigm", etc.) - back through Wittgenstein to Kant and still further back through the medievals and into philosophy's ancient primordial soup. Even Aristotle and some of the pre-Socratics grappled with differing methods of organizing and describing reality. For example, consider Aristotle's account of the dispute between Thales and Anaximander (joined also by Empedocles) over the fundamental constitution of the world:

Of the philosophers, then, most thought the principles which were of the nature of matter were the only principles of all things. That of which all things that are consist, the first from which they come to be, the last into which they are resolved (the substance remaining, but changing in its modifications), this they say is the element and this the principle of things, and therefore they think nothing is either generated or destroyed, since this sort of entity is always conserved, as we say Socrates neither comes to be absolutely when he comes to be beautiful or musical, nor ceases to be when he loses these characteristics, because the substratum, Socrates himself, remains. Just so they say nothing else comes to be or ceases to be; for there must be some entity—either one or more than one—from which all other things come to be, it being conserved.

Yet they do not all agree as to the number and the nature of these principles. Thales, the founder of this type of philosophy, says the principle is water (for which reason he declared that the earth rests on water), getting the notion perhaps from seeing that the nutriment of all things is moist, and that heat itself is generated from the moist and kept alive by it (and that from which they come to be is a principle of all things). He got his notion from this fact, and from the fact that the seeds of all things have a moist nature, and that water is the origin of the nature of moist things. (*Metaphysics* 1.3 , 983b 8-27)

So, Thales notes the cyclical transformation of each "elemental" constituent of nature into some one of the others. He observes water being heated, evaporating and condensing into clouds that fall in the form of rain to become one with the earth, to nourish living things,

etc. Thales therefore concludes that all is water under one guise or another. The "four elements" were but different stages in the cyclical transmogrification of the single substratum water. Within the Thalesian metaphysic, all events in the natural world are to be understood as hydromorphic alterations in the substratum. Anaximander approached the matter from a slightly different theoretical perspective:

Nor can the infinite body be one and simple, whether it is, as some [reference to Anaximander] hold, a thing over and above the elements (from which they generate the elements) or is not thus qualified.

We must consider the former alternative; for there *are* some people who make this the infinite, and not air or water, in order that the other elements may not be annihilated by the element which is infinite. They have contrariety with each other—air is cold, water moist, fire hot; if one were infinite, the others by now would have ceased to be. As it is, they say, the infinite is different from them and is their source. (*Physics* 3.5, 204b22-28 - brackets mine)

Why not fire as the substratum? Why not earth or air? Given that Thales' observations always involved one "element" changing into another, Anaximander wondered, what logical principle demands that one pick out any particular one of the "four" elements as "the" substratum to be contrasted with the others as mere *stages* of that substratum? If the "simplest stuff" of which the world is made were to be uncovered, there had to be found some neutral thing-in-itself underlying the differences in the appearances and behavior of water, fire, air, and earth. That thing-in-itself is the source of the "elements" and accounts for their various modes and changes.

But why, asked Empedocles, need we find a neutral something "underlying" the four elements? We have our fundamental constituents of nature and should bend our efforts upon understanding the transformation of element into element within the cycle of nature. Richard D. McKirahan, Jr. elucidates the relations between the forces of Love and Strife and their effect upon the cyclical transformation of the four elements in

Empedocles' metaphysics:

The essential principle of Empedocles' KOSMOS is an eternal pattern of alternate and reciprocal increases and decreases in the influence of Love and Strife over the four elements. At one extreme of the cycle, Love has complete dominance and Strife has none; at the other extreme, Strife dominates all, Love none. At the time of Love's complete dominance, the elements are completely and uniformly mixed and bonded into a single spherical compound comprising all the material in the universe. When Strife prevails utterly, there is no mixture at all, and the elements are completely separated from one another: all earth in one mass, and likewise for all water, air, and fire. In between these extreme states, Love and Strife are both on the field. (1994: p. 269)

Are we then to understand Love and Strife to be further elements simply of a different sort than air, fire, earth, and water? Are they modes of Anaximander's "boundless"? Can the two terms be understood merely as expedients for describing the behavior of the substratum of all things? If so, what is the nature of that substratum? Do the foregoing questions have objective, determinate answers, or can one and the same "story of the elements" be told in a variety of ways? Our glance at this debate between the ancients demonstrates, in a microcosm, something that appears to be at the heart of an ancient debate about the proper understanding of the fundamental nature of reality.

Thales, Anaximander, and Empedocles, may have been operating with different principles in mind for organizing the phenomena with which they were presented. Thales' attempted unification of all phenomena under one umbrella did not go far enough for Anaximander's taste for reduction, whereas Empedocles wondered about the motivation to *reduce* at all. Were these ancients simply engaged in differently parsing or organizing one and the same world? Were all three, in fact, organizing the world in one and the same fashion but just *talking about* the project in different ways? Does talking in different ways about organizing one's world *constitute* different ways of organizing it? If one of the three disputants were right, would at least one of the others have to be wrong?

Both? Neither? Are we, with this dispute, confronted with conceptual diversity? If so, can we make sense of this "debate" or were the three simply talking past each other? Finally, what would it mean to claim that we have, in this case, philosophers speaking from within different "conceptual frameworks"? Perhaps a further investigation of some of the history of "conceptual frameworks" will be of assistance in approaching these and other questions about this and similar debates.

It would appear that philosophers have long wrestled with the problems of competing systems for parsing the world. Plato desired that theory carve nature "at its joints," but philosophers both prior and subsequent to Plato have often found it exceedingly difficult (if not, impossible even in principle) to identify a unique set of joints about which to employ their conceptual carving knives. The difficulty appears to be in determining the constituency and ordering of the "parts" of nature in any way that is independent of our place and perspective within the "body" of nature. It is difficult to know how to go about carving when one woman's "joint" is another's "limb" and one man's "simple" is another's "complex". But let us wade through the metaphor and imagery (insofar as we are able) in our further exploration of the role of "conceptual frameworks" in the theorizing of metaphysicians and others who attempt to "carve up", categorize or otherwise order reality.

Kant attributes the structure of the phenomenal world to our epistemic inclinations. We experience the world through a filter of our forms of intuition and concepts that give our experience a particular sort of form and character:

It is therefore from the human standpoint only that we can speak of space, extended objects, etc. If we drop the subjective conditions under which alone we can gain external

intuition, that is, so far as we ourselves may be affected by objects, the representation of space means nothing. For this predicate is applied to objects only insofar as they appear to us and are objects of our senses. The constant form of this receptivity, which we call sensibility, is a necessary condition of all relations in which objects as outside us can be perceived. When abstraction is made of these objects, what remains is pure intuition which we call space. As the peculiar conditions of our sensibility cannot be looked upon as conditions of the possibility of objects themselves, but only of their appearance to us, we may say indeed that space comprehends all things which may appear to us externally, but not all things in themselves, whether perceived by us or not, or by any subject whatsoever. We cannot judge whether the intuitions of other thinking beings function under the same conditions which determine our intuition and which for us are universally binding. If we add the limitation of the judgment to the concept of the subject, the judgment gains absolute validity. The proposition: All things are beside each other in space, is valid only under the limitation that things are taken as objects of our sensible intuition. If I add that condition to the concept and say: All things, as outer appearances, are beside each other in space, the rule obtains universal and unlimited validity. (*Critique of Pure Reason* B42-43/A26-27 - emphasis mine)

With the Kantian metaphysics, it is by way of our innate forms of intuition (e.g. space, time) and basic concepts, which he calls *categories* (e.g. causation, substance), that any particular order is imposed upon empirical reality. Without some kind of conceptual organization, the world is devoid of features, order, or any particular structure. We *impose* rather than simply discover the natural order.

Modern day constructivists have co-opted this feature of Kantian metaphysics, conjoined it to the non-Kantian doctrine of conceptual relativism, and run riot through every edifice of objectivity and ontological realism (but more on that score later). What we must note here is the role of conceptual categories in Kant's account of the nature of reality. Order and structure are not inherent in nature *simpliciter*, but only in phenomenal nature as constituted by the interplay of the concepts of agents and the world-in-itself. The relativization of facts and truth, to frameworks, cultures, epochs, etc., along pseudo-Kantian lines, is a common theme among proponents of conceptual relativity and relativism in general. There have been a number of noteworthy devotees to some such

type of relativity throughout the recent history of philosophy.

Wittgenstein, for example, aims a sceptical eye at the logical atomist's distinction between the objectively "simple" and the "composite" in reality. He suggests that we supplant that simple distinction with a relativistic account of "simples" and "composites". Where Russell had proposed a phenomenalism in which any composite entity is reducible to or constructed out of some host of simple entities, Wittgenstein offers a variety of assessments of "simplicity" or "complexity" in accordance with the rules of different language games. He argues that we can find no scrupulously interest-independent or objective principle whereby we may assert a special entitlement of one game's version of reality over any other's:

We use the word "composite" (and therefore the word "simple") in an enormous number of different and differently related ways. (Is the colour of a square on a chessboard simple, or does it consist of pure white and pure yellow? And is white simple, or does it consist of the colours of the rainbow?—Is this length of 2 cm. simple, or does it consist of two parts, each 1 cm. long? But why not of one bit 3 cm. long, and one bit 1 cm. long measured in the opposite direction?)

To the *philosophical* question: "Is the visual image of this tree composite, and what are its component parts?" the correct answer is: "That depends on what you understand by 'composite'." (And that is of course not an answer but a rejection of the question.) (§ 47)

We find that the way of organizing the elements of one's experience *fixes* its structure as opposed to merely enabling one to *discover* some set of "ready-made" perspective-independent features. Wittgenstein's suggestion is that only the adoption of some particular language game or another generates a crystallization of fact in matters regarding the relative status of the "parts" of the world of our experience (of course, what does and does not constitute a "part" of that world is similarly a function of the adoption of some particular language game or other). Wittgenstein claims then that (at least some)

facts obtain only relative to the imposition of some scheme of categorization upon reality.

Putnam has lately focussed his considerable intellect upon decrying the doctrine of metaphysical realism as incoherent and constructing an alternative "internal" (or pragmatic) realism. This new "realism" embraces conceptual relativity and assigns a constructive role (not unlike that found in Kant's metaphysics) to our systems of classification, individuation, ordering, etc. Reality, for Putnam, is not independent of our epistemic inclinations, but is inextricably bound to various perspectives or interests.

Divergent interests give rise to different sets of individuals, properties, and relations:

The situation does not itself legislate how words like "object," "entity," and "exist" must be used. What is wrong with the notion of objects existing "independently" of conceptual schemes is that there are no standards for the use of even the logical notions apart from conceptual choices. What the cookie-cutter metaphor [of classical realism] tries to preserve is the naive idea that at least one Category—the ancient category of Object or Substance—has an absolute interpretation. The alternative to this idea is not the view that it's all *just* language. We can and should insist that some facts are there to be discovered and not legislated by us. But this is something to be said when one has adopted a way of speaking, a language, a "conceptual scheme." To talk of "facts" without specifying the language to be used is to talk of nothing; the word "fact" no more has its use fixed by the world itself than does the word "exist" or the word "object". (1988: p. 114 - brackets and emphasis mine)

Only *internal* to some conceptual scheme or other may we coherently talk of (or even conceive of) facts with any particular structure. Different facts obtain relative to different conceptual schemes.

So, for example, the conceptual scheme that countenances (say) mereological sums as objects (à la Lezniewski - see § 2.3) will fix, in any given situation, a set of individuals that is quite different from that set fixed by a conceptual scheme in which mereological sums are anathema. Putnam's internal realism denies that either conceptual scheme "is *more* the 'right' way to view the situation" (1988: p. 114) than the other.

Questions such as "How many objects are in this region of space?" are not well-formed unless some system of individuation of objects is first adopted and specified. Only once the specification of the intended use of terms such as "object" or "particular" is in place does it make sense to attempt an answer to questions about how many of them there are. For Putnam, a conceptual scheme or framework is akin to a "point of view" from within the confines of one language or way of speaking. Only with the *intension* of the terms of one's language fixed does any determinate fact about *extension* emerge. This is not, I think, so much a point about language as it is about the *function* of language in parsing and ordering our experience of the world.<sup>1</sup>

Donald Davidson, although presenting the case against the coherence of conceptual schemes, nonetheless offers some indications as to the alleged nature of what he thinks to be incoherent (or, at least, the diversity of which he finds incoherent):

Conceptual schemes, we are told, are ways of organizing experience; they are systems of categories that give form to the data of sensation; they are points of view from which individuals, cultures, or periods survey the passing scene. (1973/74: p. 66)

We may identify conceptual schemes with languages, then, or better, allowing for the possibility that more than one language may express the same scheme, sets of intertranslatable languages. (p. 68)

The images and metaphors fall into two main groups: conceptual schemes (languages) either *organize* something, or they *fit* it (as in "he warps his scientific heritage to fit his...sensory promptings" [Quine's "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" - p. 46]). The first group contains also *systematize*, *divide up* (the stream of experience); further examples of

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<sup>1</sup> This distinction is brought out nicely in Putnam (1988: pp. 113-16), especially in the following passage: "The seemingly more complex cases of conceptual relativity described above—the relativity of Identity (as in the question 'Is the tree identical with the space-time region it occupies?' or 'Is the chair identical with the mereological sum of the elementary particles that make it up?') and the relativity of the categories Concrete and Abstract (as in the question 'Is a space-time point a concrete individual, or is it a mere limit, and hence an abstract entity of some kind?')—and one might add many other examples—can all be handled in much the same way. 'Identical,' 'individual,' and 'abstract' are notions with a variety of different uses. The difference between, say, describing space-time in a language that takes points as individuals and describing space-time in a language that takes points as mere limits is a difference in the choice of a language, and neither language is the 'one true description'". (pp. 114-115)

the second group are *predict, account for, face* (the tribunal of experience). (p. 74 - brackets mine)

Proponents of conceptual diversity often assert that language imposes order and categorizational parameters upon what we find ourselves presented with (the distinction between organizational scheme and thing organized is one which Davidson rejects). This role of imposing order is consistently assigned, by philosophers of the appropriate stripe(s), to conceptual schemes or frameworks.<sup>1</sup>

The central idea behind conceptual diversity is, however, that there exist different ways of organizing or "slicing up" the world. Goodman, Quine, Kuhn, Feyerabend, Whorf, and many others could well have been cited here as defenders of conceptual diversity. All of them may be interpreted (not unreasonably) as presenting the case that there is not any one uniquely correct way of carving nature at its joints. One carves, they argue, in accordance with one's system of organizing and/or categorizing experience.

The foregoing excerpts offer slightly varying accounts of what I think can be given a single very broad type of interpretation. The type of thing in question is, of course, a *conceptual framework*. I shall use this term very broadly as a catch-all for anything that we would count as a *way of* categorizing, depicting, perceiving, parsing, or otherwise ordering the objects of inquiry. The alleged diversity of ways of conducting these various enterprises is typically taken to be a function of diversity in belief systems. The diversity in belief systems is typically alleged to be the result of differences in such

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<sup>1</sup>Davidson consistently presents the argument that there are not, in fact, *diverse* ways of organizing, systematizing or dividing up either reality or experience or "the passing scene". That is, there are not, in fact, diverse non-intertranslatable languages which carry with them alternative conceptual schemes (This issue will be broached in § 4.3 of this dissertation).

things as culture, historical epoch, stages of scientific/theoretical advancement, and (perhaps less frequently) perceptual or conceptual apparatus. I take it that something such as this last consideration is at work in Thomas Nagel's claims regarding the conceptual inaccessibility of a bat's mental life from inside the perspective of the human species. For example, Nagel insists that:

...if extrapolation from our own case is involved in the idea of what it is like to be a bat, the extrapolation must be incomplete. We cannot form more than a schematic conception of what it *is* like. For example, we may ascribe general *types* of experience on the basis of the animal's structure and behavior. Thus we describe bat sonar as a form of three-dimensional forward perception; we believe that bats feel some versions of pain, fear, hunger, and lust, and that they have other, more familiar types of perception besides sonar. But we believe that these experiences also have in each case a specific subjective character, which it is beyond our ability to conceive. And if there is conscious life elsewhere in the universe, it is likely that some of it will not be describable even in the most general experiential terms available to us. (1979: pp. 169-70)

The idea appears to be that bats have a way of ordering and operating within their environment that is utterly alien in its structure to any way that humans have of conceiving of our environment. We have no means by which to even approximate the bat's experiences involving (in particular) its echolocation perceptual apparatus. We can not *think about* the physical world in the way that bats do. We are not cognitively equipped to do so.

Similar sorts of claims have been made about other members of our own species who are socialized within cultures that are conceptually alien to ours or to one another. Whorf (1956), for example, describes alleged facets of Hopi culture that have encouraged many to the conclusion that the Hopi are operating within a different conceptual framework from most of modern-day Western civilization (or, perhaps, Euro-Western civilization).

Kuhn (1962) has persuaded many that those entrenched within the Aristotelian "paradigm," with its *telos*, phlogiston, and "natural places," were quite different from post-Newtonians in their efforts at conceptual categorization. He has argued, for instance, that the Newtonian concept "mass" is distinct from and not translatable into, its cognate concept in post-Newtonian relativity theory. That is, Newton's use of "mass" is not the same as either Einstein's use of "relative mass" or of "proper mass," nor is there an acceptable conversion formula by virtue of which to translate Newton's "mass-talk" into Einstein's.<sup>3</sup>

In each such case, it is suggested that different world-versions result from the imposition or projection of diverse systems of ordering phenomena. Metaphysical facts for the Hopi are quite distinct from those that obtain for citizens of the Western state of mind. Division of the fundamental parts of nature involved, for the ancients, merely the "four elements," whereas inhabitants of the modern epoch engaged in the "same" project must concern themselves with the entire periodic table as well as the underlying realm of the sub-atomic. The nature of the world, and of the satisfaction of our inquiries into the world, is (at least in part) a function of the conceptual categories that we bring to the investigation. The facts that we "find" are largely a result of our way of going about the search. From the foregoing suggestions (and similar ones offered by other proponents of conceptual relativity) we may distill something of the general idea of conceptual diversity and of conceptual frameworks.

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<sup>3</sup> Hartry Field (1973) has produced an excellent paper on this and related topics.

#### 4.1b Wittgenstein's "Games" And Conceptual Frameworks

In each of the aforementioned cases, it is suggested that users of the opposing paradigms, cultures, or epochs have different ways of thinking about, "looking at," or "putting together" the phenomena with which they are presented. Though this account or explanation of "conceptual frameworks" is, admittedly, a bit vague and imprecise, there appears to be little hope of any great increase in precision without tremendous loss of utility and increased susceptibility to counterexample.

Some philosophers (e.g. Davidson, Putnam) seem keen on identifying conceptual frameworks with languages or sets of languages. Then they set out necessary and sufficient conditions for conceptual diversity in terms of the features of different languages. I believe that this emphasis on linguistic practice is misguided, and I intend to explore a number of cases of conceptual diversity among speakers of the same language. The association of conceptual schemes and languages has become a commonplace because, as D.K. Henderson (1994) points out, "languagehood is associated with organizing objects and experience in that languages employ predicates with extensions and constitutive criteria." (p. 186) It may turn out, however, that linguistic practice is not the sole means by which we order reality or our experience (see §§ 4.2-4.3). Consider Nagel's characterization of the alien world of bat experience. The difference between their experience and ours seems to be logically prior to linguistic considerations. Any attempt to set out anything like necessary and sufficient conditions for "frameworkhood" in terms of features of one's language is, no doubt, destined to leave out some case about which many would feel powerful intuitions for inclusion.

Chris Swoyer suggests that precision is neither required for, nor particularly well-suited to, understanding the notion of a conceptual framework:

As I shall understand it, the notion of a conceptual framework has much in common with such things as *Weltanschauungen*, categorical schemes, and, perhaps, even forms of life. The notion of a conceptual framework or scheme is a theoretical one designed to help us understand and explain thought and action, and its use is to be justified by its success in doing so. Like the related theoretical notions of culture and society, that of a conceptual framework will involve a certain amount of idealization, for it is doubtful that the basic features of thought of any very large group of people, especially if it is highly diversified and heterogenous, could be set out literally without countless quantifications. But far from being a defect, such idealization is a standard feature of theoretical concepts and is one of the things that make them useful. (1982: pp. 87-88)

Perhaps we are better off adopting something like the Wittgensteinian stance toward "games" and applying it to the case of "conceptual frameworks". Let us focus our attention on the overlapping and criss-crossing features listed in the above-mentioned accounts of frameworks, schemes, and paradigms without worrying a great deal about specifying rigid parameters for their exemplification and/or individuation. Wittgenstein offers the following advice on how to give an explanation of what we mean by the term "game":

How should we explain to someone what a game is? I imagine that we should describe *games* to him, and we might add: "This *and similar things* are called 'games'". And do we know any more about it ourselves? (*Philosophical Investigations* § 69)

and:

One gives examples and intends them to be taken in a particular way.—I do not, however, mean by this that he is supposed to see in those examples that common thing which I—for some reason—was unable to express; but that he is now to *employ* those examples in a particular way. Here giving examples is not an *indirect* means of explaining—in default of a better. For any general definition can be misunderstood too. The point is that *this* is how we play the game. (I mean the language-game with the word "game".) (§ 71)

Contrast is often useful in developing an understanding of a concept (even if that concept is vague and imprecise). One might, for instance, contrast a *good* game of baseball with a *bad* one so as to reveal just what it is that makes the particular game being viewed "good". One need not, however, hold that any game qualifying as *good* must have

precisely those features that motivate one to call *this* particular game "good". There may simply be a "family" of features that, given a variety of different circumstances, interests, etc., make it appropriate to call a game of baseball "good". Similarly, there may be a family of considerations which, given a variety of different inquiries, matters of debate, etc., make it appropriate to say that disputants are using different conceptual frameworks.

We might not go so far in our account of "conceptual frameworks" as Wittgenstein goes in his account of "games". That is, we need not deny the existence of any common features at all. Let us mention some candidates for features common to all conceptual frameworks, and then inspect the application of those features to a number of cases.

#### 4.1c Features Common To All Conceptual Frameworks

The absence of an exhaustive list of necessary conditions for any particular inquiry does not mean that there are *no* necessary conditions or commonalities at all. Even Wittgenstein's games are all playable and are all activities. Is there something that we are entitled to require of anything deserving of the appellation *conceptual framework*? Aside from the aforementioned feature of imposing some kind of *order* or another upon the objects of inquiry, it would appear to be necessary that any conceptual framework must impose order in accordance with certain fundamental logical principles. We could not, for example, make sense out of "order" which is not in observance of the law of non-contradiction. What would it mean to say that, *within the confines of a particular framework*, some fact both does and does not obtain? In what sense is any order at all

imposed by a conceptual system that countenances the truth of both the proposition  $p$  and the proposition  $not-p$ , or within which the presence of some fact  $f$  does not entail that  $f$  is not absent? Investigation of a putative example of conceptual divergence should help to clarify the motivation for requiring that conceptual frameworks: 1) impose order, and 2) accord with fundamental laws of logic such as the principle of non-contradiction.

Let us reconsider Putnam's possible world (§ 2.3) of "exactly three" logically independent particulars -  $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ , and  $x_3$ . Provided that we are told nothing else about this world or these particulars, the standard Western analytic or "Carnapian" conceptual framework parses or orders this possible world in something like the following way: " $x_1$ ,  $x_2$ , and  $x_3$ " is an exhaustive listing of the particulars in the possible world described - and those particulars are logically independent. The conceptual framework of the Polish logician, however, imposes a very different order upon the world described as being constituted by "three particulars". The Polish logician's ordering of the world in question might read something like: " $x_1, x_2$ , and  $x_3$ " lists the *atomic* objects in this possible world, but an *exhaustive* listing of *all objects* is, " $x_1, x_2, x_3, x_1+x_2, x_1+x_3, x_2+x_3, x_1+x_2+x_3$ ". Note that in Putnam's scenario the Carnapian and the Lezniewskian are supposed to be offering competing accounts of one and the same possibility. The Carnapian conceptual framework, which does not countenance mereological sums but embraces logically independent particulars, is one way of structuring or ordering the possibility in question, while the Lezniewskian conceptual framework, which embraces mereological sums, is another way of ordering the same possibility. Note further that the possibility in question - a world of "exactly three" particulars (or *atoms* as the case may be) - is invariant across

conceptual frameworks. The possibility in question is a brute existent to which the frameworks give order (but more on this in § 4.4).

It is only in virtue of the differences between the Carnapian structuring of the possibility in question and the Lezniewskian structuring that Putnam is encouraged to judge Carnapians and Lezniewskians to be operating with different conceptual frameworks. If the two accounts had differed only with respect to terminology and not with respect to (for example) the ontological status of mereological sums, Putnam would have had no motivation to claim that his scenario provides evidence of conceptual diversity.<sup>1</sup> It is clear that our first criterion of frameworkhood (imposition of order) must be present, and that methods of ordering things must diverge, in any case in which it makes sense to wonder about the possibility of divergent conceptual frameworks. It seems equally clear that our first criterion of frameworkhood necessitates our second (accordance with the principle of non-contradiction and any similarly fundamental logical laws - if there are any).

Suppose a Carnapian asserted that the existence of exactly three particulars in Putnam's possible world did not preclude the existence of *more than* three particulars in that same world and in precisely the same sense of "particular". Could we make any sense at all of such a "conceptual framework"? Would the "order" that it imposes be the same as that imposed by the Lezniewskian, or would it be different? Would it be both? Neither? Suppose the Lezniewskian asserted the following: 1) If we accept mereological

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<sup>1</sup>Philosophers in the Davidsonian camp - see section 4.3 - may claim that, in fact, Carnapians and Lezniewskians *do not* parse the world differently, but only talk about *the same* parsing in different ways.

sums, then there are at least seven objects in the world in question, 2) we should (and do) accept mereological sums, but, 3) there are fewer than seven objects in the world in question. Has a coherent way of ordering or structuring things been offered if *modus ponens* (in such a case) is violated? Is the series {1, 2, 3, 4} *ordered* by a "conceptual framework" that allows that 2 both comes before 3 and after 3 while 1 is both the first and last member of the series? James F. Harris, in his *Against Relativism* (pp. 27-41), argues convincingly against the coherence of any relativization of these fundamental principles of logic:

There must be logical laws on the meta-linguistic level which are "immune to revision" and inviolate according to which judgments concerning other statements in the network are made. Exactly the same thing is true of other logical laws such as The Law of Non-Contradiction and The Law of Excluded Middle. If one tries to imagine the process by which such laws might be "revised" within a certain field of beliefs, one encounters the same kind of logical *cul-de-sac*. Quine has claimed that even a revision of the Law of Excluded Middle might be an option for simplifying quantum mechanics. However, within any particular network of beliefs, quantum theory must either force a revision or not force a revision of the Law of Excluded Middle. If a person decides to revise the Law of Excluded Middle because he or she wants to "hold on to" certain recalcitrant data which result from experiments on the sub-atomic level, it can only be because the Law of Excluded Middle is still being used on the meta-linguistic level. Obviously, relative to the same particular network of beliefs, the experiment involving electron interference cannot both force a revision of the Law of Excluded Middle and not force a revision of that same law at the same time. (1992: pp. 40-41)

So, just as Wittgenstein's *games* must be playable activities, so must our *conceptual frameworks* be logically consistent systems of ordering. Although it is true that probably all of us have inconsistent overall belief sets, this need not trouble our current account of conceptual frameworks, as we shall see later (§ 4.5) that conceptual frameworks are not found in the belief sets of cognizers, but should be construed as objective, mind-independent entities.

#### 4.1d Frameworks Relativized To Inquiries

A conceptual framework then is a way of ordering the objects of inquiry in accordance with fundamental principles of reasoning such as the law of non-contradiction. Should we, therefore, accept any such way of ordering things as a conceptual framework? Will we not open the world up to an unwieldy proliferation of conceptual frameworks if we do so? Will we not find difficulties involving frameworks embedded within frameworks? For example, we will surely run into groups of people who share a particular overall cultural heritage but who existed during different historical epochs. What are we to say about our ancestors who died two thousand years before the emergence of quantum mechanics?

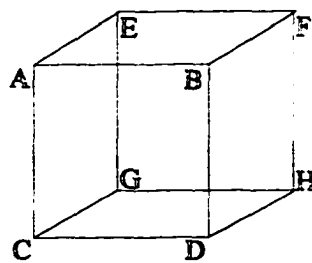
Well, surely we share more with them than we do with (say) modern-day bats, or (if there are any) extraterrestrials who enjoy enormous advantages over us in technology and whose biology and evolutionary history are vastly different from our own. It seems equally likely that modern-day physicists from different cultures and corners of the globe are likely to share more with each other, in terms of their understanding of matters within their discipline, than each shares with members of her culture's ancestry from an epoch 2000 years distant. How then are we to understand the differences in framework imposed by differences in culture, epoch, technological advancement, biology, etc., when we may find some set of individuals  $S_1$  who share some subset of relevantly similar features  $F_{1,2}$  with another group  $S_2$ , and some other set of relevantly similar features  $F_{1,3}$  with persons in  $S_3$  while members of  $S_2$  and  $S_3$  share relevantly similar features  $F_{2,3}$ ? Who is operating within the same conceptual framework as whom? Are "we" operating within the same

framework as Aristotle or a different one? What about the Hopi tribesman? A bat? What about Newton and Hawking? Do they use the same conceptual framework or different ones? The answer, it seems, depends upon what it is that we are doing, asking about, thinking about, etc. That is, the answer depends, in large part, upon context (though it should be noted again that logical principles such as the law of non-contradiction must uniformly apply cross-contextually if we are to be able to make sense of the presence of any conceptual framework at all).

It would be shocking indeed to discover that the Hopi tribesman believed (and behaved as if) he should seek the company of predators and avoid nourishing food at all costs - regardless of how alien his metaphysical view is to our own. I suspect that we would also agree about which direction the sun travels with respect to our shared vantage point, which objects are more likely to float in water, whether chocolate tastes better than gasoline, etc. A member of an alien species is likely to agree with us about the sun (provided she shares our vantage point) but might drink gasoline shakes and power her spaceship with bon-bons. Similarly, I would wager that both Newton and Hawking would judge Aristotelian claims about the straightforward description of the behavior of mid-sized physical objects to be fairly accurate, while disagreeing in many cases (with each other and with Aristotle) about the details of what is going on locally in the universe when any particular instance of behavior is observed. There could also be disagreement as to where to individuate "instances" of behavior and about just exactly what set of particulars is involved in the behavior (consider an extraterrestrial scientist who does not see mid-sized physical objects but only swarms of subatomic particles - i.e. who sees with

his normal, unaided visual apparatus what we would see when looking through very high-powered microscopes). Aristotle, Newton, and Hawking share the *human* framework with respect to inquiries such as "How are we to describe the macroscopic event that occurs locally as my hand releases this rock? (whereas the extraterrestrial scientist might not), but *internal* to, or nested within, the human framework are the Aristotelian, Newtonian, and (let's call it) Hawkingian frameworks with respect to questions such as, "What are the physical facts underlying the behavior of the rock?" Let us consider a fairly simple case for clarification.

Which is the front face, or nearest face from the reader's perspective, of the Necker cube in the figure below?



Is it ABCD or is it EFGH? The answer: It depends upon how one looks at it. That the figure represented is a cube, you and I are likely to agree (unless, of course, you are unable to perceive two-dimensional representations as representing three dimensions due to some unique feature of your neurobiology - that is, if you do not share the standard human framework in matters of visual perception), though a bat - even an intelligent and articulate one - might tell us that he does not. Where we may diverge (neither one with more or less justification than the other) is on identifying one face or the other as "front" or "nearest". What we are likely to agree upon, is that the resolution to the matter

depends upon one's "perceptual stance". Consider the well-known cases of Gestalt switches. Is this difference in "perceptual stance" sufficient for a difference in *conceptual framework* between two observers of the same species, from the same culture, epoch, etc? The answer that I would like to propose is: Yes - *with respect to this particular inquiry*. No - with respect to questions such as: "How many objects are on this table?" "What is the length of this (pointing) rigid rod?" etc. A divergence of conceptual frameworks with respect to those matters of inquiry will be grounded in other types of difference than that of "perceptual stance".

It only makes sense to ask about whether two or more individuals, cultures, groups, etc. are operating with different conceptual frameworks *once a particular context or area of inquiry has been specified*. Attempting to determine whether or not Aristotle and Newton were operating with different conceptual frameworks (without specifying context) is like trying to determine whether objects A and B are *similar* (without specifying the respect by reference to which one is to judge similarity). Are Aristotle and Newton operating with different conceptual frameworks with respect to questions such as, "What shape is the Parthenon?" - No. Are they operating with different conceptual frameworks with respect to questions such as, "Why do unsupported objects fall toward the earth?" - Yes (arguably, at least). One could probably concoct inquiries about which it would be very difficult, if not impossible, to determine whether Aristotle and Newton are operating with different conceptual frameworks. Of course, such inquiries will be influenced by the conceptual framework or perspective from which they are couched (this issue is broached again in §§ 4.4-4.5).

#### 4.1e Conceptual Frameworks And Voluntarism

Finally, it is important to note that conceptual frameworks in some of the foregoing cases of putative conceptual diversity are voluntarily adopted (by one or another party), whereas others are not. With a little practice, one can adopt, at will, either perceptual stance with respect to the Necker cube or Gestalt figures. Similarly, one can (with, presumably, a bit *more* practice) adopt either the Carnapian or the Lezniewskian stance with respect to inquiries concerning sets of objects. One can not, however, *choose* to organize one's world in the way that bats do or in the framework of the extraterrestrial. Nor does one *choose* to organize one's world "human-style". Biological and psychological facts simply determine much, probably most, of the facts about how we organize our experience of the world.<sup>5</sup> It may be the involuntariness of much of what we might call the human-framework that prompts Davidson to reject the possibility of framework diversity:

The second metaphor [Kuhn's suggestion that scientists operating in different scientific traditions "live in different worlds"] suggests instead a dualism of quite a different sort, a dualism of total scheme (or language) and uninterpreted content. (1973/74: p. 70 - brackets mine)

I want to urge that this second dualism of scheme and content, of organizing system and something waiting to be organized, cannot be made intelligible and defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. (p. 72)

How about the other kind of object, experience? Can we think of a language organizing *it*? Much the same difficulties recur. The notion of organization applies only to pluralities. But whatever plurality we take experience to consist in—events like losing a button or stubbing a toe, having a sensation of warmth or hearing a oboe—we will have to individuate according to familiar principles. A language that organizes *such* entities must be a language very like our own. (p. 74)

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<sup>5</sup> Paul Churchland (1979), however, suggests that the human neural network is sufficiently plastic to allow for tremendous diversity in the ways that we perceive our environment. See also the subsequent debate between Fodor (1984) and Churchland (1988).

It appears that in his rejection of the scheme/content distinction, Davidson sees the way in which our experience is organized as being fixed already by facts external to our choices or cognitive efforts. That is, what we are presented with comes "pre-organized". Any language or conceptual scheme of which we can make sense, must, therefore, accord with organizational principles already implicit in our stream of experience. So, any scheme of which we can make sense (and Davidson argues that we have no reason to posit cognitively inaccessible frameworks - § 4.4) cannot be distinguishable from our own. This claim may be true enough for paradigmatic cases of environmental organization within the human framework such as simple visual perception. How our brain interprets the stimuli at our sensory periphery is, no doubt, largely fixed by biological facts about us. We cannot *choose* to or *learn* to see the world in the way that bats or snakes do, nor can we choose to step outside the organizational constraints imposed by facts about our psychology or our language. Within these parameters, however, there are still significant conceptual choices to be made (e.g. Gestalt figures, Carnapian/Lezniewskian systems of individuation, etc.). In focussing on constraints imposed by translatability into a familiar idiom, Davidson has ignored the possibility of conceptual diversity *internal* to our particular idiom - i.e. *internal* to the human conceptual framework (but more on that in § 4.3). The point to be made here is simply that conceptual frameworks (as I shall be using the term) come in both the voluntarily and the involuntarily adopted types. It is a mistake to claim the incoherence of conceptual diversity by fixing one's sites only upon involuntary features of our conceptual frameworks. In the next section, we will explore a debate in which two native speakers of English from the same period in history seem,

nonetheless, to have imposed different (each logically consistent) orderings upon a single given (in this case, a contrary-to-fact possibility). Even where many elements of our experience or cognition come "pre-organized," there is still room for diversity of ways of organizing the "pre-fab" elements of the world.

### Section Summary

The term "conceptual framework" (and its cousins) has been used in a variety of ways throughout the history of philosophy, but a common theme seems to be that it is used to designate some kind of a system of imposing order upon some object of inquiry. Conceptual diversity should, therefore, be understood as a diversity in categorical or organizational systems. If it is to impose order, a conceptual framework must be logically consistent. Diversity of such systems can only be made sense of relative to some matter of inquiry or another, in much the same way that questions of similarity can only be made sense of relative to some parameter or another. We should therefore adopt a pseudo-Wittgensteinian line concerning conceptual diversity. In some contexts, conceptual diversity will be a function of involuntary features of one's biology, psychology, language, etc., whereas in other contexts, diversity may result from the voluntary adoption of one perspective or organizational method as opposed to another. Conceptual frameworks come in both the voluntarily and involuntarily adopted varieties.

## 4.2 Two Perspectives On The Black Counterexample

We need not look terribly hard to find ontological disputes that (at least arguably) hinge on conceptual diversity. Nor need we search the annals of distant philosophical history as though such difficulties were archaic matters long since disposed of by perspicuous modern analytic philosophy. What follows is a thumbnail sketch of a (fairly) contemporary debate regarding the legitimacy of Leibniz' principle of the identity of indiscernibles. I will first present the dispute, and will then attempt to make the case that its only acceptable resolution lies in the acceptance of a diversity of conceptual frameworks employed by the respective disputants.

### 4.2a The Principle Violated

Max Black presents a dialogue between characters A and B wherein A defends the principle of the identity of indiscernibles against attacks levelled at it by B. The dialogues' *raison d'etre* is the articulation, by B, of the following counterfactual possibility as an attempted counterexample to the principle that it is logically impossible (the strong version of the "Leibnizian" principle - which Leibniz may or may not have himself held)<sup>6</sup> that any two, distinct particulars could share exactly the same set of intrinsic, extrinsic, relational and modal properties:

Isn't it logically possible that the universe should have contained nothing but two exactly similar spheres? We might suppose that each was made of chemically pure iron, had a diameter of one mile, that they had the same temperature, colour, and so on, and that

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<sup>6</sup> Whether Leibniz' Principle of the Identity of Indiscernibles should be interpreted in its "strong" form (as holding necessarily) or in some other weaker form has been discussed in Bahlul (1988/89, 1992), and in French (1989). Reasons for thinking that the strong version is false are discussed the pieces by Bahlul and French just mentioned and also in Cortes (1976).

nothing else existed. Then every quality and relational characteristic of the one would also be a property of the other. Now if what I am describing is logically possible, it is not impossible for two things to have all their properties in common. This seems to me to *refute* the Principle. (1952: p. 156)

and later:

*Each* will have the relational characteristic *being at a distance of two miles, say, from the center of a sphere one mile in diameter*, etc. And each will have the relational characteristic (if you want to call it that) of *being in the same place as itself*. The two are alike in this respect as in all others. (p. 157)

Black's interlocutor A, after a valiant struggle, is reduced to the sort of feeble response reserved for the philosopher who has been forced from the trenches and stands with her back against the cold wall of intuition:

All the same I am not convinced. (p. 163)

To which B responds with, perhaps, one of the kinder of the available replies:

Well, then, you ought to be. (p. 163)

Thus the attack on the principle of the identity of indiscernibles is completed. With the presentation of a perfectly symmetrical world of exactly two particulars that share exactly the same intrinsic, extrinsic, and modal properties, Black seems to have scuttled the strong version of Leibniz' Law. If it is logically possible (as it appears to be) that there exist a world inhabited solely by two exactly similar iron globes spatially separated from each other by some distance *d*, then, *a fortiori*, it would appear to be logically possible that there exist two, distinct particulars that share exactly the same set of properties and are thereby indiscernible one from the other. Hence, the principle of the identity of indiscernibles (in its strong form) is refuted. Or is it? Perhaps the interlocutor A from Black's dialogue has been too fainthearted in the principle's defense?

#### 4.2b The Principle Redeemed

In "The Identity Of Indiscernibles," Ian Hacking claims that "it is in vain to contemplate possible spatiotemporal worlds to refute or establish the identity of indiscernibles" (p. 249). According to Hacking, any purported counterexample to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, admits of some palatable redescription such that the principle is preserved. We are never, therefore, forced into abandoning the principle by virtue of contemplating proposed spatiotemporal possibilities. Hacking addresses his argument to Kant's attempt to refute the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, but he intends that his objection be generalizable to any such putative counterexample.

In the Amphiboly of Concepts of Reflection (Critique of Pure Reason, A263/B319-20), Kant offers an argument against the identity of indiscernibles that begins with the existence of two droplets of water on a pane of glass. He then proceeds, via abstraction, to conceptually eliminate all means of differentiating one droplet from the other until there remains a universe with nothing but exactly two indistinguishable particulars. Since Kant's proposed process of abstraction seems to be conceptually unproblematic, it would appear to follow that the scenario thereby conceived is, itself, logically possible. Hacking's reply to the Kantian attack amounts to a redescription of the results of Kant's process of abstraction in the form of the Leibnizian relationalist's view of spatial relations:

On hearing of Kant's two droplets, L [an interlocutor who plays the part of Leibniz] can reply that the correct description of what one gets by abstraction is a world with one drop of water in it. List all the true propositions, expressed in purely general terms, that occur in K's description, omitting the question-begging "There are two drops." Every one of

these propositions, asserts L, occurs in the description of my one-drop universe, which is, therefore, a complete description of what there is. (1975: p. 251 - brackets mine)

All then that is given in Kant's description of the "two droplet" world, may be redescribed, without loss of any detail (save the "twoness" of droplets - which is precisely the feature at issue) as a world in which the initial "twoness" of the drops found in the actual world has been lost in the process of "abstraction". We no longer have need of *two* drops in a "complete description of what there is". Hacking's closing remarks indicate that he believes that he has established the futility of any resort to possible spatiotemporal totalities as an attempt to resolve the debate over the identity of indiscernibles:

Whatever God might create, we are clever enough to describe it in such a way that the identity of indiscernibles is preserved. This is a fact not about God but about description, space, time, and the laws that we ascribe to nature. (pp. 255-6)

Though Hacking does not directly confront the Black counterexample, the matter is nicely addressed on his behalf by Robert Adams. Adams adopts a Hackingesque stance with respect to Black's dispersal argument (i.e. the globes are spatially separated and, therefore, distinct), and adeptly constructs an alternative description of the counterexample such that the principle of the identity of indiscernibles is not violated:

The most that God could create of the world imagined by Black is a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q. This possible reality can be described as two globes in Euclidean space, or as a single globe in a non-Euclidean space so tightly curved that the globe can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from itself. But the difference between these descriptions represents no difference in the way things could really be. (1979: p. 15)

The redescription provides us with a way of understanding an object's being "spatially separated" from itself. Adams, a proponent of "primitive thisness" - a modern-day

version of Scotus' *haecceity* - then proceeds to attack the Hackingesque redescription that he has generated. Before embarking on an investigation of the success of that attack, let us be certain that we are quite clear about the point that Hacking intended to make and the redescription by way of which Adams attempts to apply it to Black's example.

All of the relevant facts of Black's counterexample that admit equally of either Black's description or Hacking's we may refer to as the *framework-invariant* ("invariant" for short) facts. This is not to suggest that such facts are independent of any system whatever of ordering, or otherwise parsing the scenario, but merely that they are equally amenable to either Black's or Hacking's scheme of describing the possibility in question. In the proposed counterexample, the "invariant" facts are indicated by "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q." Whether the Black counterexample is to be described as a case of distinct, spatially dispersed indiscernible globes in Euclidean space or as a world with a lone globe embedded in a region of curved spatiotemporal geometry is the result of the arbitrary adoption of one set of descriptive principles as opposed to another. That is, there is no description-independent fact of the matter as to the number of iron globes in Black's counterexample, and no logical or metaphysical scruple that forces us to choose one description of that possibility as opposed to the other (none, that is, which does not beg the question against either Black or Hacking). There is no description-independent fact of the matter as to whether or not this and similar counterfactual offerings present violations of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles.<sup>7</sup>

#### 4.2c Adams' Response

Adams complains that the Hackingesque paradigm does no more than present an alternative possible world in which the identity of indiscernibles is preserved. This alternative possibility, however, does not demonstrate any incoherence or ambiguity in Black's counterexample as described. So long as Black's description of the case stands, the conceivability of non-identical indiscernibles remains fortified by the counterexample as proposed - alternative possible worlds notwithstanding:

...if it is a primitive feature of a possible reality that an iron globe such as Black describes can be reached by traveling some distance in one direction on a *Euclidean* straight line from an exactly similar globe, then non-identical indiscernibles are possible in reality and not just in description. (pp. 15-6)

Adam's point is that we can coherently imagine a possible world such as Black describes and simply stipulate that the possible world under consideration is Euclidean or "flat" in its spatiotemporal geometry. Hacking's description of the "curved" world would not provide us with a counterexample to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, true - but what has that to do with the *given* counterexample? Hacking's attempt to "redescribe" Black's world has resulted in nothing more than a description of a distinct possible world - one with a single globe in curved space. This should not be confused with the possibility described by Black. The differences between Black's and Hacking's respective descriptions - two globes as opposed to one, and Euclidean space as opposed to "curved" space - amount to differences with respect to worlds described.

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<sup>7</sup> Black notes that a similar case against the principle of the identity of indiscernibles could be made with respect to a perfectly symmetrical spatiotemporal possibility with any number of entities in it: "I can easily provide for three or any number of things without changing the force of my counter-example. The important thing, for my purpose, was that the configuration of two spheres was symmetrical. So long as we preserve this feature of the imaginary universe, we can now allow any number of objects to be found in it." (p. 160)

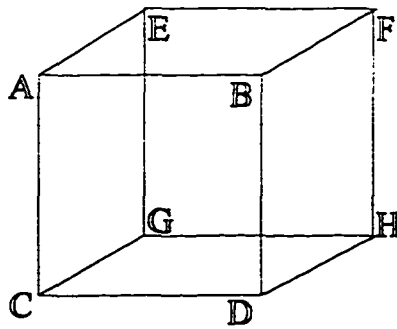
#### 4.2d The Role of Conceptual Frameworks

It appears however, to be open to the objector on Hacking's behalf to claim that the stipulation as to spatiotemporal geometry amounts to no more than a stipulation that Black's *description* of the counterexample be operative as opposed to Hacking's. That is, it appears that Adams has offered no reason for the spatiotemporal geometry of his counterfactual state of affairs to be understood as an ontological primitive or an *inherent* feature of the possibility described as opposed to a feature of the possibility as *described* in a particular way. We do not have a new possible world on our hands as a result of the Hacking redescription of the Black counterexample, we have merely been offered an alternative way of parsing or conceptualizing a world in which there is "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q." Insistence to the effect that there is one possibility involving a spatiotemporally flat world and the another involving a curved world, or that there is one possibility involving a world that contains exactly two objects and the another involving a world that contains exactly one, is nothing more than insistence upon Black's account of the counterexample as having some inherent spatiotemporal geometry and number of entities. We have, however, no principled reason for choosing one set of "inherent" features over the other.

If, in the case described, the number of objects in the world is taken to be a primitive feature of the possibility offered - which fixes spatiotemporal geometry - then we have the counterexample that Black intended. But the locution, "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight

line from a globe of iron having qualities Q," admits equally of interpretation from the perspectives adopted either by Black or by Hacking - but, obviously, not from both at once. That is, only *internal* to either the Hacking description or the Black description (or some other candidate - if there are any) does it make sense to attempt to determine the number of objects in the counterexample. There are good reasons to take the latter stance (Hacking's) to be the proper understanding of counterfactuals such as Black's (as well as Kant's "two"-droplet case). What Black thinks of as a counterfactual *world* is really just a version of how the possibility offered can be *described* - it is a *world-version*.

A useful parallel may be drawn between the case here under consideration and simpler cases of a similar nature, for example, those involving a Gestalt switch or shift in perspective. Consider the duck-rabbit figure from Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* (p. 194), or other well-known Gestalt figures, such as the profiles-chalice, that are perceived as one picture from some perspective  $P_i$ , but as a different picture from some different perspective  $P_j$ . In each such case, it is possible to perceive a figure with one fixed set of characteristics (e.g. a duck) or a figure with an entirely different set of characteristics (a rabbit), but it is quite impossible to see both at once. If asked, "Well, which is it - a duck or a rabbit?" one may offer the perfectly responsible answer, "It depends on how you look at it." Both the duck-figure and the rabbit-figure are on the page - sharing space as it were - but neither emerges as "the thing depicted" until some observational perspective or another is adopted. Note that in such cases it would be incorrect to answer the question, "Which is it?" with, "Both." Consider the question, "Which is the front face of this Necker cube?"



Does it make any sense to say that *both* ABCD and EFGH are the "front" face? Until some perspective or other is specified, one can do no better than to note the absence of a well-formed question and offer responses that are relativized to one perspective or another. One description of the cube gives us ABCD as the front whereas another description gives EFGH. Both descriptions, however, are descriptions of *one and the same* cube.

As anti-realists in the constructivist camp would hasten to point out, there is no "neutral" perspective from which to see such figures as they "really are" - independent of any particular perspective. In his *Ways Of Worldmaking*, Nelson Goodman drives home the same sort of point about frames of reference (themselves often constitutive, on my view, of conceptual frameworks):

Consider, to begin with, the statements "The sun always moves" and "The sun never moves" which, though equally true, are at odds with each other. Shall we say, then, that they describe different worlds, and indeed that there are as many different worlds as there are such mutually exclusive truths? Rather, we are inclined to regard the two strings of words not as complete statements with truth-values of their own but as elliptical for some such statements as "Under frame of reference A, the sun always moves" and "Under frame of reference B, the sun never moves"—statements that may both be true of the same world

Frames of reference, though, seem to belong less to what is described than to systems of description: and each of the two statements relates what is described to such a system. If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more

frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say? We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. (1978: pp. 2-3)

Similarly, there appears to be no neutral cognitive ground upon which to stand in order to achieve the "real" or framework-independent account of the ontology of spatiotemporal possibilities such as the Black counterexample.

The answer to the question, "How many globes of iron are there in the counterexample?" (as well as the correlative question, "Is the principle of the identity of indiscernibles violated in the counterexample?") depends upon one's adoption of a particular way of parsing or conceptualizing spatiotemporal possibilities. Black and Hacking have adopted different such ways of parsing or conceptualizing the possibility in question. That is, they have adopted different *conceptual frameworks* (see § 4.1). Each has brought a different conceptual framework to bear upon the spatiotemporal possibility indicated by the locution regarding the world consisting of "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q." Black's counterexample is inconclusive because it does not give us a world in which there are non-identical indiscernibles, but merely a world that can be described as having non-identical indiscernibles. It can also be described so that it does not.

Black and Hacking have each brought a different conceptual framework to bear upon one and the same *ontological array* (see § 4.4). The conceptual frameworks of Black and Hacking are but two of, perhaps, indefinitely many ways of parsing the ontological array in question - but more on that matter will follow later (as will more on

"ontological arrays"). Before moving on to such business, however, a number of interesting points may be made regarding the *difference* in conceptual framework between Black and Hacking, and the *sameness* of the subject matter with which they are, in the above instance, concerned - that is, the sameness of the ontological array in question.

First there is the matter of the alleged conceptual diversity accounting for Black's and Hacking's respective parsings of the counterexample offered by Black. Some philosophers have worried that we might not be able to make sense out of a "debate" between users of different conceptual frameworks. Still others make the logically prior claim that we can not even make sense out of different conceptual frameworks. Chris Swoyer is a member of the first species of sceptic concerning the applicability of conceptual relativity arguments and Donald Davidson is a member of the latter. Let us take a look at the latter position first.

### Section Summary

Max Black's attempted counterexample to Leibniz' principle of the identity of indiscernibles admits of redescription whereby the possibility in question is depicted as a "lone-globe" universe with curved space as opposed to a "twin-globe" universe with flat space. To stipulate that the possibility in question is a world with Euclidean spatiotemporal geometry is to do no more than to insist upon the adoption of one conceptual framework as opposed to another. To do so is arbitrary - there is nothing about the given scenario that forces one interpretation as opposed to the other. Facts as to the number of globes involved in the counterexample (and correlative facts about the

status of Leibniz' Law) are relativized to world-versions associated with one conceptual framework or another. This sort of relativization of fact is intended to generalize to other (though perhaps not *all* - see § 4.7) cases.

#### 4.3 Davidson's Necessary Condition For Conceptual Diversity

Donald Davidson insists that any diversity of conceptual schemes (if we could make sense of the notion of such things) requires a diversity of languages. The argument for this particularly intimate association of conceptual schemes and languages is startlingly brief, though a further investigation of Davidsonian semantics brings out its motivation more clearly:

We may accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme. The relation may be supposed to be this: if conceptual schemes differ, so do languages. But speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into the other. Studying the criteria of translation is therefore a way of focussing on criteria of identity for conceptual schemes. If conceptual schemes aren't associated with languages in this way, the original problem is needlessly doubled, for then we would have to imagine the mind, with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with *its* organizing structure. Under the circumstances we would certainly want to ask who is to be master. (1973/74: p. 67)

So, either our native language does the job of ordering and categorizing the elements of our experience, or the mind must be supposed to perform this task with its *own* language (and its attendant conceptual framework). Our dilemma (making sense of conceptual diversity) is just magnified by the second of these possibilities (i.e. we just have to deal with another language and another set of resources for organizing data). Since it is unwise to double one's trouble while making no progress toward one's goal, Davidson recommends the straightforward association mentioned above. The Black/Hacking debate from § 4.2, however, may provide us with a counterinstance to Davidson's account

of the relationship between conceptual schemes and languages. It seems that we may have a case in which conceptual schemes diverge while language is held constant. Before making that argument, though, I will provide a thumbnail sketch of the remainder of Davidson's argument against conceptual diversity.

With the aforementioned association of conceptual schemes and languages in hand, Davidson famously contends that only some degree (partial or complete) of failure of intertranslatability could serve as a criterion for distinctness of conceptual schemes employed by users of diverse languages. That is, only if language  $L_i$  fails of translatability into  $L_j$  or vice-versa can  $L_i$  and  $L_j$  (or users thereof) be coherently said to differ with respect to conceptual scheme. Davidson makes the fairly uncontroversial point that:

Languages that have evolved in distant times or places may differ extensively in their resources for dealing with one or another range of phenomena. What comes easily in one language may come hard in another, and this difference may echo significant dissimilarities in style and value. (1973/74: p. 67)

but then notes that an assortment of philosophers and linguists from Quine to Whorf have read "dramatic incomparability" (p. 67) of organizational method and conceptual standpoint into dissimilarities between languages. But surely, claims Davidson, if users of distinct languages can translate each other's utterances and inscriptions each into her own home language so as to grasp the meaning of the foreign tongue, then their respective "conceptual standpoints" or methods for organizing or interpreting experience can not be dramatically incomparable. Only when translation breaks down are we presented with the coherent possibility that there exists some difference in conceptual framework between users of  $L_i$  and  $L_j$ . Failure of intertranslatability is, therefore, a

necessary condition for diversity of conceptual frameworks.

Dorit Bar-On has perspicuously summarized the remainder of the argument against conceptual diversity as follows:

(P) Failures of intertranslatability are criterial of genuine divergence of conceptual schemes.

But

(Q) There can be no failures of intertranslatability.

So,

(C) There can be no genuine divergence of conceptual schemes. (1994: p. 150)

Davidson makes the case that (Q) there could not *be* a failure of intertranslatability, by arguing that languagehood is a *function of* translatability into familiar idiom, and one could never possess evidence of such a failure - or, at least, no evidence that is distinguishable from evidence that the object of one's interpretive attempts lacks language altogether (the argument for this criterion of languagehood is too involved to pursue here, and is, at best, tangential to present purposes, but it has received extensive treatment elsewhere - e.g. Glymour (1982), Henderson (1994), Devitt (1984)). Therefore, he concludes that the very idea of differing conceptual schemes is incoherent. Let us, however, focus on Davidson's claim that some degree of failure of intertranslatability between two languages must accompany any divergence of conceptual framework.

The idea seems to be something like this: a conceptual scheme is (roughly) just a way of parsing, ordering or otherwise organizing one's experience. This task is a function of language - or, at least, facts about one's language are intimately bound to the nature of one's conceptual framework. Thus, if users of  $L_i$  and  $L_j$  are able to effectively interpret each other's language, they cannot be parsing, ordering or otherwise organizing their experiences according to dramatically divergent organizational principles or in

dramatically different ways. Thus, failure of intertranslatability is a *criterion* of conceptual framework diversity as opposed to being merely *evidence* for it.

A variety of philosophers have attacked the Davidsonian claim that there could not be uninterpretable languages (i.e. the claim that interpretability into a familiar idiom is criterial of languagehood). The attack on translatability as criterial of languagehood is typically expanded into an attack on (Q). Davidson's position is most frequently confronted by this particular avenue of attack. Those inclined toward attacking (Q) typically bend their efforts on providing examples wherein failures of intertranslatability warrant an inference to diversity of conceptual frameworks. Their strategy has typically involved providing fairly exotic or recondite counterexamples in which users of distinct and non-intertranslatable languages appear, thereby, to be operating within different conceptual frameworks.

David Henderson (1994), for example, provides us with examples involving the Zande concepts of *mangu* and *ngua* which defy "strict" translation but admit of "reconstructive" translation. "Mangu" denotes a concept - "an inherited substance in the bodies of certain persons enabling them to cause injury to others by thinking ill of the harmed person" (p. 176) - for which we have no single lexical correlate in English. It cannot, therefore, be "strictly" translated into English, but it is possible to systematically reconstruct portions of the Zande metaphysics in English so as to eventually generate a reconstruction of the proper usage of the word "mangu" (i.e. a "reconstructive" translation). Henderson then goes on to argue that we can possess evidence of both strict translation failure and of the presence of an alien conceptual framework in virtue of our

reconstructive success in interpreting the alien language.

While there is merit in Henderson's argument and good reasons to suppose that the position that he and like-minded philosophers occupy (as against Davidson's) is the correct one, I fear that he has taken us a conceptual distance that we need not have travelled to reach the rejection of Davidson's conclusion (C). His distinction between "strict" and "reconstructive" translation, while interesting and probably useful in a range of contexts (including arguments against (Q)), seems to be more than is required to make the point that there can be cases of conceptual divergence. I believe that we can make sense of the notion of conceptual diversity in cases involving no tongues more exotic than our own English and no failure of translatability at all. That is, I believe that there are good reasons to reject (P) - as well as (Q) for which philosophers such as Henderson and Bar-On have made an ample case. Let us consider the opposing perspectives of Black and Hacking in the aforementioned debate about the description of Black's proffered counterexample to the principle of the identity of indiscernibles.

Clearly, there is no failure of translatability (complete, partial, or otherwise) between Black's language and the Hackingesque language of Robert Adams - in fact, the disputants seem fairly easily understood each from the other's vantage point - as the two are writing in the same language and epoch. Yet it would appear that the two have parsed the given counterfactual possibility in substantially different ways according, perhaps, to different principles of ontological primacy or fundamentality. Black's version takes physical objects to be primitive features of the spatiotemporal possibility and takes facts about the number of such objects to be similarly primitive. Adams' version

(speaking in Hacking's voice) relegates facts about number, individuation, etc., to the domain internal to a perspective. The respective *languages* of number and of individuation, etc., appear to be the same for both versions. Both agree that if it is stipulated that spatiotemporal geometry is Euclidean, then the world described contains two globes and if sufficiently curved, then only one. Both agree about the meaning of terms such as "internal qualities", "distance", "diameter", "globe", "iron", etc. The only possible divergence between the two comes in terms of the usage of "description".

Adams takes the counterfactual possibility to "come complete" with fixed spatiotemporal geometry and some fixed totality of physical objects. Hacking, on the other hand deems such things to be matters of description. For Hacking, the counterexample presented is something that admits equally of either description offered. There is no fact of the matter about spatiotemporal geometry until one descriptive system or another is adopted. For Hacking, the possible world in its pure or "frame-invariant" (§ 4.2) form just is what I shall refer to as the counterfactual *ontological array*, and it may be described or conceptualized in a number of ways (but more on that in § 4.4).

Even with this divergence of meaning in mind, the Black/Adams line admits of no failure of translatability or interpretability from the Hacking perspective, nor does the Hacking account of the matter defy understanding from the Black/Adams conceptual standpoint. Davidson, however, has claimed that "The failure of intertranslatability is a necessary condition for difference of conceptual schemes" (p. 72). Since we appear to have a case in which conceptual schemes (frameworks) diverge but the language in which the one description is couched translates very nicely into the language of the other

(in fact, they are *the same* language), we must explore the possibilities that: 1) Davidson is mistaken and failure of intertranslatability is not a necessary condition for difference of conceptual schemes (i.e. (P) is false), or 2) Black/Adams and Hacking (appearances to the contrary) are not really operating with different conceptual schemes or frameworks.

From our earlier foray into the literature on the subject (§ 4.1) - including excerpts from Davidson himself - we have distilled some of the central features of conceptual frameworks. They are ways of ordering, categorization, organization, individuation and systematization. If conceptual frameworks are different ways of categorizing, ordering or otherwise "slicing up" the "passing scene," and if the "passing scene" in the case of the Black counterexample is given by the neutral (as between Black and Hacking) and invariant *ontological array* suggested by, "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q," then it would appear that Black and Hacking are indeed using different conceptual frameworks. That is, they are conceptualizing from different standpoints, and they are doing so in, at worst, intertranslatable languages and, at best, precisely the same language. There is little doubt that the two have organized the object of inquiry suggested by "A globe of iron, etc," in very different ways. After all, an entirely different world-version is generated by the imposition of order in accordance with the one conceptual scheme as opposed to that generated by the imposition of order in accordance with the other. Dorit Bar-On also suggests the possibility of homolingual conceptual diversity in virtue of divergence of fundamental principles of organization or ontological fundamentality:

We might consider as possible examples the cases of English-speaking flat-earthers, or Berkeleyan idealists. Here we have people who, by ordinary linguistic standards, speak *our* language, so no problem of intertranslatability should arise. Yet there seem to be grounds for claiming that they differ from us conceptually, at least to the extent that they have fundamentally different beliefs from us on basic matters. On the face of it, it seems that the only way to insist that, appearances to the contrary, we are faced with non-intertranslatable languages in these cases is tacitly - and question-beggingly - to make (apparent) conceptual difference a sufficient condition for non-intertranslatability. (1994: p. 156)

Davidson purports to understand claims of conceptual diversity as claims regarding "ways of organizing experience" or the "passing scene". Furthermore, if Davidson is attacking some more "robust" sense of conceptual scheme; one necessarily involving different languages or great cultural divides, then he would seem to be ignoring a range of putative cases of conceptual diversity from within the bounds of a single language, culture, and period in history. Given that members of a single linguistic community (even where "sameness" is fairly narrowly construed) seem, in some cases, to organize the same data in very different ways, it would appear that Davidson's claim is simply too strong. Failure of intertranslatability is *not* a necessary condition for conceptual diversity.

### Section Summary

Davidson claims that we can make no sense of conceptual diversity (nor, therefore, of "sameness" of conceptual scheme) because failure of intertranslatability is necessary for any such diversity, and failure of intertranslatability between our language and another is incoherent (translatability into the home language is *critical* of languagehood). It may be (and probably is) possible to punch holes in the Davidsonian position by resort to exotic languages or distant epochs, but no such resort is necessary. The Black/Hacking debate, as well as similarly "mundane" cases of conceptual

divergence among linguistically homogeneous individuals or groups, seems to undermine Davidson's claim to the necessity of some failure of intertranslatability. In fact, given the "loose," pseudo-Wittgensteinian account of conceptual frameworks offered in § 4.1, we should expect cases of homolingual conceptual diversity to be available in abundance.

#### 4.4 An Alleged Incoherence In The Relativization Of Truth To Conceptual Frameworks

Chris Swoyer argues that there exists a tension between two relativistic motifs regarding truth, both of which are often deployed simultaneously by constructivists and other relativistic theorists of truth. Each motif appears equally necessary to motivate the general doctrine that truth is relative to some conceptual framework or other. The tension exists between: 1) the assertion that one and the same proposition (utterance, statement or whatever one takes to be the bearer of truth) can be true relative to one conceptual framework while false relative to another, and 2) the constructivistic impulse to correlate different conceptual frameworks with different worlds or world-versions. That is, if conceptual frameworks deal literally with different worlds (or versions), then a proposition  $P_i$  in conceptual framework  $C_i$  cannot have the same meaning as its cognate proposition  $P_j$  in conceptual framework  $C_j$ . The meanings of  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  can not be the same because they are about states of affairs in numerically distinct worlds (or versions). That is, the content of  $P_i$  cannot be the same as the content of  $P_j$ , as the constituent parts of  $P_i$  do not refer to the same individuals, classes, properties, relationships, etc., as do the constituent parts of  $P_j$ . If, however,  $C_i$  and  $C_j$  are correlated with one and the same world, then it is unclear how  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  could possibly differ in truth value if each makes the same

claim about one and the same state of affairs. If  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  make the same claim about the same individuals, classes, properties, relationships, etc., then it would appear to be impossible that  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  fail to share truth value. Swoyer articulates the problem in his "True For":

...a difficulty arises in trying to maintain simultaneously that two frameworks are sufficiently different for one thing to be true in one while false in the other *and* that they are sufficiently alike to share something which could thus vary in truth value. For if the frameworks are radically different, they deal with different worlds and have little subject matter in common. As we imagine one or both evolving to become more like the other, we can begin to make more sense of their containing resources for expressing the same thing, but less sense of their assigning it different truth values. (1982: p. 105)

The view that there exists such a tension is not peculiar to one philosopher. It is fairly common in the literature regarding conceptual frameworks, relativism, realism, etc.

Donald Davidson (1973/74) cites various cases in which relativists of one stripe or another seem to fall victim to the sort of difficulty that Swoyer indicates. He pokes fun at Whorf's attempt to explain the intranslatability of Hopi into English by offering English translations of the utterly alien Hopi metaphysics. He also chides Kuhn's post-revolutionary attempts to demonstrate the cognitive inaccessability of pre-revolutionary paradigms (p. 67). All such endeavors are, according to Davidson, misguided attempts to demonstrate that which is indemonstrable - not because of the nature of the attempted demonstrations, but because of a conflict between two principles that are purported to be simultaneously demonstrated. The first is that truth is relative to conceptual frameworks, and the second is that different conceptual frameworks generate different worlds or deal with distinct models of reality:

The dominant metaphor of conceptual relativism, that of differing points of view, seems to betray an underlying paradox. Different points of view make sense, but only if there is a common coordinate system on which to plot them; yet the existence of a common

system belies the claim of dramatic incomparability. (1973/74: p. 67)

This difficulty with relativism (especially among constructivists such as Goodman and Putnam in his "renegade" later metaphysics)<sup>8</sup> has been noted by a range of philosophers in the realist camp (e.g. Wolterstorff (1987), Van Inwagen (1993), Devitt (1984)). The latter of these three notes this alleged problem for theories presented by Kuhn and others whom he has dubbed "radical philosophers of science":

The Constructivism of the radicals has made it difficult for them to explain such phenomena of scientific life as conflict, confirmation, disconfirmation, and progress. I doubt whether they can. To take just one example, consider Kuhn's view of progress. It is alleged to consist in increasing success at puzzle solving. But how can Kuhn allow the constancy of puzzles through revolutions that this view seems to require? (1984: p. 158)

Do constructivists, and other relativists, have an insoluble problem on their hands?

Should that family of doctrines be rejected as incoherent on these grounds? I have argued earlier (chapter II) that it should be rejected, but not because of the alleged difficulty cited by Swoyer, Davidson, and others. What I have termed an *ontological array* is, I shall argue, sufficiently malleable to allow for a proposition about it to be true relative to one framework and false relative to another. It is also sufficiently contentful to allow that each such conceptual framework correlates to or generates some particular distinct parsing of it (i.e. some world-version) when the two are "coupled". How can this seemingly paradoxical role be served by one and the same thing? An explanation by reference to Black's counterexample will be especially useful for this purpose as it is, on either of the aforementioned interpretations, fairly simple and homogeneous (i.e. it has only a handful of properties and relations which, in greater numbers, might complicate

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<sup>8</sup> The appellation comes from Devitt (1984), chapter 12.

matters tremendously).

Robert Adams has very neatly set out a description of what I intend the term "ontological array" to refer to in the context of Black's counterexample. The ontological array for that possibility may be depicted as "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having internal qualities Q." No doubt, this same array admits of depiction in other terms. One might instead talk about swarms of molecules, spatiotemporal slices, relations between point-masses, or indefinitely many other descriptive devices. The important point, however, is that any such description, if it is to serve us as an accurate and useful depiction of the Black counterexample, must admit of redescription as, or translation into the "globe-of-iron" idiom deployed by Adams if we are to be able to understand it to be a depiction of one and the same ontological array as that about which the Black/Hacking debate is concerned. This claim should be understood primarily as an epistemic one. Though alternative depictions to which we lack cognitive access (e.g. because embedded in an extraterrestrially advanced physical theory) may be constructed, we will not *understand* or *recognize* them to be depictions of the appropriate sort unless we have access to some means of translation from the alien idiom into our own.

It is also important to note that the nature of the world-version associated with any particular conceptual framework is constrained by the intrinsic structure of the array in question. That is, the conjunction of the given features of the array and the organizational principles of any particular conceptual framework, fixes some determinate set of features. Putnam makes the point about a perspective (framework) fixing a set of facts with respect

to inquiries concerning causal relationships:

Imagine that the escape valve on a pressure cooker sticks and the pressure cooker explodes. We say... 'The stuck valve caused the pressure cooker to explode'. We do not say 'The presence of  $\Delta$  caused the pressure cooker to explode', where  $\Delta$  is, say, an arbitrary irregularly shaped piece of the surface of the cooker, 0.1 cm. in area. Yet, in the physics of the explosion, the role played by the stuck valve is exactly the same as the role of  $\Delta$ : the absence of either would have permitted the steam to escape, bringing down the pressure and averting the explosion. (1987: pp. 37-38)

He then proceeds to explain that our identification of the stuck valve as "the cause" (as opposed to the presence of  $\Delta$  as "the cause") of the explosion is a function of a restriction of our "explanation space" to the alternatives: a) everything functioning as designed, or b) an explosion takes place. That is, it is a function of the adoption of our standard conceptual framework for inquiries concerning cause and effect relationships. Had we adopted the suggested alternative to our standard conceptual framework, we would have identified  $\Delta$  as the cause of the explosion. Whichever of the two frameworks we adopt, however, its resources must be adequate to describe and explain the explosion's taking place, and must (for this matter of inquiry) offer a coherent explanation for the explosion, consistent with our observations and in accordance with a coherent body of physical law.<sup>1</sup>

In the metaphysic that I am suggesting, the ontological array is that which admits of parsing in a number (potentially infinite) of different ways, in accordance with different conceptual frameworks, but nonetheless restricts the product of the coupling of any particular framework to it. In the aforementioned inquiry into the cause of the

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<sup>1</sup> It should be noted that a different matter of inquiry, one about whether or not an explosion took place, would not place the same constraints upon the viability of competing conceptual frameworks. Consider the case of a traveler whose future light-cone is exactly inverted with respect to ours (i.e. his future is our past). His conceptual framework is not constrained to describe or explain an explosion, because, from his frame of reference, none has taken place. He is, however, constrained to explain *his* observation of the instantaneous assemblage of widely dispersed particles into a boiler. He and another traveler in his frame of reference might disagree about "the cause" of *that* particular event.

exploding boiler, the ontological array is just (what "we" would describe as) the event of the boiler's explosion and the physical conditions antecedent to that event. The ontological array is what is *just* there irrespective of the adoption of either the one conceptual framework or the other. When that array is coupled to "our" *standard* conceptual framework, the stuck valve is appropriately identified as *the cause* of the explosion. Relative to some alternative conceptual framework (call it  $C_a$ ), it may well be appropriate to identify the presence of  $\Delta$  as *the cause* of the explosion.

For another example, the ontological array of Black's counterfactual possibility *must* be described, from Hacking's framework, as a *lone* globe in curved spacetime. The array does not admit of a plurality of globes (within the Hacking framework) as the various relations generated by that plurality would not comport with the intrinsic structure of the array. It imposes a restriction regarding the distance by which the globes are separated, in conjunction with the absence of any other entities in the world. It should also be noted, however, that any attempt to redescribe the array that fails of attempted translation into "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, etc..." leaves us no reason to take it to be a depiction of the ontological array that underpins the Black/Adams and the Hacking descriptions offered earlier. This is merely an *evidential* claim and should not be confused with a criterial claim of a Davidsonian order. There might, in fact, *be* an untranslatable alien language in which a description of Black's counterexample could be constructed, but we would never be able to possess evidence of good reason to *believe that it is* such a description. For example, an enormously intellectually and technologically advanced extraterrestrial might produce a redescription of Black's

counterfactual (e.g. in terms of deeply hidden features of space-time - à la a completed version of David Bohm's implicate order<sup>1</sup> - to which we mere humans have no access) that would be unrecognizable as such to us.

We have then the ontological array for Black's counterexample as described by Adams speaking for Hacking. Call this array  $A_{BC}$  (for Black counterexample). We have also competing descriptions of  $A_{BC}$  offered by users of conceptual frameworks  $C_B$  (Black) and  $C_H$  (Hacking) respectively. The claim of the Hackingsque relativist (the role briefly adopted by Adams) is that some proposition  $P_i$  (or whatever one takes truth-bearers to be ) is true relative to  $C_H$  and its cognate  $P_j$  is false relative to  $C_B$ . The Swoyer/Davidson/Devitt allegation is that  $P_j$  and  $P_i$  are either propositions that are about different things (and, therefore, have different meanings), or they are about the same things (and, therefore, have the same meaning). In the former case, the difference in truth value between  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  is a simple function of the fact that they mean different things and nothing interesting about relative truth follows. In the latter case, we can make no sense of  $P_i$  and  $P_j$  having different truth values. Consider, however, the following proposition:

$P_A$ : There is exactly one globe in the possibility described in Black's counterexample. Now substitute  $P_A$  for both  $P_i$  and  $P_j$ . Next, place  $P_A$  in Black's mouth and in Hacking's mouth (i.e. interpret it from  $C_B$  and then from  $C_H$ ).  $P_A$  is false relative to  $C_B$  and it is true relative to  $C_H$ . Yet, from either conceptual framework,  $P_A$  is about a possibility in which nothing exists other than "a globe of iron, having internal qualities  $Q$ , which can be

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<sup>1</sup> See: *The Ghost In The Atom*, P.C.W. Davies and J.R. Brown (eds.), Cambridge University press: 1986, pp. 118-134.

reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having internal qualities Q." That is,  $P_A$ , relative to  $C_B$ , is about precisely the same ontological array as is  $P_A$ , relative to  $C_H$ . Furthermore, it is only with respect to some  $C_i$  or another that it makes sense to attempt a determination of the truth value of  $P_A$ . On this one point, constructivists such as Goodman are correct (see Ch. 2 and § 4.2 of this chapter).

Just as we can not answer the question "Does the sun move or does it stand still?" until some frame of reference is specified, neither can we answer, "How many globes are there in Black's counterexample?" until some conceptual framework or another is specified. Until we are given some such specification, the best we can do is something like, "Well, according to Black's way of slicing things up there are two and according to Hacking's way there is only one." If we are then asked, "But which way is the correct way to 'slice things up'?" we can only shrug and respond, "That particular counterfactual ontological array admits equally of either way. We have no principled reason to choose one over the other." The fundamental features of reality, on the view proposed here, turn out to be (oddly enough) things like conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays. The facts *internal* to any particular framework's parsing of the particular array to which it is coupled (i.e. facts internal to a *world-version*), are *relativized to* the particular "coupling" in question. So far, the metaphysic herein described resembles all too closely that of the pernicious and villainous constructivist. Wherever are we to find the ontological bedrock required for sidestepping the major objections to constructivism and other forms of relativism? In other words, where's the realism in this "realism"?

### Section Summary

Swoyer alleges that we can make no sense out of different conceptual frameworks that deal with the same domain but assign different truth values to one and the same proposition about some part of their mutual domain. This same charge is echoed in the writings of other realistically-inclined philosophers. An *ontological array*, however, is pliant enough to ground relativizations of fact, truth, etc., to conceptual frameworks and yet still serve as a single centerpiece to which various frameworks are "coupled" or applied. That is, diverse conceptual frameworks can deal with one and the same ontological array but parse it into different world-versions or sets of facts. There is no incoherence in a proposition's being true relative to one conceptual framework (or its world-version), false relative to another, and, in each case, about numerically one and the same ontological array.

## Ch. V: Ontological Bedrock, Objections, and Replies

In this final chapter, I first argue that holistic realism is, indeed, a species of *realism* although a large component of it is the embracing of a variety of phenomenal relativism. Section 5.1 is devoted to making the case for the realism in holistic realism through consideration of the role of ontological arrays, conceptual frameworks, and world-versions insofar as each is relevant to the holistic realist's treatment of the aforementioned Black/Hacking debate. Similar cases of conceptual diversity are used to motivate the holistic realist's insistence upon the objectivity of these "fundamental features" of reality.

### 5.1 Holistic Realism And Objectivity

Holistic realism strikes ontological bedrock in its positing of ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks as objective, mind-independent features of reality. Together (in their "coupling"), the two fix determinate, objective sets of facts or *world-versions*. This is the *realism* in holistic realism. If we take ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks to be part of the "fabric" of the universe, we avoid the incoherence of full-blown relativism and its metaphysical godchild, constructivism. The mind-independence and invariance of arrays and frameworks constitutes the objectivity in which the relativization of facts to world versions is grounded. An example may help to illustrate the sense in which ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks are objectively "out there". Let us look back at Black's attempted counterexample to Leibniz' principle of the

identity of indiscernibles.

Once we choose either Black's or Hacking's account of the possibility in question (i.e. once we adopt one conceptual framework or the other), a set of determinate facts about the counterexample crystallizes. We get a particular *parsing* of the possibility under consideration - a *world-version*. If, for example, we adopt  $C_B$  and couple it to  $A_{BC}$  (i.e. parse  $A_{BC}$  in accordance with the organizational principles of  $C_B$ ), we get a world in which there are exactly two iron globes in Euclidean spacetime. If, on the other hand, we couple  $C_H$  to  $A_{BC}$ , we get a world in which there is exactly one iron globe in a tightly curved spacetime. Perhaps if we couple  $C_A$  (for Alpha Centurian) to  $A_{BC}$ , we will get a radically different parsing of the spatiotemporal possibility in question - perhaps we will not even recognize it as being about the same ontological array (due, perhaps, to epistemic limitations on our part). We are not, however, at liberty to generate *any* arbitrary parsing of  $A_{BC}$  that we wish simply by coupling some  $C_i$  or other to it. That is, the intrinsic structure of  $A_{BC}$ , though it admits of various parsings, does not admit of simply any parsing whatever - anymore than the duck-rabbit figure admits of being viewed as (say) a badger from some perspective. There appears to be, for example, no way of parsing  $A_{BC}$  such that the resulting world-version has three cubes and a cylinder in it.

So, an Alpha Centurian equipped with an adequate translation manual from English into her (its?) home language and reading the relevant papers by Black, Hacking, and Adams might well conceptualize a parsing of Black's counterfactual that is very different from any of those offered by the terrestrial authors. That is, the Alpha

Centurian's world-version might be very different than either Black's or Hacking's. Once the Alpha Centurian adopts (or is embedded in) a conceptual framework, however, the resulting world-version is an objective and inevitable consequence of the organizational principles of that framework as coupled to the particular ontological array in question. The array and some particular framework, taken jointly, fix a set of facts or a world-version, and no effort on the part of cognizers can in any way alter that version - though there are numerous cases in which the epistemic efforts of cognizers play a causal role in the *adoption* of a framework and subsequent emergence of a particular world-version (§ 4.1). The ontological array constrains world-versions in something like the way that Kant's noumena are supposed to constrain our empirical world. That is, the intrinsic structure of the array dictates the world-version that emerges from its coupling to any particular framework. It is the absence of any mechanism for constraint that plagues the "worldmakers" (e.g. Goodman, Putnam, Kuhn, Whorf, et al.). This difficulty is amply explicated by a number of philosophers in the realist camp (see Devitt (1984), Wolterstorff (1987), Scheffler (1980), and Chapter II of this dissertation). In § 5.2 of this work, I will explore the relationship between holistic realism and the Kantian legacy of constructivism.

For now, it is important to notice that the ontological array, and the various parsings or world-versions of which it admits, are quite independent of any facts about the mental states or activities of agents. That is, the ontological array for any given matter of inquiry or investigation is a fixed, objective entity whose nature is entirely independent of our epistemic capacities. It is precisely at this point that the metaphysical

view here proposed diverges from that of constructivists such as Goodman or Putnam. Goodman complains against the metaphysical realist that the structure of our world (or worlds) is something that *we impose* and not something found. His complaint is intended to register against *any* alleged mind-independent structure, and he makes his case explicitly against *temporal* structure:

All measurement, furthermore, is based upon order. Indeed, only through suitable arrangements and groupings can we handle vast quantities of material perceptually or cognitively. Gombrich discusses the decimal periodization of historical time into decades, centuries, and millennia. Daily time is marked off into twenty-four hours, and each of these into sixty minutes of sixty seconds each. Whatever else may be said of these modes of organization, they are not 'found in the world' but *built into a world*. Ordering, as well as composition and decomposition and weighting of wholes and kinds, participates in worldmaking. (1978: pp. 13-14)

What Goodman fails to notice is that while it is true that "we" impose a particular system of temporal ordering upon events in our world, the data with which we find ourselves presented already *admitted of* parsing by that particular organizational system (as well as indefinitely many others).<sup>1</sup>

Our world-version (regarding temporal facts) is one of the many possibilities from which to choose. So it is true that we *choose* to slice time up in some particular way, but this choice is available to us only because of the intrinsic structure of the ontological array to which the conceptual framework that we are using is coupled. We find ourselves in a world in which events happen. Those events and the things involved in them are individuated in accordance with a conceptual framework that is appropriate to inquiries concerning the individuation of particulars, events, etc. So, we are faced with a world-

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<sup>1</sup>Provided, of course, that our claims about temporality adequately and consistently describe and order events as we observe them (otherwise, the ontological array does *not* admit of our system of temporal ordering, and we have not adopted a coherent world-view - i.e. we are *wrong* about temporal matters).

version complete with particulars and events. We then adopt some conceptual framework that is appropriate to inquiries about temporality, and the events in our world-version are ordered temporally according to that framework. We could well have adopted some alternative conceptual framework for temporal ordering, in which case, events in our world-version would have been ordered differently.

We are able to divide the passage of time into years, days, hours, etc., only because of the objective fact that various matters of temporal inquiry (and their attendant ontological arrays), approached from within our overarching framework for individuating events, particulars, etc., admit of parsing into years, days, hours, etc. We do not *cause* the existence of seconds and minutes, we merely adopt a framework (for temporal inquiries) within which seconds, minutes and the like serve as adequate temporal metrics.

If this is a bit confusing, an example may serve to flesh it all out a bit. Consider an inquiry regarding the length of time between sunrise in Greenwich, England and sunset there. The holistic realist recognizes that the idiom in which the inquiry is couched already places us within a particular framework for the individuation of the relevant events. Our inertial frame is fixed as (roughly) that of one standing somewhere in Greenwich (as opposed to one traveling away from the earth in a spaceship, flying around it in an airplane, etc.). Furthermore, a particular method of individuating objects has been, at least to some degree, specified. The sun is to be taken as a single unified entity, distinct from and independent of the earth or other celestial bodies (as opposed to - say - some alien system of individuation that takes the Sun-Jupiter to be an indivisible object in this case, or that takes each instantaneous temporal phase of the sun to be a distinct entity

causally unrelated to the others). A particular boundary for the horizon is fixed by our frame of reference and subsequently serves a criterial role in determining the time at which the sun "sets". A particular kind of spatiotemporal-relational theory is imposed upon our observations - as they do not uniquely determine any one particular account of the motions of the bodies involved (e.g. geocentric theories can account equally well - though perhaps not as parsimoniously - for our observations as can heliocentric theories). All of the relevant background facts are fixed in accordance with some overarching framework for parsing the world-itself. Within the confines of the appropriate overarching framework, for the individuation of objects and events, we have divergences along lines of geocentricity and heliocentricity, various inertial frames, etc. We then specify one or another organizational scheme for ordering and understanding celestial motion (i.e. we adopt a conceptual framework) and one or another inertial frame (for fixing simultaneity, placement of our horizon, etc.).

In the case under consideration, the ontological array is a world-version absent, so to speak, any particular system of temporal ordering. That is, a world-version with a particular set of individuals and events "emerges" from the coupling of some ontological array (a section of the world-itself) and a conceptual framework appropriate to inquiries regarding the individuation of particulars and events. *That* world-version then serves as the ontological array for the subsequent inquiry regarding the system of temporal ordering for events in it. A conceptual framework appropriate for such inquiries is adopted and a particular temporally-ordered world-version "emerges". *That* world-version, or any part of it, may serve as the ontological array for some subsequent inquiry (e.g. inquiries

regarding the faces of a Necker cube that is one of the individuals in the initial world-version).

Once a world-version is ordered insofar as the individuation of particulars and events is concerned, we are then free to impose some temporal metric or another upon the world. The events between and including that one designated by "sunrise" and that one designated by "sunset" are divided up by the hour, the minute, the second, etc.

Obviously, Goodman is correct to point out that we could have chosen different units of time (e.g. units based on rotations of Jupiter on its axis - and subsequent divisions of those units). But Goodman crucially neglects the fact that *whatever* our temporal grid and whatever its basic units, we are constrained to impose an organizational system that accords with the "spacing" of events in the initial world-version.

For example, a book that is dropped, in my inertial frame, from five feet above the ground does not hit the ground instantaneously and does not take more time to hit the ground than it does for me to write this sentence. Whether we use seconds or schmeconds as our basic temporal unit is a matter of choice, but whichever we choose, our temporal grid must appropriately fit the stream of events within the world-version that we are talking about. I can not, for example, coherently claim that it takes two seconds for the book to fall the relevant distance, and that it takes two seconds for me to write this sentence - because the sentence writing *takes longer*. The terminal points of those two events do not match up properly.

We do not *build* temporal orderings into the world, we merely choose one such ordering from the many of which the ontological array for our inquiry admits. For

temporal inquiries, the ontological array with which we are dealing will typically be some world-version. We do not, for example, *make* seconds, minutes, and the rest of our temporal system "fit" our world-version - that system "fit" our world-version before the first cognizer ever appeared upon the scene. A day was twenty-four-and-some-fraction hours in temporal length, long before any human decided to slice time up in the appropriate way. That is, the relevant ontological array (the world-itself) always was parsed by the relevant conceptual framework into "our" world-version (involving the earth, sun, their respective motion, and everything else required to couch the inquiry). That world-version always did admit of temporal ordering by minutes, seconds, hours, etc. That is simply part of the *way that things are* quite independently of any facts about cognizers. We do not, in any sense, *cause* events to be parsed (temporally, spatially, or otherwise) in the way that they are. Ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks - objective entities, independent of cognizers - accomplish all of that work for us. We merely "latch on" to one conceptual framework or another and take on its scheme of organizing things insofar as a particular inquiry is concerned.

We do not *make* worlds or even "versions". It is not by virtue of any epistemic effort on our part (or anyone else's) that an array is parsed or ordered. An ontological array admits, independently of cognizers, of a particular ordering in accordance with the organizational dictates of some particular conceptual framework. As cognizers we adopt, "take-up," or find ourselves involuntarily (e.g. due to biological, psychological, sociological, or similar features of our noetic estate) embedded within the world-version resultant from a particular *conceptual framework*. We are *elements of* that world-version.

The world-version itself is just an ordering of an ontological array in accordance with the organizational principles of a conceptual framework, and does not depend for its existence upon any cognizer actually *doing* any ordering at all. In this respect, a conceptual framework is akin to an inertial frame or frame of reference. It is, for example, an objective fact that a rod of length  $l$  in rest frame is contracted in its non-rest frames so that for any particular non-rest frame  $l_i$  its length is less than its rest-frame length  $l$  (i.e. for any rigid rod,  $l > l_i$ ). Presumably, such facts about length would have obtained even if no cognizers had ever existed. We can speak quite coherently and meaningfully of some frame of reference that no cognizer has ever occupied. We can speak of hypothetical frames of reference and of the relational facts that obtain within those frames. It is, for example, an objective fact that, *in my frame of reference*, this sheet of paper is not currently moving. It is also an objective fact that in the frame of reference of an observer traveling away from the earth near the speed of light, this sheet of paper is moving very rapidly and has a length and mass which are very different from its length and mass in "my" frame. All of this is objectively the case whether or not there is any observer actually occupying either of the frames of reference mentioned (or whether there ever has been or ever will be an observer occupying either frame). The same point may be made with respect to conceptual frameworks.

Whether Hacking or Adams actually does provide an articulation of the facts about Black's counterexample from the perspective of the "Hacking" conceptual framework, the objective fact of the matter is that the ontological array set out in Black's description of his "twin-globe" world admits of the ordering imposed by the

categorizational system that Hacking adopts in his redescription. That the ontological array  $A_{BC}$  admits of this ordering is not a fact with which either Black or Hacking has anything to do at all. Hacking's epistemic efforts were involved only in the *adoption* of the conceptual framework in question. The framework itself was already "there" to be adopted in just the same sense in which frames of reference are already "there" to be occupied by observers. Neither conceptual frameworks nor frames of reference are *things* in the way that (say) trees or rocks are things, but rather both are *ways of ordering* things. Hence, for some matters of inquiry, a diversity of inertial frames constitutes a diversity of conceptual frameworks (Consider the question: "What is the length of this rod?" and matters discussed in § 4.1).

Here is one way of explaining why ontological arrays, conceptual frameworks, and world-versions must be "out there" independently of cognizers. The following seems to be a fact: Had I existed 10 million years ago, the world would have seemed some particular way to me. Assuming that I could have survived for a while, I would have seen some objects and experienced some events. That is, I would have been confronted with some world-version. It makes no sense to suppose that that world-version would come into being with the advent of my appearance in the past, for then the fact that I would have experienced one particular set of events as opposed to any other is inexplicable.

Here is another fact: Had an intelligent bat existed 10 million years ago, the world would have seemed some particular way to it. As has been argued in chapter III, the way that it would have seemed to the bat is not the way that it would have seemed to

me. The bat and I would have been confronted with different world-versions. Why? The bat finds itself in a world-version that is ordered according to a conceptual framework that is distinct from the one according to which my world-version is ordered. What we say here is analogous to what we would say about what would have been observed had there been an astronaut aboard the Voyager space probe as it passed Jupiter. There is some objective fact of the matter about what the astronaut would have observed (had she been looking). It does not matter that there was not, in fact, any astronaut aboard Voyager. Why does it not matter? Jupiter is "out there", and it looks a particular way to creatures with perceptual apparatus like ours. Similarly, it is a fact that the world looks (and feels, and sounds, etc.) a particular way to creatures with perceptual apparatus like ours - whether there are, or ever were, creatures like us or not.

The ontological array  $A_{BC}$  *need not* have been described as "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q." In fact, this description (and *all* description) is from "within" a particular conceptual framework - namely, that which happens to be (though it need not have been) occupied by cognizers of a particular type. Note that a Lezniewskian need not describe Black's counterfactual ontological array in this way. Our alien scientist with the microscope eyes might not have available to her any concepts such as "iron globe," and might have instead described the array  $A_{BC}$  in terms of molecular swarms or relationships between spatiotemporal regions of varying particle density. How would an intelligent bat conceive of the possibility in question? Any description of anything at all, necessarily assumes some conceptual framework or

another. Hence, Goodman inquires:

If I ask about the world, you can offer to tell me how it is under one or more frames of reference; but if I insist that you tell me how it is apart from all frames, what can you say? We are confined to ways of describing whatever is described. (1978: pp. 2-3)

Talking about or asking about the nature of the world is a project that can get off the ground only with some categorizational system or another assumed. The presence of a diversity of such systems does not, however, preclude the possibility of a unified overarching system within which the multiple, more-restricted systems are embedded. A description of Black's counterexample as involving *globes* need not preclude a divergence with respect to inquiries as to the *number* of globes present, nor does a divergence at that particular level of inquiry preclude agreement about the nature of the *types* of things involved in the counterfactual (e.g. globes). Inquiry always occurs "within" some framework, and, frequently, a subsequent divergence of frameworks occurs "within" an overarching one. Hence, both Black and Hacking are operating with (say) the human-western-analytic framework when it comes to the individuation of particulars, but diverge into different conceptual frameworks with respect to matters of ontological fundamentality or methods of conceptualizing the particular spatiotemporal possibility that Black describes.

### Section Summary

Any world-version or parsing of an ontological array is a function of the "coupling" of a particular conceptual framework with the array in question. As both ontological arrays and the various conceptual frameworks with which they are coupled are objective, mind-independent entities, the world-version accompanying any particular

coupling of such entities is, itself, an objective, mind-independent entity. It is precisely the mind-independence of conceptual frameworks (in conjunction with the constraint provided by the objective intrinsic structure of the ontological array) that distinguishes holistic realism from constructivism. Holistic realism strips cognizers of the "constructive" power assigned them by the "worldmakers". Worlds (or versions) come "ready-made". Cognizers "find" the versions that they do, in large part, because of involuntary constraints on their epistemic capacities (e.g. psychological, biological, and environmental determinants of noetic constitution) - though some versions are freely adopted (e.g. Black's version of his counterfactual as opposed to Hacking's). Two individuals may share a framework with respect to one matter of inquiry while using differing frameworks with respect to some distinct area of inquiry.

## 5.2 Holistic Realism And Objections To Its Competitors

As noted in chapter 2, constructivistic relativism faces (at least) two major difficulties: 1) the emergence problem and 2) the constraint problem. Full-blown relativism of any species is frequently confronted with charges of incoherence and self-referential antinomies - e.g. Swoyer (1982), Van Inwagen (1993). As we saw in Ch. III, classical realism has also been charged with incoherence and with inadequacy in the face of those cases that seem to demand conceptual exertion on the part of cognizers - e.g. Rorty (1972, 1979), Putnam (1981, 1983, 1987, 1988), Goodman (1978, 1984). If holistic realism is held up as a viable alternative to these metaphysical theories, it must withstand critical analysis along those lines that are problematic for its competitors. Let

us first see how holistic realism fares against constructivism's objectors.

The emergence problem is, in brief: the existence of minds is inexplicable in the first place if their presence is required in order that there be any particular facts at all (facts such as: there is a particular mind or set of minds that generates a world-version). If there were no minds (and, thereby, no conceptual frameworks) present in the universe's distant past, then there could have been no facts antecedent to the initial emergence of mind upon the scene. Without facts, how is it that there ever came to be minds (or anything else for that matter) in order that facts emerge? The constructivist suffers from the problem of the chicken and the egg.

Holistic realism, on the other hand, neatly circumvents the emergence problem. If the ontological status of conceptual frameworks is divorced from epistemic facts about cognizers, and frameworks themselves are fundamental features of the universe that existed *prior to* minds or cognizers, then no difficulty (on this score) is generated by the relativization of facts to world-versions. The emergence and evolution of intelligent cognitive agents is grounded in an objective, mind-independent world. Cognizers are elements of some world-version, or set of world-versions, existing independently of cognizers. Conceptual frameworks and world-versions preceded the existence of cognizers. We *latch on to* or *adopt* conceptual frameworks much as we *adopt* a frame of reference. We do not *create* or *construct* them. Since world-versions are not of our making, but are "in" the universe prior to our presence in it, there is no emergence problem regarding some facts existing only relative to world-versions.

Lezniewskian mereology posits seven individuals where Carnapianism posits only

three. Putnam argues that no logical or metaphysical scruple gives priority to either metaphysical view as opposed to the other (Ch. III). To put the matter simply, one can just as well answer a question about number Lezniewski-style as one can Carnap-style. We are, therefore, forced to accept some version of conceptual relativity. The number of individuals one finds in the world is, in part, a function of the categorical scheme that one brings to the inquiry. Putnam suggests that the epistemic powers of cognizers play some kind of a constructive role where world-versions are concerned. The nature of reality, from the perspective of one using a particular conceptual scheme, is fixed by facts about the organizational principles of her scheme. But what, an opponent to constructivism may rightfully ask, determines the nature of the world-version generated by any particular conceptual scheme? What, for example, determines that the Lezniewskian world-version contains seven objects in a particular region of space whereas the Carnapian world-version contains only three objects in that region? Why not two for Carnap and three for Lezniewski? Why not none in either case? What constrains projection from any particular framework, in any particular case, if all facts, features, relations, etc. are *internal* to conceptual schemes or perspectives?

Goodman tells us that the Eskimo's world, absent the uniform natural kind *snow*, contains a very different set of facts than does the New Englander's world, which lacks the multiplicity of kinds of white, cold, crystalline H<sub>2</sub>O that cover the Eskimo's habitat most of the year. The difference in the Eskimo and the New Englander's world-version is a consequence of divergent conceptual frameworks or methods for parsing or ordering reality. But then why the presence of *snow* or any of the Eskimo's sundry types? What is

it about the world external to the New Englander's conceptual perspective that determines the presence of snow (as opposed to sand, dirt, snails, some alien substance, or just nothingness) in exactly those places in her environment in which the New Englander finds snow - and why do two New Englanders find it in the same places? If the world "in-itself" is utterly devoid of features, there would appear to be nothing to fix any particular set of facts (any particular world-version) or to constrain the constructions of any conceptual framework. Let us remind ourselves of the typical constructivist's account of the world-in-itself as featureless, and of alleged concepts of the world-in-itself as *vacuous*:

Given a language, we can describe the 'facts' that make the sentences of that language true and false in a 'trivial' way--using the sentences of that very language; but the dream of finding a well-defined Universal Relation between a (supposed) totality of all facts and an arbitrary true sentence in an arbitrary language, is just the dream of an absolute notion of a fact (or of an 'object') and of an absolute relation between sentences and the facts (or the objects) 'in themselves'; the very dream whose hopelessness I hoped to expose with the aid of my little example involving three Carnapian individuals and seven non-empty mereological sums. (Putnam, 1987: p. 40)

Talk of unstructured content or an unconceptualized given or a substratum without properties is self-defeating; for the talk imposes structure, conceptualizes, ascribes properties. Although conception without perception is merely *empty*, perception without conception is *blind* (totally inoperative). Predicates, pictures, other labels, schemata, survive want of application, but content vanishes without form. We can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols. (Goodman, 1978: p. 6)

Nor is this view of the "world-in-itself" peculiar to constructivists. Richard Rorty (whom, Devitt (1984) has argued should be interpreted as a realist with respect to metaphysical matters<sup>2</sup>) joins the worldmakers in their ridiculing of such notions:

The notion of "the world" as used in a phrase like 'different conceptual schemes carve up the world differently' must be the notion of something *completely* unspecified and unspecifiable--the thing-in-itself, in fact. As soon as we start thinking of "the world" as atoms and the void, or sense data and awareness of them, or "stimuli" of a certain sort

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<sup>2</sup> See especially Devitt (1984) §§ 11.2-11.3.

brought to bear upon organs of a certain sort, we have changed the name of the game.  
For we are now well within some particular theory about how the world is. (1972: p. 663)

According to Putnam, Goodman, Rorty, and similarly inclined metaphysicians, the world's various features, properties, relations, etc., only come to be fixed or to take a particular "shape" insofar as they are ordered by some set of conceptual categories or some scheme for constructing reality. Goodman tells us that the world-in-itself "need not be denied those who love it," (1978: p.4) but that the notion of the world from *no particular perspective* is without content and useless for purposes of description, scientific investigation, etc. - in fact, such a notion is quite *thoroughly* useless.

Let us grant Goodman this point (i.e. accept the viability of this line of objection to classical realism - see Ch. III) for the sake of argument. May we not still rightfully demand an explanation of the means whereby the worlds (or versions) that *do* emerge or result from the projection of one set of conceptual categories or another come to have the particular features that are found in them. Why, for example, does  $C_B$  generate a two-globe universe while  $C_H$  generates a one-globe universe in our scenario from § 4.2? Why not three globes in  $C_B$  and thirty-five in  $C_H$ ? The worldmakers must respond with some mechanism for constraint upon the possible outcome of adopting any particular perspective or conceptual framework; otherwise the features of the worlds (or versions) generated by the Eskimo as opposed to the New Englander, or Black as opposed to Hacking, are completely inexplicable. Without some kind of constraint, it seems that cognizers make worlds in the most literal sense - they make worlds *ex nihilo*.

A featureless world such as that described by the proponents of "world-making" simply lacks the capacity to constrain construction in any way. There can be no causal

constraint imposed by anything external to world-versions, as causal relations are typically featured by constructivists as among the most intuitively plausible candidates for facts existing only *internal* to some world-version or another. Nor, it would seem, can a world, the very concept of which is vacuous and empty, impose conceptual constraint upon cognizers or perceivers (nor, presumably, is there anything in such a world that admits of perception). Constructivism, therefore, provides no account of any mechanism whereby the mind's constructive activities are made to generate any particular "version" of reality. It would seem that each cognizer should be able to generate any world-version whatever simply by thinking or projecting what she wishes. Constructivism makes Gods of us all.

Holistic realism does not suffer from any such problem. The ontological array for any particular matter of inquiry is an entity independent of the functioning, or even existence, of any cognitive agents. Similarly, the various parsings of the array (the various world-versions) are also objective and independent of any facts about the epistemic properties of agents, because they result from the coupling of conceptual frameworks (themselves mind-independent) and ontological arrays. In any particular case then, the world-versions are constrained by the objective, intrinsic structure of the ontological array to which the given conceptual framework is coupled. An analogy may be useful for understanding the relationship between the ontological array and conceptual frameworks.

The ontological array may be thought of as analogous to a sphere of quantum material in superposition between any number of possible states corresponding to the

number of potential observational perspectives (the analog to conceptual frameworks). Just as a quantum system (at least on some interpretations of quantum mechanics<sup>1</sup>) does not "crystallize" or acquire any particular eigenstate for (say) position until observed, neither does the ontological array take shape as any determinate world-version in and of itself, but only insofar as it is coupled to some conceptual framework or another. The array, as "seen" or experienced from some particular conceptual framework, is a world-version. Such places have fixed, objective, determinate facts in them (quite independently of the actions or cognitive exertions of human beings or any other cognizers). So, just as observation fixes a particular eigenstate for the quantum system, in similar fashion, a conceptual framework fixes a set of facts or a world-version.

Robert Geroch provides a description of the concept of a spacetime interval wherein we find significant similarities between it and our proposed concept of an ontological array:

The interval is a sort of misty thing that stands in the background, dominating all that goes on (for it is the only link we have between the observations of different individuals), but disappearing in the end. It's a beautiful idea—and a rather subtle one—having the crucial quantity be something which doesn't by itself have all that much physical significance. Rather, its significance comes from its implications in these and other similar calculations [concerning spatial and temporal location of events in a four-dimensional coordinate system]. (1978: p. 158 - brackets mine)

Arrays and intervals share the feature of constraining the outcome of observations from varying perspectives. They also lack "much physical significance" as things-in-themselves. Their structure or intrinsic nature is revealed only in the disparate world-versions generated by approaching them from different perspectives, frames of reference,

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<sup>1</sup> For a fairly non-technical survey of the various interpretations of quantum mechanics see *The Ghost In The Atom* (op. cit.).

or conceptual frameworks. When a cognizer adopts or finds herself embedded in a particular conceptual framework, she thereby finds a fixed, objective totality of facts, features, properties, relations, etc. A particular world-version *crystallizes*, just as a quantum system takes on a particular set of features, or a spacetime interval's terminal events occupy particular spatial locations, only in virtue of the adoption of (respectively) a conceptual framework, or an observational perspective, or a frame of reference.

### Section Summary

Holistic realism does not suffer from the emergence problem because it takes conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays to have preceded the existence of minds. The "coupling" of these two types of entities generate world-versions. Cognizers are elements of world-versions. We "find" the different available ways of carving up reality, but we are not responsible for any of the carving. Holistic does not suffer from the constraint problem either. World-makers such as Goodman and Putnam are unable to explain why it is that various world-versions have the features that they do. It seems that any set of conceptual categories is capable of generating any of indefinitely many world-versions. Why do we get the ones that we, in fact, do? Holistic realism's answer is that the ontological array for any particular inquiry is endowed with intrinsic structure. The objective structure of the array, when coupled to any particular objective conceptual framework, generates an objective world-version. The features of the world-version are a function of the way that a particular conceptual framework parses the ontological array in question.

### 5.3 Objections To Holistic Realism

**1) This is all just a matter of words.**

The claim here is that careful and complete specification of the meanings of the terms that we are using, should obviate the apparent tension between propositions like: "The sun never moves" and "The sun always moves." Take the simple example of the Necker Cube. In that particular inquiry, we are concerned with determining which face of the cube is in "front". It is not, however, terribly interesting to note that observers adopting different perspectives will identify different faces as the "front" - just as it is not terribly interesting to note that whether or not someone is on my left depends upon where I am standing relative to that person. Similarly, inquiring whether there are two globes or one globe in Black's counterexample is infelicitously elliptical. One should rather ask whether there are two globes in the Black counterexample *understood as* or *described as* a flat-space world as opposed to its being *understood as* or *described as* a curved-space world. If we are careful to ask well-formed questions that disambiguate one from another use of our terms, then our questions are no longer subject to the "conceptual relativist's" linguistic sleight of hand. When inquiring about the motion (or lack thereof) of the sun, one must be careful to specify a particular frame of reference. One's interlocutor must then give a determinate, non-relativized answer. The same is the case with Necker Cubes, Gestalt figures, mereological sums, length, weight, shape, color, and all other matters of inquiry. Once we are careful to explain precisely what it is that we mean to ask, the appropriate answer is not relative to anything at all. The arguments for

conceptual relativity hinge on our colloquial penchant for asking incomplete questions. The need for conceptual relativity is not inherent in the "fabric of the universe," but is merely a function of the vagueness inherent in common linguistic practice.

This objection is, for the most part, an exercise in contentious agreement. Holistic realism is committed to the objectivity of facts *given* a conceptual framework that parses an ontological array in some one of the indefinitely many ways in which it admits of parsing. That is, holistic realism is committed to the objectivity of world-versions. The objector complains that *once the meanings of terms are properly articulated*, the door is closed on the conceptual relativist. But that door is just the one that the conceptual relativist pointed out the need to pass through in the first place! What the objector takes to be the "proper articulation" of the meaning of terms, just *is* the specification of one conceptual framework or another. As Adams (speaking in Hacking's voice) points out, the stipulation that Black's counterexample be understood as a world with "flat" space is nothing more than insistence that Black's conceptual framework be used to parse this particular ontological array (i.e. that we restrict our inquiry to "Black's" world-version). The objection that a *complete* inquiry about the matter *includes* specification that the meanings of the terms involved are to be *understood as referring to* either a "flat" or a "curved" world, is indistinguishable from the holistic realist's insistence that the *facts* in the case are relative to one or another way of parsing the data provided (i.e. one or another conceptual framework's ordering of the counterfactual ontological array into a particular world-version). In each case mentioned, a "proper and complete articulation" of the meaning of the terms used turns out to be nothing more than

insistence upon relativization to some world-version. But this is precisely what the holistic realist alleges to be required for a proper understanding of ontological matters. The relativity of facts to world-versions requires that we first specify our way of understanding the terms we use and their classificatory and categorizational functions before we may provide answers for any particular inquiry into the nature of reality. We must first pick out the world-version to which we are to refer before we may attempt to find the answers to questions concerning the structure of the world.

To insist upon a specification of the use of terms is not tantamount to a claim that the whole debate is merely semantic. Our use of words indicates the particular parsing of the world with which we are dealing. The ways in which our terms are to be understood tell us a great deal about the conceptual framework that we are using to organize our experience. The debate is not *about* words and their use, but getting ourselves straight on how we are using them is the way to approach deeper questions about the nature of reality.

## **2) What about invariant features of the world?**

How does holistic realism account for framework invariant features of spacetime such as the spacetime interval, and invariant features of objects such as proper length. According to holistic realism, such facts should obtain only *relative to* some world-version or another, but should not remain constant *across* all of them. Unlike the law of non-contradiction, such facts do not appear to be constraints upon something's being a conceptual framework and generating world-versions. Their invariance is inexplicable

according to holistic realism. The spacetime interval between two events is invariant regardless of one's inertial frame. According to the account of conceptual frameworks given in § 4.1, difference in reference frame should constitute a difference in conceptual framework for inquiries involving spatiotemporal facts or features of the physical world. Hence, the answer to questions such as, "What is the spacetime interval between events  $E_i$  and  $E_j$ ?" should, according to holistic realism, be something like, "Well, that depends upon one's frame of reference." It does not, however, depend upon any such thing:

In certain formulations of the theory of relativity, use is made of a four-dimensional coordinate system in which three dimensions represent the space coordinates  $x, y, z$  and the *fourth dimension* is  $ict$ , where  $t$  is time,  $c$  is the speed of light, and  $i$  is  $\sqrt{-1}$ . Points in this space are called *events*. The equivalent to the distance between two points is the *interval* between two events. The distance between two points is not invariant under a Lorentz transformation, because the measurements of the positions of the points that are simultaneous according to an observer are not simultaneous according to an observer in uniform motion with respect to the first. By contrast, the interval between two events is invariant. (*The Penguin Dictionary Of Physics*: p. 181 - emphasis mine)

The spacetime interval's invariance demonstrates the inadequacy of holistic realism or any other metaphysic that seeks to relativize spatiotemporal facts to conceptual frameworks or frames of reference. Similarly, the invariance of an object's *proper* length, mass, etc., tell against holistic realism. The proper length of any object  $x$ , is the same for any observer regardless of her frame of reference. If we adopt the holistic realist's world-view, we should not expect invariances of this type.

The holistic realist can offer a fairly straightforward and conclusive response to the latter of these two phenomena. Proper length is nothing more than length *in rest frame*. It is no problem for holistic realism that facts *internal* to world-versions are objective and invariant. Conceptual frameworks *fix* a set of facts (a world-version), and the facts that obtain *in that world-version* do not vary with changes to one's conceptual

framework. So, just as it is an objective, framework-invariant fact that *from Black's conceptual framework* there are exactly two globes in his counterexample, similarly, holistic realism posits an objective, invariant length for an object *in the object's rest frame* (i.e. in the world-version resultant from "viewing" the object from a particular frame of reference). The invariance of proper length is, therefore, precisely in accord with the ontology of holistic realism. Spacetime intervals provide a more interesting (though, in the end, no more troubling) ground for objection.

The invariance of the spacetime interval is a function of the relationship between the spatial and temporal components of an event's location in a four-dimensional coordinate system. An increase in the distance between two events along any one of the four axes, entails a compensatory decrease in the distance between the two events along the other axes so that the interval always remains the same. For example, one observer,  $O_1$ , may see events  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  as simultaneous and separated by distance  $d$ . Another observer,  $O_2$ , in motion relative to  $O_1$ , may see  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  not as simultaneous but as separated temporally by  $\Delta t$ . If so, his assignment of relative spatial location to  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  will differ from those of  $O_1$ , but, in the calculation of the interval, these differences will exactly compensate for the disparity in the two observers' temporal assignments. Geroch tells the story this way:

This is our final result. It means that our nonrelativist tagging along with the clock would say "Well, this 'interval' that you people seem so interested in is computed as follows. I take the square of the (apparent) spatial distance between the events and divide by the square of  $c = 3 \times 10^{10}$  cm/sec. Then, I subtract the square of the (apparent) elapsed time between the events." We, of course, know what this nonrelativist does not know, namely that different individuals (that is, with different clock world-lines, and so forth) making similar measurements on these same two events will come up with different "apparent spatial distances" and "apparent elapsed times." On these things they will disagree completely. The only thing they will agree on is this strange combination  $[(\Delta x)^2/c^2] -$

$(\Delta t)^2$ , the interval. (1978: p. 97)

An increase in distance along one axis (in this case, temporal distance) is always accompanied by compensatory adjustments to other variables involved in one's calculation of the distance between two events. Hence, the invariance of the interval.

Again, this putative difficulty for the sort of conceptual relativity that holistic realism embraces is no real threat when it is properly understood. An ontological array has an intrinsic structure that constrains the set of facts generated by its coupling to any particular conceptual framework (§ 5.1-5.2). For example, the ontological array in Putnam's scenario concerning the number of objects in a given space admits of being parsed into *three* Carnapian individuals or into *seven* Lezniewskian individuals. The relationship between the number of individuals in the array and the system of individuation brought to bear upon that array is invariant. That is, even for *Carnap* (or anyone else for that matter) Putnam's example involves seven individuals *from the Lezniewskian perspective*. Similarly, the relationship between one's reference frame and the temporal (or spatial) separation of any two events  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  is also governed by objective facts about the region of spacetime being observed. It is not, therefore, any more surprising or problematic that spacetime intervals should not vary across frames of reference than it is that both the Carnapian and the Lezniewskian will agree about how the region of spacetime that they are respectively parsing will determine the outcome *given* one organizational scheme or another for the individuation of particulars. That is, they will agree that a spatiotemporal region *of this nature* will yield this or that number of individuals when parsed in accordance with this or that conceptual framework.

Similarly, both the earthling and the (say) Venusian (given adequate translation manuals) will agree that a particular explosion is caused by the lighting of a match according to the earthling's framework, and by the saturation of the atmosphere with oxygen (the relevant abnormality) according to the Venusian's framework. The intrinsic structure of the explosion and the conditions that precipitate it are the same for both the earthling and the Venusian.

Finally, Black and Hacking will agree that Black's counterexample must be described as a lone-globe world if one adopts *Hacking's* perspective and as a twin-globe world if one adopts Black's perspective. Why? Because "a globe of iron, having internal qualities Q, which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities Q," is the invariant ontological array that each is approaching from his perspective or framework. It is not a difficulty for holistic realism that the ontological array involved in any particular dispute has an invariant intrinsic structure across all couplings to various conceptual frameworks. Indeed, it would be troubling to the holistic realist if such invariances were not the case.

In inquiries regarding the spatial and/or temporal separation of events, the spacetime interval constitutes the intrinsic structure of the ontological array to which various conceptual frameworks (here - frames of reference) are coupled to generate various world-versions (here - differing assignments of temporal and/or spatial location to events) that are, themselves, invariant. That is, the world-version correlated with any particular conceptual framework  $C_i$  is invariant (hence the invariance of features of objects such as their *proper length*), and the intrinsic structure of any particular

ontological array is, itself, invariant and thereby constrains each conceptual framework to which it is coupled. Conceptual frameworks "cannot help" but generate a particular world-version in accordance with that structure (hence the invariance of the *spacetime interval* between any two events). While that which is simultaneous for me need not be simultaneous for you, and points separated by distance  $d$  for me need not be separated by  $d$  for you, it is still the case that where these disparities obtain, they obtain in tandem and invariably compensate for one another. If one is told that events  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are separated by a spacetime interval  $I$ , one has a number of options in plotting  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  along temporal and spatial axes.

Similarly, in the case of Black's counterexample, one may interpret it as spatiotemporally "flat" and describe the world as twin-globed, or one may interpret it as spatiotemporally "curved" and describe the world as lone-globed, but the "conceptual interval" (as it were), the ontological array, remains constant. If one is told about a case in which there is "a globe of iron, having internal qualities  $Q$  which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities  $Q$ ," one may carve the case up à la either Black or Hacking.

So different frames of reference assign (for example) simultaneity to different events, but do so in accordance with the intrinsic structure of spacetime. A particular rest frame assigns, quite objectively and independent of facts about minds or cognizers, simultaneity to particular sets of events because that is *just* the way that the universe objectively is. In order to make *any* assignment of simultaneity to any events at all, some frame of reference or other must be adopted. It is senseless to ask whether  $E_1$  and  $E_2$  are

simultaneous irrespective of reference frame (the very project of *individuating* events is arguably impossible in the absence of an adoption of one reference frame or another). Similarly, while it is senseless to ask for (say) the number of individuals in a room or the spatiotemporal geometry of a counterfactual possibility in the absence of some conceptual framework or another, there is an objective, mind-independent *way that things are* such that once any particular conceptual framework is adopted, some particular set of facts (i.e. some world-version) is objectively fixed. An ontological array is such a *way that things are*. A spacetime interval is a species of ontological array. Invariances such as proper length and spacetime intervals comport very nicely with the theory of holistic realism.

**3) "Holistic Realism" is just Putnam's Pragmatic Realism with a few bells and whistles added.**

Putnam has already pointed out a number of cases where there seems to be no escaping conceptual relativity, but has also made the case that he is a realist. His pragmatic realism accomplishes the marriage of realism and conceptual relativity and does so without elevating conceptual frameworks to the status of ontological fundamentality, and without the need of "ontological arrays" (whatever we are to understand those as being). With Putnam's pragmatic realism (see Chs. II and III), we have a theory that accomplishes everything that "holistic" realism has been developed to accomplish and is more parsimonious in so doing. We have, therefore, no reason to embrace holistic realism and shoulder the burden of its peculiar ontology in which the "fundamental" features of reality are things like conceptual frameworks and ontological

arrays. In short, holistic realism offers us nothing that pragmatic realism does not, and brings new difficulties along in the bargain. So the objection goes.

Although it is true that pragmatic realism is more parsimonious than holistic realism and that the former (if coherent) accomplishes many of the same results as those sought by the latter, it is also the case that parsimony is but *one* theoretical virtue and pragmatic realism is beset by a number of problems that, I argue (§ 5.2), holistic realism avoids. Pragmatic realism is a species of constructivism and faces both the emergence and the constraint problems, whereas holistic realism is, at bottom, non-constructivistic realism that nonetheless accepts a plurality of world-versions. The objectivity of conceptual frameworks, ontological arrays, and world-versions staves off the antinomies of pragmatic realism. In fact, the difficulties with Putnam's pragmatic realism are precisely *the motivation* for holistic realism's reification of conceptual frameworks - independent of any facts about cognizers - and its positing of objective, independent ontological arrays as fundamental parts of the world-itself. Holistic realism's additions and modifications to constructivism's bare world-in-itself are expressly for the purpose of sidestepping the constraint and the emergence problems (with pragmatic realism) while accommodating all those cases that necessitate conceptual relativity. If the ontology of holistic realism seems unnecessarily "thick" (though, hopefully, that "thickness" has been sufficiently justified), it is because of constraints imposed by the marriage of the conceptual relativity found in pragmatic realism (and other forms of constructivism) and the objectivity of the world-in-itself held dear by classical metaphysical realists. If both are necessary for a complete and descriptively successful metaphysical theory, then our

understanding of the nature of the world must expand in its simultaneous accommodation of the two. The "bells and whistles" make all the difference to the viability of holistic realism.

**4) Why do we need this impregnation of the classical realistic ontology?**

An "ontological array" is just the neutral world-in-itself underlying various "world-versions". It is precisely what constructivists have been denying and metaphysical realists have been affirming throughout the debate with which we are here concerned. Take, for example, the two propositions: 1) The earth revolves around the sun, and 2) The sun revolves around the earth. Granted, whether we take 1) to be true and 2) to be false or, conversely, 2) to be true and 1) false, is a matter of one's frame of reference (or "conceptual framework" for inquiries regarding relative motion). Nonetheless, the world-in-itself has the intrinsic, framework-independent feature that the sun and the earth alter position with respect to one another in accordance with some appropriate formula. Straightforward metaphysical realism has ample apparatus for dealing with relativity of this sort - without the additional metaphysical baggage of ontological arrays and conceptual frameworks reified as part of the "fabric" of the universe. We should, therefore, reject holistic realism on the grounds that classical metaphysical realism is more parsimonious while offering equal descriptive and explanatory power.

The first response to this sort of objection is that the acceptance of cases of conceptual relativity is a very large step on the road from metaphysical to holistic realism. Once this step is taken, one must next recognize that conceptual frameworks are a

prerequisite for any description, explanation, or inquiry at all, and the transformation from classical to holistic realist is well underway. Finally, one must also embrace the mind-independence of conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays, but by this stage it is clear that any failure to do so will result in all the antinomies of constructivism. Until conceptual frameworks are "pulled out of people's heads" and installed in the world-itself, the presence of particular facts that "we" would have experienced had we been around (say) 10 million years ago (see § 5.1) is inexplicable.

A "classical" realist who accepts conceptual relativity, and the objectivity of conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays, is all but indistinguishable from a holistic realist. In the case suggested in the above objection, one can not ignore the necessity of conceptual frameworks for generating any particular world-version. Goodman has already pointed out the inadequacy of the classical realist's resolution to an inquiry about the sun revolving around the earth or vice-versa:

The equally true conflicting sentences concerning the daily motion of the earth and sun

(9) The earth rotates, while the sun is motionless

(10) The earth is motionless, while the sun revolves around it

might be interpreted as amounting to

(11) The earth rotates relative to the sun

(12) The sun revolves relative to the earth,

which are nonconflicting truths.

What must be noticed, however, is that (11) does not quite say, as (9) does, that the earth rotates; and (12) does not quite say, as (10) does, that the earth is motionless. That an object moves relative to another does not imply either that the first one moves or that the second does not. Indeed, where  $f$  is an appropriate formula, (11) and (12) alike amount to the single statement

(13) The spatial relationships between the earth and the sun vary with time according to formula  $f$ ,

and this does not attribute motion or rest to the earth or the sun but is entirely compatible

not only with (9) and (10) but also with the statement that the earth rotates for a time and then stops while the sun moves around it. (1978: p. 113)

We do not even get a completed world-version until we fix a particular reference frame (a conceptual framework for inquiries concerning the relative motion of objects). Only once we specify a conceptual framework do we get determinate answers to questions such as, "Does the sun revolve around the earth?" This is near the heart of holistic realism. Once the classical realist has travelled the conceptual distance required for dealing with these and similar cases, she has become a holistic realist.

Similarly, a pragmatic realist (or other form of constructivist) who begins to accept the necessity of some mind-independent grounding for her proposed relativizations of truth or fact, has begun changing her world-view more radically than it might, at first, be supposed. The "impregnation" of the classical ontologies is a necessary consequence of the attempt to explain all of those phenomena that are problematic for either of the two species of classical doctrine, while avoiding the sort of incoherence with which each has been characteristically charged. Simply adding a measure of conceptual relativity to classical realism without the appropriate adjustments and additions to one's ontology will produce a theory saddled with the emergence problem (Where did the first conceptual framework come from if facts about such things are mind-dependent?). Furthermore, it is not clear that such a move, by itself, will enable one to deflect the charge of incoherence standardly levelled at classical realism (What is this neutral "thing-in-itself" like? What are its features?). In achieving a comprehensive account of the nature of reality, we must tolerate a certain loss of elegance. Such is the price of completeness.

**5) So, what else is this good for?**

There is no reason to suspect that holistic realism will turn out to be usefully generalizable to a broad cross-section of issues in metaphysics. Whatever limited plausibility must be conceded to the doctrine is largely the result of the anomalous nature of cases so far considered. A few perceptual illusions, a dispute about individuation (the principles of which are known to be largely conventional), and a counterexample designed as a special, other-worldly problem for a version of the principle of the identity of indiscernibles, jointly provide little if any reason to suspect a potential expansion of the range of inquiry for which holistic realism is useful. How can this doctrine be applied to mainstream metaphysical concerns, and what resolution may we hope holistic realism provides to disputes other than those of the above-mentioned, anomalous stripe? It is, for the most part, inadvisable to generalize from a small number of cases. It is still more ill-advised to generalize from a small number of *weird* cases.

The holistic realist's first line of response to this species of objection is that one should not exaggerate the "anomalousness" of the cases for which the objector has conceded holistic realism's viability as an account. Once it is conceded that matters regarding individuation, number, spatiotemporal geometry, and an assortment of issues about perception admit of successful or plausible analysis by holistic realism, it is no tremendous leap to larger issues involving matters of individuation, number, etc., as components. Furthermore, the objection fails to include causation as an area that seems very likely to produce inquiry amenable to analysis by holistic realism (let us not forget

Putnam's exploding boiler case).<sup>1</sup> Whether something is the "cause" of any particular event as opposed to merely an antecedent condition or a prerequisite, seems to be largely a function of one's conceptual framework or the "explanation space" within which one is operating.

If questions concerning causation fall under the cognizance of holistic realism, then the theory's fecundity is very difficult to call into question. In fact, were holistic realism good for nothing else but the analysis of causal relationships, it would be difficult

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<sup>1</sup> There is ongoing debate between Putnam, and similarly inclined metaphysicians, and critics such as Devitt, Sosa, and others about the inherently perspectival nature of causation and about what would follow for metaphysical realism. The following are a few excerpts:

This relativity of causes to interests, and to background conditions not mentioned in the 'hard science' explanation of the event in question, does not make causation something we simply legislate. Given our interests and what we regard as the relevant background conditions, it would be simply false to say that it was the wall of the pressure cooker that caused the explosion (unless it happened to be defective, and it should happen to be the defect and not the condition of the valve that 'explains' the explosion). Our conceptual scheme restricts the 'space' of descriptions available to us; but it does not predetermine the answers to our questions. (Putnam 1987: pp. 38-39)

Putnam asks about the reference of 'cat', 'cow', and so on. We answer in terms of causal relations. Putnam then asks about the reference of 'causally related'. That such a question can be asked does not show that our answer to the first question was not a perfectly good one; it does not show that we have failed to explain how one model among many is the 'intended' one. To show this, it would be necessary to show that there is something about our first answer that needs explanation and that we can't explain. Putnam has not shown this. In particular, he has not shown that our second answer, the explanation of reference for 'causally related', does not explain, so far as explanation is necessary, how 'causally related' uniquely refers. He would want to claim that it does not, of course, because the words 'causally related' that are used in the second answer do not uniquely refer. But that is what he is supposed to be showing us. He is simply begging the question against the realist. However long he continues his questioning, the realist has an answer along the above lines to pick out the desired unique referent. (Devitt 1984: p. 227)

But, again, why must the metaphysical realist "read into the world" any such relation of reference or of correspondence (or of causal explanation)? What the metaphysical realist is committed to holding is that there is an in-itself reality independent of our minds and even of our existence, and that we can talk about such reality and its constituents by virtue of correspondence relations between our language (and/or our minds), on one hand, and things-in-themselves and their intrinsic properties (including their relations), on the other. This does not commit the metaphysical realist to holding that reference itself (or correspondence, or causal explanation) is among the objective properties constitutive of in-itself reality. (Sosa 1993: p. 609)

to denigrate its value for metaphysics as a discipline (consider Hume's analysis of causation and the body of theory generated by subsequent response to it). Causation is an integral component of the stream of events that makes up the universe, and a successful theory explaining the nature of causation will go a long way toward explaining the nature of the whole of the universe.

Finally, it is not at all difficult to think of other disputes and inquiries that are *prima facie* candidates for analysis by holistic realism. Consider, for example, current debate concerning the ontological status of monadic properties and relations. The dispute over whether monadic properties are logically or ontologically prior to relations (or the reverse is the case), has raged intermittently since at least the time of the medievals (if not before).<sup>1</sup> Given the absence of anything like a conclusive resolution, one wonders if there is any fact-in-itself, independent of conceptual framework, as to the ontological priority of relations or monadic properties. Perhaps monadic properties are more fundamental than relations relative to one framework, while relations are more fundamental than monadic properties relative to another framework, and a complete analysis simply can not go any "further down" than that. In any case, there seems ample reason to suspect that there is a substantial range of inquiries for which holistic realism may provide interesting and useful analysis.

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<sup>1</sup> A nice historical survey on the history of relations, and the debates surrounding them may be found in Weinberg (1965) and in Henninger (1989).

### Section Summary

- O1:** The motivation for holistic realism is a result of colloquial imperspecuity. If we are careful to ask complete, well-formed questions, we will have no need of "ontological arrays" or "conceptual frameworks".
- R1:** "Complete, well-formed" questions *designate* conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays. This "objection" presents nothing inconsistent with holistic realism.
- O2:** Invariant facts and features of the world do not accord with holistic realism's conceptual relativity, wherein all (or almost all) facts obtain only *relative to* some world-version or other.
- R2:** All invariant facts are either internal to world-versions, and thereby objective and invariant by hypothesis, or they are part of the intrinsic structure of an ontological array - also posited as objective and invariant entities. Neither type of case is inconsistent with the principles of holistic realism.
- O3:** Putnam's pragmatic realism accomplishes everything that holistic realism is intended to accomplish, and does so more parsimoniously.
- R3:** Pragmatic realism, though more parsimonious than holistic realism, is incomplete and beset with the emergence and constraint problems (Ch. II). Neither problem confronts holistic realism.
- O4:** Classical realism is not in need of the augmentation suggested by the holistic realist. It has ample resources to deal with conceptual relativity.

- R4:** A classical realist who embraces conceptual relativity has no choice but to adopt the ontology of the holistic realist if she is to offer a coherent world-view.
- Conceptual frameworks and ontological arrays must be "pulled out of minds" and must be understood to be objective, mind-independent entities.
- O5:** The anomalous cases so far considered provide little hope of useful generalizability for the theory of holistic realism.
- R5:** The cases listed are not as anomalous as the objection suggests, and there is good reason to be optimistic about holistic realism as a viable account of causal relationships.

#### 5.4 The Holistic Realist's World-View

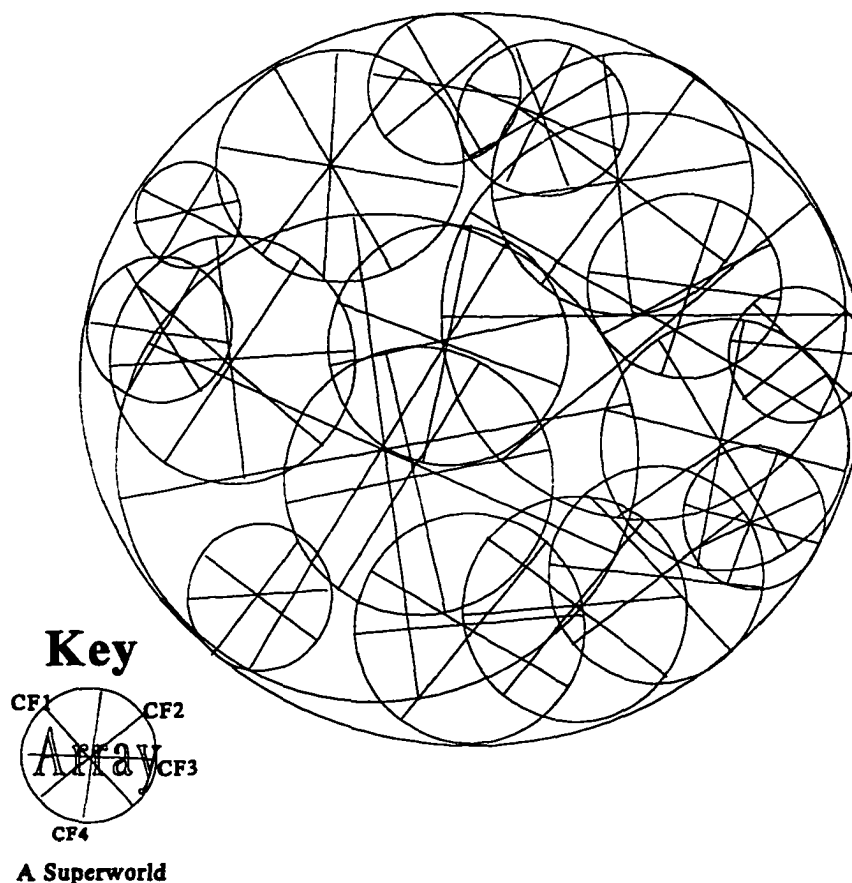
Now for the big picture. The totality of all world-versions (i.e. all potential parsings of an ontological array) is the *Superworld* (if that moniker will be forgiven) for the inquiry in question. The Superworld encompasses all couplings of conceptual frameworks to the ontological array for the matter of inquiry at hand. So, for the case of the Black/Hacking debate from § 4.2, the ontological array  $A_{BC}$  is indicated by the locution, "A globe of iron, having internal qualities  $Q$  which can be reached by traveling two diameters in a straight line from a globe of iron having qualities  $Q$ ." The two conceptual frameworks here under consideration (though there almost certainly exist others) are those earlier described and labeled  $C_B$  and  $C_H$  (see §§ 4.2-4.3). The Superworld for this particular matter of inquiry is the totality of the world-versions generated by coupling each of  $C_B$  and  $C_H$  (setting aside other frameworks for simplicity's

sake) to  $A_{BC}$ . Just as the facts and features *internal* to any particular world-version are fixed, determinate, objective, independent of the actions of cognizers, etc., so too are the facts and features internal to the Superworld. The world-version  $W_B$  (Black's world version) is objectively a constituent of the Superworld for Black's counterexample as is the world-version  $W_H$  (Hacking's). It is, therefore, an objective fact that: 1) Black's counterexample is a world with two globes *given Black's conceptual framework*, just as it is objectively a fact that 2) Black's counterexample is a world with exactly one globe *given Hacking's conceptual framework*. Thus there can be no "nesting" paradoxes generated wherein (say) the structure of Black's world-version *from Black's perspective* has a particular set of features but the structure of Black's world-version *from Hacking's perspective* has some distinct set of features. Holistic realism thereby averts the antinomies that result from relativizing facts about everything, including facts about the fundamental constituents of reality and about the nature of the world versions-generated by one framework or another, to some parameter. That is, holistic realism averts the antinomies of full-blown relativism.

Note that the ontological array for the inquiry, "What is the world like?" is the world-itself. The Superworld for this inquiry (call it the Super Superworld - everything that exists is in it) is made up of every parsing of every ontological array (i.e. every world-version for every way of ordering anything) from the perspective of every conceptual framework. Every element of every world-version is objectively "out there" independently of any cognition. The collection of *all* world-versions is the Super Superworld. The following is (of all things) a representation of the world-in-itself (the

Super Superworld).

## The Super Superworld



In the above diagram, each circle represents a Superworld and each line bisecting a circle represents a particular world-version that is the result of coupling the conceptual framework at its endpoints to the ontological array represented by the intersection of lines at the center of each circle. Everything represented in the diagram is an objective feature of the world-in-itself (i.e. the Super Superworld). Note also that the Superworlds are represented as overlapping each other. A world-version in one Superworld may serve

as an ontological array for a distinct Superworld (e.g. the temporal ordering case discussed above). The character of each ontological array, conceptual framework, and world-version depicted above is, however, objective and invariant.

The sort of conceptual relativity embraced by holistic realism is not full-blown and does not go "all the way down" (as did the turtles in a particular objection to modern astronomy<sup>1</sup>). The principles of classical realism reign over the fundamental features of each Superworld. Each Superworld *just is* the way that it is. Similarly, any particular world-version just is the way that it is. We must, however, recognize that indefinitely many viable world-versions exist as elements of each Superworld, and that no one of them has privilege of place over any of the others. That is, we must reject the one "true" world-in-itself posited by classical metaphysical realism as the objective, invariant collection of framework-neutral facts involving particular objects such as rocks, rivers, stars, sticks, people, poodles, etc. Ontological matters are not as simple as that. The fact of any particular matter is not fixed by some universal metaphysical monolith, but depends, in part, upon how what is "there" is to be categorized, individuated, etc. Holistic realism is a theory regarding nature's indefinitely many sets of joints and the indefinitely many ways that our world (or world-versions) can be when carved at one set of them or another.

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<sup>1</sup> Stephen Hawking relates the, probably apocryphal, incident as follows: "A well-known scientist (some say it was Bertrand Russell) once gave a public lecture on astronomy. He described how the earth orbits around the sun and how the sun, in turn, orbits around the center of a vast collection of stars called our galaxy. At the end of the lecture, a little old lady at the back of the room got up and said: 'What you have told us is rubbish. The world is really a flat plate supported on the back of a giant tortoise.' The scientist gave a superior smile before replying, 'What is the tortoise standing on?' 'You're very clever, young man, very clever,' said the old lady. 'But it's turtles all the way down!'" (1988: p. 1)

### Section Summary

The incoherence of full-blown relativism is averted in the objective independence of each Superworld and its features (i.e. ontological arrays, conceptual frameworks, and world-versions). Classical realism has difficulties with the framework-neutral world-in-itself, and with the apparent necessity of conceptual frameworks for description and explanation. Because of its acceptance of conceptual relativity, the difficulties of classical realism do not confront holistic realism. The relativity embraced by holistic realism is not relativity "all the way down" (so to speak), but only relativity with respect to the variety of conceptual frameworks available for a particular case of description or explanation. Holistic realism offers the best and most captivating features that the realist and relativist camps have (respectively) to offer. It is submitted as the best of all possible world-views.

### Conclusion

In holistic realism, we have a theory of the nature of reality - a theory of *what there is*. The theory is, at once, a hard-core realism (embracing a world-in-itself) and an acceptance of conceptual relativity as indispensable to metaphysical theorizing. Holistic realism encompasses what is hardest to deny about both realism and relativism, while circumventing those problems with the classical doctrines that have generated the perennial chasm between realists and relativists. The respective metaphysical theories must not be conceived as straightforwardly and thoroughly irreconcilable. The theory of holistic realism is aimed at something like the same sort of synthesis that Kant's

transcendental idealism sought to bring to the notions underpinning empiricism and rationalism. At the heart of each effort is the intuition that there is "something right" about each of the supposedly conflicting paradigms responsible for captivating the great minds in each camp. The *way the world is*, insists the metaphysical realist, cannot depend upon facts about minds or cognizers because (to offer one simple reason) there was a world before there were minds, and that world had to be one way or another in order that minds were to come to be. But, the relativist responds, the "world-in-itself," or the world as conceived from within no particular organizational system is without any fixed form or content. We can not even begin to pose (much less answer) metaphysical inquiries until we adopt some conceptual framework or another. The holistic realist agrees on both counts. The nature of reality can not be mind-dependent and, though relativizations of truth or fact are inescapable, they must terminate in objective, mind-independent ontological bedrock lest we end up with a chaotic, "anything goes" metaphysic, or some kind of constructivism whereby cognizers are vested with the God-like power to create worlds *ex nihilo*. Holistic realism carves up the classical realist's objective, mind-independent cake, but allows the relativist to eat it too.

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