

Relativism About Truth

by

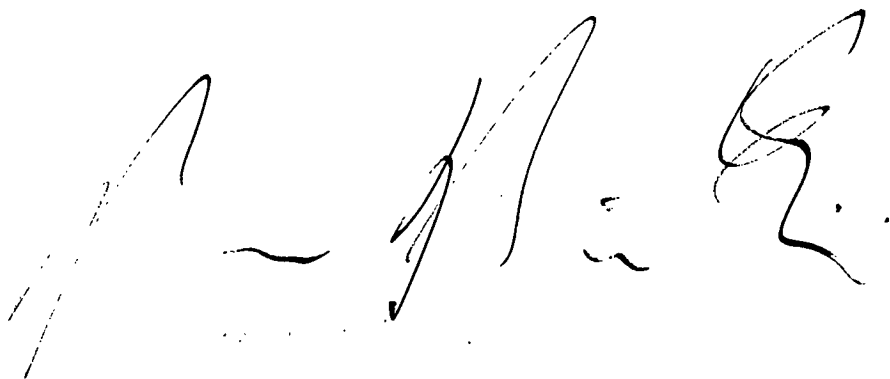
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Dept of Philosophy

This thesis contains no material which has been accepted for a degree or diploma by the University of Tasmania or any other institution and to the best of my knowledge and belief no material previously published or written by another person except where due acknowledgment is made in the text of the thesis.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'A. M. E.', written in a cursive style.

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of the letters 'P', 'L', and 'K' in a stylized, cursive script. The 'P' is tall and loops back. The 'L' is simple and vertical. The 'K' is more complex, with a large loop at the top and a horizontal stroke at the bottom. There are small horizontal strokes between the letters.

Abstract

Broadly put, the thesis is an investigation of the possibility of articulating a coherent thesis of truth relativism within first, a host correspondence theory of truth and second, a host coherence theory of truth. The type of relativism addressed in the thesis is what is sometimes called 'framework relativism', that where truth is relativised to a framework of belief, conceptual scheme or something of that sort. A further restraint is that it is a global relativistic thesis which is sought, one that is relativistic about all truths. The thesis does not set itself the task of defending relativism but just that of seeking a coherent articulation of it.

The work is in two sections. In the first, the host theory is the correspondence theory of truth. The result of that section's analysis is that, although what Chris Swoyer calls 'strong truth relativism' is not able to be given coherent articulation, what he calls 'weak truth relativism' is. The conception of weak correspondence relative truth that is explicated here is a three place relation of proposition, world (without "joints at which to carve") and categorial repertoire (of a type suggested by Jack Meiland). A global thesis in its terms proves coherently articulable and does not suffer from problems of self-inclusion.

In the second section, the host theory is the coherence theory. Promising looking host though it seems, neither propositional nor doxastic web versions of the coherence theory prove to be able to permit either weak or strong global truth relativistic theses to be coherently articulated. The most promising looking coherence relativist candidate of those examined is a strong doxastic thesis developed by James Young. Like other coherence relativisms examined, Young's succumbs to the reflexivity demands of a global thesis. Strong coherence theses also prove to have difficulty in having the same proposition true relative to one propositional/doxastic web and false relative to another. Weak variants have difficulty explicating the "appropriate alternativeness" of the categorial repertoire in terms of which some target proposition is to be ineffable.

The results of investigation are contrary to conventional wisdom concerning relativism in that it proves to be the correspondence theory, not the coherence theory, within which it is easier to articulate global (though only weak) framework truth relativism.

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INTRODUCTION

'How Must Relativism Be Understood To Be Coherent?'.¹ Broadly put, and within some restraints, this thesis attempts to answer the question, a question which has not been answered totally in the literature and is one of continuing philosophical interest.

Mark Okrent claims:

Recently there has been a revival of philosophic interest in, and discussion of, "relativism". Debates concerning relativism, however, tend to have an odd air of unreality. It is odd that while most everyone wants to refute relativism, just about no one wants to be identified as a relativist. There is even a tendency to use 'relativist' as an epithet of abuse. But, if relativism is universally acknowledged to be refuted, even self-refuting, then why is there so much discussion of it ...?' (1984, p. 341)

Friedel Weinert puts it even more strongly:

...the modern age is marked by the renunciation of the possibility of the one true ontological statement about the world. The modern age has abandoned the search for Truth and has opened the door to the age of relativism. (1984, p382)

Robert Nola remarks:

Long an outcast from philosophy, relativism has, for most of this century, found a home in the doctrines of most (but not all) sociologists of science, several historians of science and a handful of philosophers of science. (1988, p.2)

Yet, though he judges it to have only a handful of supporters and, remarks 'no matter how much philosophers are at odds with one another they seem, with only a few

¹ I borrow the question's wording from the title of a recent paper by John Fox. (1992)

exceptions, to be united in their condemnation of relativism',² Nola goes on to note that '... relativism exerts a strange fascination and a number of philosophers ... have found it instructive to come to terms with the ways they find it to be self-refuting or incoherent (if they find it so at all).' (1988, p. 1)

Hilary Putnam is one such philosopher, remarking:

I myself am fascinated by the different ways in which relativism is incoherent or self-contradictory. I think they are worth careful study by epistemologists ... because each of the refutations of relativism teaches us something important about knowledge. (1983, p. 288)

Harvey Siegel remarks that his view was :

...relativism is an obvious non-starter, a position whose very statement requires logical contradiction and so self-refutation, and so a position not worthy of sustained philosophical attention ... But it became clear that such an out-of-hand rejection of relativism was too cavalier. For one thing, many highly regarded philosophers, working in a variety of areas³, embraced one or another form of relativism. For another, several philosophers took on the task of articulating and defending relativism, paying special attention to the problem of relativism's alleged incoherence. Most importantly, the last two-three decades have witnessed a striking emergence of relativism in the philosophy of science.⁴ (1987, p. xi)

Okrent complains:

Contemporary discussions of relativism are confused ... (in part because) ... there is no clear understanding that there are a variety of senses in which one may talk of relativism and ... a theory which is relativist in one of these senses

² Barry Barnes and David Bloor put the point even more extremely: '...in the academic world relativism is everywhere abominated...'. (1982, p. 21)

³ Though, if Nola is to be believed, not many in philosophy of science.

⁴ Again, the contrast with Nola is interesting, though Nola cites Feyerabend as one of his examples and, in a review of Siegel's book, remarks 'Philosophy of science has, surprisingly, for the last thirty years or so provided a fertile breeding ground for relativists - especially the off-shoot which combines historical and social studies of science with an appropriate philosophy of science'. (1989, p. 419) The last clause is significant.

need not be in others. Correlated with this goes a failure to recognise that arguments which are quite conclusive against some forms of relativism entirely miss the mark when leveled against other kinds. (1984, p. 342)

Alisdair MacIntyre echos this unease at too swift and too unsophisticated a dismissal of relativism, observing:

...relativism... is one of those doctrines that have by now been refuted a number of times too often. Nothing is perhaps a surer sign that a doctrine embodies some not-to-be-neglected truth than that in the course of the history of philosophy it should have been refuted again and again. Genuinely refutable doctrines only need to be refuted once. (1989, p. 182)

The task of this thesis is to explore whether there is some not-to-be-neglected truth in relativism that survives even those criticisms more careful than the "too quick" arguments sometimes employed to dismiss it. But such a task in its entirety is too much for one thesis. As Michael Krausz remarks, 'hardly a philosophical issue is untouched by relativism'. (1989, p. 1) So, although philosophers have generally been perhaps too quickly dismissive of relativistic theses, not all such theses can be examined here. Given the variety of these theses and Okrent's warnings above, any attempt to assess relativism needs to be careful in distinguishing from among the varieties of relativism just what it is that is under investigation. Much of the remainder of this introduction offers preliminary taxonomic remarks to focus the thesis' topic.

THE TOPIC REFINED

To be relativistic about some subject matter X, is to say that claims within X cannot be made *simpliciter* but can only be made relative to something else, Y. Clearly there are three sources of variation here: what is being relativised (the X), what it is being relativised to (the Y) and the relativising relation. Let me focus on the first relatum.

As Krausz noted, there are relativistic theses about almost any sub-domain within philosophy and, recalling Nola's comments, its application is not confined to philosophy. Borrowing a label from Krausz and Jack Meiland (1982), one can identify a family of theses as 'cognitive relativism'. The first constraint upon this work is that it confines itself to cognitive relativism (as opposed to, say, moral relativism). Continuing the subdivision, I follow Nola (1988, pp. 10-19) in distinguishing ontological, semantic and epistemological relativisms. According to the first, such things as what exists, or its nature, are relative to some relativiser (some Y). According to the second, such things as truth, or reference, or meaning, or concepts, or conceptual schemes, are considered relative to some relativiser. According to the third, such things as justification, or good reason, or criteria of rationality, are considered relative to some relativiser. There are good grounds for considering some relativistic theses to be amalgams of theses from across these categories⁵ but the above serves initial taxonomic purposes.

Of these foci within cognitive relativism, epistemic relativism, or, more precisely, relativism about standards of justification, has received considerable discussion in the literature.⁶ Ontological relativism has also had some airing.⁷ And, within semantic relativism, meaning, or sense, relativism has been discussed⁸ but what has not received the amount of attention that might be expected or deserved, is truth relativism. Truth relativism is the focus of this work.⁹

Chris Swoyer has asserted: 'Truth is the Achille's heel of relativism' (1982, p. 84)

and: 'At least since Plato's attack on the Protagorean doctrine of *homo mensura*, truth

⁵ Those relativists holding what are sometimes called 'epistemic theories of truth' consider themselves to be a case in point. I will turn to such matters in Section Two. Also, as will be seen in Section One, ontological concerns can become intertwined with semantic ones (see also Edwards, 1993, Rappaport, 1993, my 1996b and Rappaport 1996 on such matters).

⁶ See, for instance, the works of Kuhn (e.g. 1970) and post-positivistic "new philosophy of science" generally.

⁷ For instance, in work by Quine, (e.g. 1990) Putnam, (e.g. 1983, pp. 205-228) and Goodman (e.g. 1978).

⁸ See, for instance, work by Quine (e.g. 1990) and by Feyerabend (e.g. 1975).

⁹ But, as the discussion demands, I shall also touch upon the relativising of sense, ontology and standards of justification.

has been a focal point in criticisms of relativism.' (p.84) Ernest Gellner exemplifies the point, 'A spectre haunts human thought: relativism. If truth has many faces then not one of them deserves trust or respect'. (1982, p. 181) Although the object of attack, truth relativism is less often explicitly defended.¹⁰ One concern is to get 'a clearer picture of truth than we currently have', (Swoyer, 1982, p. 85) for in its absence, and given the medley of propositions (including meta-propositions about truth) deemed relativistic, confusions and misunderstandings of the sort warned of by Okrent will subvert the discussion. In this investigation of truth relativism, the scope of what follows is restricted to articulating a coherent concept and thesis of truth relativism. This is not a slight task; it is, however, only a preliminary one in that the attempt is not to defend any thesis of truth relativism as such. The attempt is to find out which truth-relativistic theses are coherent and worthy candidates for further analysis and possible endorsement.

Relativism is a matter of something (X) being relativised to something else (Y).

And, as indicated, of the range of candidates for X that philosophers have discussed relativistic conceptions of, this investigation focuses on just one - truth. But what of Y? If truth is to be relativised, then to what?

From Protagoras on, a variety of candidates for the second, relativising, relatum feature in the literature. My concern is with what I call 'framework relativism'¹¹.

Introducing framework relativism, Meiland and Krausz display its varieties:

In one of its most common modern forms cognitive relativism holds that truth and knowledge are relative, not to individual persons or even whole societies, but instead to factors variously called conceptual schemes, conceptual frameworks, linguistic frameworks, forms of life, modes of discourse systems of thought, Weltanschauungen, disciplinary matrices, paradigms, constellations

¹⁰ Although, as Swoyer observes, 'although those of a relativistic persuasion typically begin with considerations about concepts, meaning, or perception rather than truth, their views do appear to lead rather naturally to conclusions about ...[truth]...' (p. 85)

¹¹ Siegel, 1987, p. 32. Siegel however, is more interested in epistemological relativism though his discussion often conflates this and truth relativism without having the explicit commitment to such conflation of those advocating an epistemic conception of truth. The latter I consider in Section Two.

of absolute presuppositions, points of view, perspectives, or worlds. (1982, p.8)

One could add 'world versions', 'categorical frameworks', 'networks of categories', 'epistemes' and so forth.

Even bearing in mind that Meiland and Krausz speak also of relativism about knowledge and not just about truth,¹² it is clear from this list that a rich variety of thinkers have contributed to the dialogue about framework relativism¹³.

Meiland and Krausz regard the absolutist, Immanuel Kant, as a key influence in the rise of modern framework relativism, for Kant influenced philosophers to accept the view that the mind imposed concepts or categories upon sensory inputs 'thus determining the form taken by our experience of the world'. (Meiland and Krausz, 1982, p. 7) They point out that, with Hegel's claim that these basic organising concepts could change over time, the ground was laid for the notion that there might be more than one and, in some sense, equally legitimate way of construing experience or reality. It is a short step to the view that truth is a function of the framework employed in making truth claims. Indeed, the framework version of relativism underlies some other suggestions as to what the relativising Y might be. It is plausible to construe having truth relative to an individual as parasitic upon framework relativism with the crucial relevant difference between individuals being the framework employed by them. Similarly for different cultures.

Looking at the list from Meiland and Krausz, one can subdivide framework relativisms into two sorts. The first is where the framework is merely a framework of concepts, 'a conceptual scheme' being the phrase most often employed. The second is where the framework is a framework of substantive beliefs (c.f. Scheffler,

¹² And one should also remind oneself that our initial working three-fold division of cognitive relativism has been challenged by some writers - as we shall see below.

¹³ For instance, Wittgenstein and Winch with 'Forms of Life', Feyerabend with 'Weltanschauungen', Kuhn with 'Paradigm', Kuhn again, and Goodman, with 'Worlds' and so on.

1967, p. 36). Though the distinction is controversial, being able to make it is a precondition for the intelligible statement of some sorts of truth relativism.¹⁴

Unless otherwise indicated, 'framework' will be used in a generic way for these types of relativiser.

The third source of variation of relativistic theses of the form 'X is relative to Y' is the relation itself. How is that relation to be understood? When one states that truth is relative to a framework more than further minor clarification of the relata is necessary for it to be known what is claimed. Drawing upon a distinction offered by Swoyer, (1982, p. 92), I also distinguish strong and weak truth relativism. This will be articulated in more detail later but some further characterisation is in order here. In the former, strong, case, to speak of a proposition¹⁵ being true relative to a framework is to suggest that the very same proposition might be true relative to one framework but false relative to another. On the latter, weak, view, a proposition might be true relative to one framework but not true relative to another only in the sense that the second framework is not able to express the proposition. Articulating weak truth relativism further will be a major task of the thesis.

Theses of truth relativism can also be advanced of varying scope. Is the relativist saying of all propositions that they can only be candidates for relative truth¹⁶, or just all propositions of a certain sort, or only some propositions (regardless of type) or what? It is the most inclusive, or global, sorts of truth relativism which have received most criticism and such criticisms have notably included self-referential concerns generated by theses of truth relativism falling in their own scope. Despite this potential vulnerability in relativism, in what follows, my concern is to try to

¹⁴ See, for instance, Chapter Two's discussion. Another precondition will be the rejection of the neoverificationist arguments of Donald Davidson against the possibility of there being an untranslatable variety of conceptual schemes. I return to this in Chapter Four.

¹⁵ I shall generally speak of propositions as truth vehicles though sometimes it is important for the discussion of some variants of truth relativism to note that some other candidate truth vehicle is in mind.

¹⁶ Be this as a reportive/mildly explicatory analysis (however surprising) or, more plausibly, as a reformative proposal.

make sense of relativism at its philosophically most challenging, that is, global¹⁷ relativism, a thesis about the nature of all truth. I focus on the least promising, most extreme, version of relativism in agreement with Meiland's observation (in the context of reflexive concerns about relativism) that:

The most interesting and important aspect of relativism is that it seems to give us a theory of the nature and conditions of intellectual work. If, as a piece of intellectual work in its own right, it claims to be of a different nature, or not subject to the same intellectual conditions as other intellectual works, then ... relativism tells us much less about the nature of intellectual activity ... It would result in a dualistic theory of the intellect. (1980, p. 119)

So, the possibility of coherent conceptions of framework truth relativism of strong or weak sorts and of coherent global theses of truth relativism understood by reference to those conceptions is the focus of this thesis.

The conceptions considered will be just that, conceptions¹⁸ of truth. It may be that some new analytical theory of truth would prove more conducive to relativistic themes than existing theories but creating such a theory goes outside the scope of this work. I will only attempt the formulation of truth-relativism within already invented host theories of truth. Of those candidate host analyses of truth, two major theories have been chosen within which to attempt explication of the concept of relative truth and articulation of a coherent global relativistic thesis in its terms. One host theory is an obvious choice - the coherence theory of truth. The other, the correspondence theory, is less apparently welcoming of relativism. As Rom Harre and Michael Krausz have observed recently, 'It seems that the coherence account of what it means to say that a statement is true is more readily construed in relativist terms than the correspondence account.' (1996, p. 127) This is all construing the coherence theory as a theory '...about the nature of, not the criteria for, truth'. (Swoyer, 1982, p. 96) Coherence theories are currently more popular as theories of

¹⁷ I borrow the term from Young (1987 and 1995). Other words which are used in the literature for theses similarly sweeping in scope are: 'total', 'pure', 'radical' ...

¹⁸ Albeit more on the reformative, than the reportive, side of explicatory.

justification, not truth,¹⁹ but it is as a theory of the nature of truth that it is employed here. I will be viewing the coherence theory as '...a conception of truth ... a way of thinking about truth...'. (Resnick, 1990, p. 406)

The coherence theory is an obvious conceptual context within which to attempt the formulation of concepts and theses of relative truth; indeed it is so obviously promising a candidate host that it is sometimes advanced as an objection to coherence theories that they entail relativism.²⁰ As will emerge in the discussion of coherence relativism, however, it proves surprisingly difficult to achieve the goal of a global thesis of truth relativism within a host coherence theory of truth. In my judgement, the task is impossible. Far from being entailed by coherence theories of truth, global truth relativism of the weak or strong variety is incompatible with such a conception of the nature of truth,

One thing that makes coherence theories seem receptive hosts for relativism is their associated idealist or constructivist or anti-realist semantics. Correspondence theories, on the other hand, with their usual association with realist semantics, seem unreceptive as contexts within which to attempt relativism's articulation. Indeed, Nola initially sets relativism up as a rival to realism. (1988, p. 1) Appearances deceive,²¹ however, and the investigations of Section One lead me to conclude that it is easier to be a global relativist about truth within the unpromising looking confines of a correspondence theory, albeit with a minimal associated ontological realism, than in a coherence host theory. Global weak truth relativism, at least, seems possible.

¹⁹ See Kirkham, 1992, ch. 1. I draw upon Kirkham's taxonomy of theory types in my Section Two, Chapter Seven.

²⁰ See, for instance, Ralph Walker's remarks in his 1989, pp. 27-28.

²¹ Nola himself goes on to qualify his initial contrast by saying: 'At first glance it would appear that relativism stands in marked contrast to realism. On the whole this is correct. However if distinctions are carefully drawn between varieties of realism and relativism, it will be seen that some of the varieties are compatible with one another.' (p. 3)

It is not the aim of this thesis to champion a correspondence over a coherence analysis of truth or to defend relativism against absolutism. I seek only the answers to these questions: 'What coherent conceptions of weak or strong framework truth relativism, if any, are there within a coherence host conception of truth and within a correspondence host conception of truth?' and: 'Which such conceptions can be used to formulate a viable global thesis of relative truth?'. The unexpected conclusion of the thesis is that global relativists are better off under a correspondence umbrella than a coherence one.

My thinking on the topic has generated a number of papers and these are listed in the references at the end (including one under 'Galle') and copies enclosed inside the back cover.

CHAPTER ONE

THE CORRESPONDENCE THEORY AND RELATIVISM

CORRESPONDENCE TRUTH:

George Pitcher poses the question:

If a person thinks or asserts something true, what is there about what he thinks or says that makes it true? What, in short, is truth? (1964, p. 2)

He immediately continues:

These questions can seem unspeakably deep; they can also seem unspeakably trivial. That is one good sign that they are philosophical. Another is that they are puzzling. On the surface, they are not puzzling, but the deeper one goes, the more puzzling they become. (p. 2)

Pitcher introduces the correspondence theory of truth by noting:

The move which comes to mind at once, of course, is to construe it as designating a relation between what people assert or think, on the one hand, and something else - a fact, situation, state of affairs, event, or whatever - on the other; and the relation which seems called for is that of agreeing with, fitting, answering to - or, to use the traditional expression, corresponding to. (p. 4)

He continues:

There can be no denying the attractiveness of this view; it seems to be just right. It struck the first of the great philosophers to consider the problem of truth - viz., Plato and Aristotle - as so obviously the correct one that the question of possible alternatives to it never occurred to them. (p. 4)

Indeed, Aristotle's famous statement that 'to say of what is that it is not, or of what is not that it is, is false; while to say of what is, that it is, and of what is not that it is not, is true',¹ conveys just the sort of obviousness that leads Pitcher to observe:

If there were such a thing as the common sense view of truth, it would be the Correspondence Theory...[that is]...at the outset...[it]...appear[s] to be straightforwardly and undeniably correct. (p. 4)

Similarly, Alan White, in commenting on the Correspondence Theory, speaks of it as not just popular but indisputable (1970, p. 102) and attributes this to 'its insistence that there be something other than what is said which makes what is said true'. (p. 103)

When attempting philosophical explication of this starting intuition, its initial plausibility can seem to vanish into thin air. Brian Carr remarks:

Different versions of the Correspondence Theory clearly offer different answers to the problem of spelling out the intuitive thesis that factual truth is a matter of saying how things in fact are. Most importantly they differ in their interpretations of the relationship of correspondence; of the bearer of truth and falsity (that which is said to be truth or false), and in their understanding of what, in the world, makes the bearer true or false. (1988, p. 80).

In partial taxonomic expansion upon this, let me focus on truth-bearers, or truth-vehicles. The range of candidates is wide. Sentences (unspecified), sentence tokens, sentence types, Quinean eternal sentences, statements, the content of statements, assertions, utterances, judgements, beliefs, theories, remarks, ideas and speech acts have all been put forward as candidates. As Richard Kirkham remarks:

Even if all philosophers reached sufficient agreement to identify by name the one right bearer of truth, our problems would hardly be at an end, for there is

¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, Book iv, Ch. 7, 1011b, 25-8. Plato's views are in *Sophist*, 263B. Though, as Alan White remarks (1970, p. 102) Aristotle's remark can be seen as the starting point for Tarski's Semantic Theory and the Logical Superfluity (or Redundancy) Theory of F. P. Ramsey.

also disagreement about the nature of the things named by each of these terms.
(1992, p. 54)²

Following tradition, I employ 'proposition' as a convenient label for the bearers of truth. Though, in agreement with Kirkham, C. J. F. Williams notes "it is easier to be persuaded that it is indeed propositions which are properly called 'true' or 'false' than to have a clear idea of what a proposition is" (1976, p. 32). For the most part it will not matter precisely what truth bearers, or truth vehicles, are. Where greater specificity is demanded, I will clarify matters.

Similarly, the "truth maker" has been variously conceived and, although broadly it is the world, or objective reality, which is intended, what this comes down to has proved troublesome. Thus one has facts, situations, states of affairs, or events as possibilities favoured by some theorist or other. Given the standard difficulties posed by hypothetical, modal, negative³ and disjunctive propositions, I follow many others (e.g. Pitcher, 1964, White, 1970 & Carr, 1988) in speaking of facts, or "facts that" as truth-makers.

It might seem from this that a corollary of a correspondence theory of truth would be ontological realism. Or, more carefully, that a realist construal of the truth maker was part⁴ of a correspondence theory. 'Realism', even 'ontological realism', is not without ambiguity.⁵ In particular, it is not absolutely clear cut just how mind independent the facts must be for a conception of reality to be realist.⁶ And, in any event, it is not clear that a theory ceases to be a correspondence theory if its

2 Kirkham himself favours a rather tolerant attitude on truth bearers and argues persuasively that the choice of truth bearer is ultimately pragmatic and that nothing, in principle, stops teddy bears being truth bearers! (1992, Sect. 2.4, pp. 59-63).

3 As C. J. F. Williams has remarked 'A Correspondence Theory of Falsehood is more difficult to come by than a Correspondence Theory of Truth'. (Williams, 1976, P. 75).

4 Kirkham (1992, p. 75) notes that one could, *qua* truth theorist, demand that truth makers be facts of some specified realist sort, deny the existence of any such facts (and thereby be, say, an idealist) and thus deny that any truths obtain! A view that he calls odd, but not inconsistent (though it seems to me to get into self-referential difficulties).

5 See Nola, 1988, pp. 4-6. Nola's editorial taxonomy of "isms" constitutes a general injunction to be conceptually precise in such discussions as the present one.

6 See Kirkham, 1992, pp. 74-79.

accompanying ontological conception of what facts are allows them to be mind dependent. As Kirkham remarks, it is perfectly possible to hold that truth consists in correspondence with facts and to hold also that facts are mind dependent entities (1992, p. 134). Indeed, as I note in Section Two, having states of mind, experience, or whatnot, as truth makers is strongly akin to having external objective reality's facts as truth makers: in each case, one can speak of a relation of correspondence between truth vehicle and truth maker. I follow Kirkham concerning the inclusive tolerance of 'correspondence theory'; and him and Nola concerning the variety of views plausibly labelled realist.

This is, admittedly, an inclusively tolerant view but it has a key feature for my purposes. Even if in some manner the creation of minds, facts would still be distinct in type from the truth vehicles, the propositions. (And this would remain so if we had something like beliefs as truth vehicles). This is a key feature in distinguishing the theories of this section from the coherence theories of the next. It will emerge that stretching the correspondence theory conception to include mind created realities as truth makers is of less assistance in formulating truth relativism than at first seems the case.

So far then, we have propositions as truth vehicles and facts as truth makers and truth is to be a correspondence relation between the two. What is this relation though? Kirkham is of the view that it is unfortunate that so much attention has focused upon the correspondence relation and judges talk of propositions corresponding with the facts as just 'a handy summing up of a theory in which no special relation makes any appearance' (1992, p. 135). He quotes (p. 135) D. W. Hamlyn (1962, pp. 201-204): "nothing turns on the use of the word 'corresponds' here. All that is meant is that wherever there is a true statement, there is a fact stated by it and wherever a fact a possible true statement which states it".

As Kirkham goes on to say, (p. 136) just how one specifies the relation would depend upon what one took the truth bearer to be. If it is a statement, the relation could be 'says that'; if it is a belief, it could be 'is the belief that', and so on. And just what those relations are is, as Kirkham observes, no special problem for a correspondence theory of truth; they are also problems within philosophy of language, philosophy of mind and so forth. In short, it is no catastrophic objection to a correspondence theory if it cannot manage to clarify everything at once. As Kirkham observes "some progress is made by reducing truth to 'saying' ...[though]... philosophy will eventually want an analysis of 'says that'..." (p. 136)

However, many correspondence theorists have attempted to clarify the relation between truth vehicle and truth maker. Two broad analytical variations dominate the literature. In White's words (p. 105), one can think of a proposition corresponding to a fact or corresponding with a fact. Pitcher (p. 10) uses 'correspondence-as-correlation' for correspondence to and explains it as 'a "weak" relation, a mere pairing of members of two or more groups in accordance with some principle' (p. 11). Contrasted with this, correspondence with is correspondence-as-congruity (p. 10) which is explained as 'a "richer" relation of harmony or arrangement between two or more things.' (p. 11). Bertrand Russell (1912) and the early Wittgenstein (1918), are notable modern instances of the "congruence" variation; and J. L. Austin (1950) of the "correlation" view.⁷

Of these two variations, White remarks that, although much of the discussion of the correspondence theory ignores such niceties, 'most have undoubtedly thought of what is truly said as correspondence with a fact' (p. 106). Pitcher echos this:

... there can be little doubt that the main impetus of traditional correspondence theories has been...to think of a proposition and the fact it states as two separate complexes which exactly fit each other... . The congruity that exists between a proposition and the reality it describes is thus considered to be of

⁷ Kirkham, (1982, pp. 119-120) sees Aristotle as more in the congruence division and Plato as more in the correlation division within correspondence theories.

the same intimate kind as that which exists between a perfect representation of something and that of which it is the representation. (p. 11).

In the face of various difficulties confronting even well worked out versions of correspondence-as-congruity, like that of the early Wittgenstein, White (p. 108) and Pitcher (p. 14) favour the abandonment of the idea of part by part structural matching of proposition and fact. They favour the weaker relationship of correlation of what is said, that p, with the fact that p.

Clearly then, a satisfactory correspondence account of truth may end up rather different from its initial conception in which:

In the proposition 'the cat is on the mat', 'the cat', designates the cat, 'on' designates the relation of being on, and 'the mat' designates the mat. The proposition asserts that the first (the cat) and third (the mat) in that order are related by the second (the relation of being on). The fact that the cat is on the mat consists of the cat and the mat, related so that the former is on the latter. The agreement is perfect. (Pitcher, p. 11).

It might even be, as C. J. F. Williams suggests (1976), that correspondence truth is not to be straightforwardly conceived of as a relation at all. Rather, it might be best analysed by use of an existential quantifier binding two conjoined variables. (Ch. 5, Sect. 3). But, even so, Williams allows that 'philosophers may be forgiven for diagnosing a concept as relational when all that was really in evidence was the less specific phenomenon, a function of two arguments (p. 91). Further, although Williams' analytical 'apparatus does not include anything explicitly relational... the analogies which exist between the (analysans) sentences we are enabled by its means to construct and sentences which can properly be called relational are sufficient to make talk of a relation of correspondence understandable and natural' (p. 96).

The details about how the relation (or "relation") of correspondence is most satisfactorily analysed need not further concern us for the moment. (I will talk of the

relation of correspondence merely as a convenient turn of phrase). The task of Section One is to investigate the possibility of formulating a coherent thesis of truth relativism within the broad constraints of a correspondence theory. Such a host theory of truth will be assumed for the sake of argument as common ground for truth relativism and its rival, truth absolutism, with each be being conceived of within this shared host theoretical framework. The point of this introduction is to note that there is no canonical and precise characterisation of the correspondence theory of truth. The core notion is that of truth vehicles and truth makers such that a true proposition is fact stating.

What is important for present purposes is that this shared ground between absolutist and relativist is one which accords truth making power to a different category of things than the truth vehicles.⁸ The facts being proposed as the source of a proposition's truth. Absolutist theories and relativist theories will be distinguished by their detailed accounts of what correspondence truth amounts to. But given this truth making power of the world in any correspondence account of truth, can any version of truth relativism be consistent with this? Is 'correspondence truth relativism' oxymoronic?

RELATIVE TRUTH AND REALITY:

The version of truth relativism with which I am concerned is so-called framework or conceptual scheme relativism. If truth is seen as a truth vehicle's correspondence to (or with) a truth maker (that is, a proposition "capturing" some aspect of reality, or fact, or whatnot), then how can a framework (or conceptual scheme) intrude upon this relationship? If there is a way things are, a determinate reality⁹ "out there" then

⁸ Compare the coherence theories of truth as investigated in Section Two.

⁹ Recall that our earlier discussion of truth makers did not commit the correspondence theory to such rigid realisms; the "loophole" will turn out to be important.

how can a framework¹⁰ mediate the relationship of proposition to reality to generate a viable truth relativism?

The situation looks particularly difficult if we focus upon one of a pair of versions of relativism distinguished by Chris Swoyer. He contrasts 'strong relativism' (about truth) with 'weak relativism'. Adapted slightly for present purposes, these are characterised as follows. In strong relativism the same proposition can be true relative to one framework and false relative to another. In weak relativism one does not have the same proposition available for each framework. Rather than being true for one framework and false for another, the proposition true in one framework will be simply inexpressible in another. (Swoyer, 1982, p. 92). I discuss weak truth relativism later but, for now, I will examine the chances of stating strong correspondence truth relativism in a coherent way.

A problem immediately emerges with strong truth relativism. How can different frameworks manage to have the same proposition made true and false by just the one world. One response is to seize on the end part of the previous sentence. It speaks of one reality and it might seem that the only way of having strong correspondence truth relativism would be to abandon this assumption. Would it aid the coherence of this conjunction of theses were there to be, literally, more than one universe, or world? Thomas Kuhn seems at times, to allow this possibility with his remark that post-revolutionary theorists live in a different world to pre-revolutionary theorists¹¹.

It is difficult to view the suggestion that there are parallel universes, or realms of being, as anything but a manner-of-speaking. But, for present purposes, no decision

¹⁰ I shall, for the moment drop the 'or conceptual scheme' as for ease of exposition. Quite what this putative relativiser amounts to proves important but will be examined later.

¹¹ Kuhn, 1970, pp.102, 150 and elsewhere; see also Feyerabend, 1978, p.70 for similar turns of phrase. But see Kuhn, 1970, p.111 and 1977, p.309, n.18 as evidence that this should just be viewed as a manner of speaking. Richard Sylvan (see his 'Radical Pluralism' in Nola, 1988, pp.253-291) is an even more dramatic seeming case of a "multiple worlds" theorist. He speaks of many true theories corresponding with many actual worlds (p. 273). However, he also makes the curious remark that to be an actual world is not to exist! (p. 280).

as to the plausibility of the suggestion has to be made. The point is whether the postulation of multiple realities would assist the coherence of relativistic correspondence truth. On the face of it, the answer is 'yes'. Were there to be multiple objective universes and various frameworks to correlate with various such universes then truth relativism would seem intelligible. Suppose that there was a world in which every event had a cause and another in which no event had a cause. Suppose further that two thinkers devise two frameworks - a deterministic one and an indeterministic one. Now, consider the proposition that suffocation causes death. It might seem that one could consider it to be true relative to the deterministic framework¹² but false relative to the indeterministic one whilst retaining reality as the provider of propositions' truth makers in that it would be the existence of a deterministic and of an indeterministic world that would make the claim that suffocation causes death true and false respectively.

Despite appearances, however, even having such radical ontological pluralism would not allow strong truth relativism. Even were there to be (at least) two worlds, an indeterministic one and a deterministic one, a sentence like 'suffocation causes death' would simply suffer ambiguity as to its reference. It would be unclear whether it expressed a proposition about suffocation as it occurs in one world or as it occurs in the other. That clarified though, its truth or falsity would simply be a matter of whether or not it matched how things were in the world it was talking about.¹³ In short, the situation seems analogous to that of indexicals, pronouns and the sort, with a one world ontology. That we had a deterministic framework that suited the deterministic world or an indeterministic framework that suited the indeterministic world would be no more relevant to the issue of propositional truth than that someone has a Christian framework of thought that a chalice fits in with or

¹² As it stands, this is unclear in that even in a deterministic world this particular proposition may happen to be false. It depends on further specification of the framework but such more detailed articulation is beside the point at hand.

¹³ Clearly two other possibilities obtain. One is that the claim is, Stawson style, neither true nor false of the indeterministic world (cf. Stawson, 1950). The other is that one takes the claim to be about both worlds and thus being either partly true (in virtue of the deterministic world) and partly false (in virtue of the indeterministic world) or just false (as a universal with exceptions provided by the indeterministic world). None of this, though, helps the relativist.

an aesthetic framework of thought that a sculpture fits in with. Those frameworks do not affect the truth or falsity of the propositions expressed by 'that fell over' where 'that' either refers to the chalice or to the sculpture. Once the referential ambiguity of the indexical is resolved there seems no ground for considering truth to be anything to do with a framework.

So how could the framework be brought into the account? So far, I have spoken of there just happening to be a multiplicity of worlds comprising objective reality (or realities). Much as in the commonsense monistic picture, I have been speaking in a way that considered these to be independent of our theorising, to pre-exist our thinking about reality. What, though, if reality were considered to be dependent on human theorising; what if we were literally world makers?¹⁴ On this view, to create a framework would also be to create, god-style, an external world to match.¹⁵

Jamie Whyte attributes just such a view to relativists. He speaks of the 'preposterous powers of creation and destruction which relativism attributes to humans' (1993, pp. 116-117). Whyte goes on :

Relativists happily accept this implication of their view. They talk about the 'social construction of scientific facts' and say things like 'Pluto didn't exist in the twelfth century'. Relativists are quite explicit about this. They mean it when they say that scientific facts have no reality independent of consensus about them. But this means that scientists didn't discover Pluto, since, by hypothesis, it wasn't there to be discovered before scientists agreed that it was. On the contrary, scientists made Pluto. (p. 117)

It might well be that relativists' talk of "constructing reality" is, contra-Whyte, a mere *façon de parler* but, even if not, and even if Whyte's dismissal of such powers is ill-conceived and it is possible for the embracer of a framework to literally make a

¹⁴ The term is Nelson Goodman's (see his 1978); I don't, however, understand Goodman to be postulating multiple worlds in the sense meant here. Goodman's views will be returned to in Chapter Two.

¹⁵ Much as God cannot create a world with round squares, so there would presumably be constraints on our world making.

world to match it, this is not of as much help in crafting a viable correspondence truth relativism as would seem at first glance.

Suppose that we consider two frameworks - a deterministic one and an indeterministic one. And, as a result, two worlds are created, one deterministic and one indeterministic. Once created, each exists somehow (we are not going to concern ourselves with the ontological plausibility of this). The point is that once both worlds do exist, and someone utters a sentence like 'suffocation causes death', it would need to be made clear what statement is being made with that sentence. In particular, it would have to be clear which world's episodes of suffocation are being discussed. Once that is clarified, then (as in the case before, when worlds were similarly multiple but pre-existing humans' devisings of frameworks) nothing more relativistic about truth than the familiar features of unclear reference seems to obtain. It is not as if one has one proposition, which is true-for one framework and false-for another. Rather, one has one proposition which is only about one framework's attendant world in the first place. Even ontology will not be relativised on this view, for both worlds exist and exist for each group of theorists. The picture is not that of a framework's endorsers having the world as they conceive of it but just a world. And even if they somehow manage to inhabit¹⁶ just that world, the multiple world view is that another world, that of the rival theorist, also exists.

Finally, none of the above would be affected were one to be even more liberal with one's conception of what could be the facts, the truth makers, for correspondence truth relativism. One could allow the facts, reality, or whatnot to be as solipsism or idealism would have it and not be extra-mental at all. Kirkham argues persuasively that 'it is perfectly possible to hold that truth consists in correspondence to the facts and to hold also facts are mind-dependent entities...(even to the extent of being)...ideal entities or, ...spiritual substance...' (1992, pp. 133-134). Whether one

¹⁶ There are difficulties with this idea, touched on in my 1988. Briefly, if the two theorists were to engage in debate "where" would that occur? And what is the world-of someone as yet undecided as to which of two rival frameworks to accept?

agrees with Kirkham is beside the present point for that point is merely that, even were one to allow such truth makers, that would be of no assistance to strong correspondence truth relativism's prospects of coherence; the above arguments apply *mutatis mutandis*.

To summarise: a key part of what makes a theory of truth a correspondence theory is the idea that truth is governed by what reality is like. What makes a theory of truth a framework-relativistic theory is the idea that the truth of one's propositions is also a function of the framework employed or assumed. Finally, strong truth relativism is the view that the same proposition could be true relative to one framework and false relative to another. We have looked at whether radical ontological proposals that there are multiple worlds would assist the conception of strong correspondence truth relativism. The answer is that it would not. Rom Harre and Michael Krausz put a similar point:

For two claims to disagree they must disagree about something which is held common. Without such commonality the claims would talk about different things... if ...they talk about 'different worlds' then the question of relativism does not even arise... . In order for there to be genuine conflict...there must be commonality of the objects to which they presumably refer. (1996, p. 218)

What then of truth relativism with just one world for propositions to correspond to? Can just one world make a proposition true relative to one framework yet false relative to another? This seems absurd but perhaps appearances deceive.

A prominent critic of any such relativism is William Newton-Smith (1982 & 1981, Ch. 2, Sect. 4, pp. 34-37). Newton-Smith allows that the same sentence interpreted differently in two different frameworks could be true on one interpretation yet false on the other. It not being the same proposition in each case, he dismisses such a view as 'trivial semantical relativism' (1981, p. 35), as a merely verbal appearance of strong truth relativism. Moreover, he denies that it is coherent to speak of the same

proposition being true relative to one framework and false relative to another. This is because he ties propositional identity to identity of truth conditions ('... sameness of meaning requires [but is not exhausted by] sameness of truth-conditions') (1982, p. 116). If propositional identity is set by truth conditions and truth is determined by the way the world is then one world strong correspondence truth relativism looks incoherent.¹⁷ If Newton-Smith is right, then one cannot have any (correspondence) truths as relative in the sense outlined.

Newton-Smith's criticisms look unanswerable; however, they have been challenged. Frank White (1986, 1989) raises an interesting criticism of the Newton-Smith argument. He argues that 'there is no incoherence in asserting that propositions may be true in one ...[framework]... and false in another'¹⁸. Were White's arguments to be sound they would be of the first importance for, to date, it has looked as if strong correspondence truth relativism was indeed incoherent. Are White's arguments sound?

Newton-Smith's "incoherence" claim rests on a nexus between propositional identity and sameness of truth conditions. As I interpret White,¹⁹ the key to making sense of strong truth relativism is to have propositional identity dependent upon identity of sense and reference yet not entail identity of truth conditions. Thus the very same proposition might be both true and false. Whether this promise is fulfilled obviously depends upon one's account of truth conditions. The relativism comes in, for White, by suggesting that such truth conditions could be theory dependent. That is, there might be, not truth *simpliciter*, but truth-relative-to-a-theory and thus the possibility of the same proposition being true-relative-to-one-theory, but false-relative-to-

¹⁷ The charge of incoherence normally levelled at relativism is self-referential incoherence derived from having all truth relative yet seeming to want to exclude the statement of relativism itself. I shall return to this, quite separate, argument in Chapter Four.

¹⁸ White, 1986, p. 332. White talks of a theory or a culture while I have been speaking generically of a framework. It has not been important to date to more closely specify just what a framework was (though it will be in the next chapter) and I shall, for the remainder of this chapter, just follow White's terminology.

¹⁹ White claimed in his 1989 paper that his views were misunderstood by me in my 1988 paper. Much of the following draws upon the clarifications contained in his later paper, especially pp. 4-5.

another. To illustrate: the same proposition (such as 'the sum of the angles of a triangle is equal to that of two right angles') occurring within the context of Euclidean geometry might be true-in-Euclid but, as 'the conditions for truth-in-Euclid are different from those of truth-in-Riemann' (White, 1986, p. 332), that same proposition can coherently be false-in-Riemann. As another illustration, 'according to one theory, space and time form a single continuum in which bodies have temporal parts. By contrast, according to another theory which considers space and time to be separate, bodies do not have temporal parts... Let us assume that a single proposition is involved, ... [as] the meanings of the relevant terms are the same in both theories ... [yet this] single proposition is true ... in the first theory and false ... in the second theory' (White, 1989, pp. 4-5). A breaking of the nexus of propositional identity and truth conditional identity is the only entry point against Newton-Smith's incoherence charge, but can it be done?

White confidently answers the challenge by saying: 'Without any doubt it is possible' (1989, p. 5). He suggests a dual account of truth. For propositions, the "truth maker" within a theory for that proposition is the part or role which the statement plays in that theory. This, as he notes, is a coherence theory account of the truth of individual propositions and is thus outside the present context of discussion. However at the level of a whole theory's truth, White suggests that one conceive of the theory (though not its individual propositions) as related to the world such 'that it is the way the world is which makes the theory as a whole work as it does, makes it successful in its predictions, fruitful in its range of applications, able to solve past anomalies and so forth' (1989, p. 5). For White, this is a weak²⁰ version of the correspondence theory of truth, coherence for individual propositions and correspondence of theory to reality (but not proposition by proposition the way the grooves in a record correspond to the sounds of its music). But is this correspondence, even 'weak' correspondence? It is not clear. Nevertheless, I am being liberal and inclusive in the allowable range of truth bearers; and one

²⁰ The use of 'weak' is White's. It is not to be confused with Swoyer's meaning for 'weak'.

possibility is theories as a whole. Granting potential truth relativistic theses disputed points for the sake of argument, let me allow this holistic conception of correspondence. Even so, will White's move work? Perhaps, but not as a version of strong correspondence truth relativism of the sort Newton-Smith is denying. White holds that a theory as a whole corresponds to the world in that 'it is the way the world is which makes the theory as a whole ... work as it does' (1989, p. 5). What is meant by this? First, it means successful predictions. But success in prediction is a matter of the prediction proposition turning out to be true as a discrete proposition. The prediction proposition claims, say, a meter reading of 10 amps and that is what turns out to be the case. Yet this common correspondence construal of an individual prediction proposition's truth condition would seem to be just what White's composite truth theory denies. But, if it is not this then what is it for a theory's prediction to succeed? Similar queries can be raised about 'fruitful in its range of applications' (1989, p. 5). By this is ordinarily meant that the theory manages to expand the range of its applications and this would ordinarily mean that the range of experiences, observations, etc. which the theory can explain is expanded. And this would involve an explanatory relationship between true observation (etc.) propositions and theory. Finally, the ability of a theory to solve anomalies would traditionally be construed as the ability of the theory to enter into an explanatory relationship with true propositions (usually observational but perhaps other-domain theoretical) which past theories could not do.

In short, these ways of talking would usually be construed as presupposing that individual propositions can have a truth value discretely.²¹ Yet White appears not to allow this. This oddity might be resolved in several ways. First, one might hold that a distinction is to be drawn between observational (etc.) propositions and theoretical ones such that, while observational propositions' truth conditions were to be construed discretely in a correspondence theory way, theoretical propositions were

²¹ Though one's epistemic judgement as to what that truth value is may be deemed fallible and, for instance, one may have theoretical grounds for resolving an anomaly by deeming it not to have been a true proposition at all.

not and were to have their truth construed in the coherence manner outlined by White. It is a commonplace that the very drawing of this observational proposition/theoretical proposition distinction presents great difficulties. However, I do not need to challenge that distinction for present purposes, for White's line of development does not look promising. Why would one allow some propositions (observational ones) to discretely correspond to reality yet others (theoretical) to only correspond as a part of a corporate whole – the theory?²² This would be especially difficult to understand were the reference and sense of terms employed in the making of either type of proposition to be as understood pre-theoretically. Alternatively, one might have a common sense understanding of the sense and reference of terms employed in the making of observation propositions but another, theoretical context, or holist,²³ construal of the determination of the sense and reference of terms employed in the making of theoretical propositions.²⁴ On such a view, and tying truth conditions to propositional identity, one might have observational propositions true discretely but theoretical propositions true collectively. However, a theoretical context construal of the sense and reference of theoretical terms employed would mean that, though typographically identical, different propositions²⁵ would be being expressed by the same sentence as used in each theory. Thus one would be back in a trivial semantic relativist position in which one did not have the same proposition true-in one theory, false in another. White explicitly does not want to go down that path and though he has propositional identity linked to sense and reference, they are, even for theoretical sentences, conceived of pre-theoretically. So though our first alternative route might make sense of a different account of observational and theoretical propositions' truth conditions it is not open to White and, in any event, is of no help in defending substantive, as opposed to trivial, strong truth relativism.

²² Note also that, although for present purposes, we are looking at a weaker thesis, that it is possible for some proposition to be true relative to one theory and false relative to another, the strategic context of the discussion is that of investigating the chances of global relativism. Were we to allow some propositions (the observational ones) to be true *simpliciter*, or absolutely, then they would constitute exceptions to global truth relativism.

²³ In the manner, say, of a Kuhn, or a Feyerabend, or a Quine.

²⁴ Mind you, there's some awkwardness when the same term occurs in both proposition types.

²⁵ Assuming that it makes sense to talk of separate propositions at all in this contextualist construal of meaning, reference and propositional identity; I shall defer discussion of such difficulties.

An attempt at modifying White's suggestion might abandon any observational/theoretical proposition distinction and view all propositions advanced by a cognitive agent as part of a total theory with no proposition up for discrete possession of a truth value. What then is the picture of anomaly, successful prediction and so forth? I assume that the idea is that one has a body of observational experience²⁶ with which one wishes to theoretically engage, of which one wishes an explanatory or descriptively true account. One's theory might have anomalous aspects; that is, episodes within that body of observational experience might resist the account offered by that theory.²⁷ In that sense, the theory as a whole might not correspond with one's experience as a whole without any particular proposition of the theory not corresponding. Perhaps this is possible; semantic holism about meaning, reference and truth is not unknown, and could be conceded to be quite coherent.²⁸ But in White's attack on Newton-Smith one has holism only about correspondence truth. His account of sense and reference is that such matters are settled by pre-theoretical common understanding. This causes problems peculiar to White's theoretical aim of separating truth and reference. Admittedly, causal theorists of reference have suggested that, for at least some terms (notably, natural kind terms)²⁹ reference is independent of sense. If one took this view, then one might be comfortable with saying that meaning, being divorced from reference, can thus be divorced from truth. For reference is what is crucial to the correspondence truth status of a proposition. (What will govern propositional identity will be dependent on how extensionalist one is). But such causalism³⁰ about reference would seem tied to discretist correspondence about truth. For, except as a piece of radical verbal reform,³¹ it is

²⁶ Whatever sort of thing one takes that to be need not concern us now.

²⁷ This can occur even if one's experiences are being categorised in terms of that theory so long as they are not total creatures of the theory. An X1 theorist can tend to see things in X1 categories and be led by his theory to expect an X1 type experience yet have an X2 type of experience.

²⁸ I don't personally judge it to be as defensible as epistemic holism but for present purposes it would be enough were it to be a coherent theory, even if not a true theory.

²⁹ Which one may expect to be key terms in theoretical statements.

³⁰ Or Historicism or whatever; the fine detail of the Kripke/Putnam type of account of reference is irrelevant here. Not reference via satisfaction of attributes associated with the term anyway.

³¹ By which I mean the recommended dropping of the ordinary concept of truth and replacing it by another. For instance, such a move is sometimes advocated in the face of scepticism about knowledge of any external world, that is, of knowledge of the truth status of any statements about it (viewing truth as

hard to see how one can avoid deeming true a proposition in which some object referred to actually instantiated the property referred to. Thus it is not clear that White can avail himself of that theory. In any event, such appeal to causal theories of reference is not to have meaning and reference divorced from truth, just meaning.

The source of difficulty with White's suggestion is that the common sense understanding³² of the sense or reference of terms used in the making of propositions involves a discrete "proposition matching world", construal of such propositions' truth conditions. This is not compatible with the coherentist account White advocates for the truth of propositions.³³ Perhaps meaning can be divorced from truth but reference cannot and perhaps a coherentist account of propositional truth can be given but not with the ordinary conception of term reference.³⁴

An exploration of White's suggestion of a correspondence account for theories' truth conditions is also in order. While at the level of individual propositions, White proposes a coherence account, at the level of theories, he proposed that theories as a whole can correspond to reality and can be deemed true if they do. And it is this latter feature that has warranted us investigating his views in a section on the correspondence theory. Problems exist with such views but White is quite right that the notion of a theory as a whole being accountable to reality³⁵ is apparently viable and not to be dismissed in a paragraph; to reiterate, I am liberal in what I allow correspondence theorists as truth-bearers. Is it, though, to be dismissed, after further scrutiny, as a source of relativism about truth?

correspondence for the moment). It seems epistemically futile to operate with such a concept of truth and thus some other anti-realist conception that blurs the semantic/epistemic distinction is proposed.

³² Not that there is any such understanding in the case of many terms employed in making theoretical statements; it's unclear to me how White's account can extend to technical terms, technically construed.

³³ This was my basic point in rejoinder to White in my 1989, p. 6.

³⁴ As I said earlier, these matters will be explored more in the second section - that on coherence accounts of relative-truth.

³⁵ By which is meant, remember, accountable as true, not just as judgeable to be true. Such semantic holism is somewhat more radical than epistemic holism. It's one thing to say, for instance, that, when faced with an anomalous experience, one has no warrant for deeming statement X rather than statement Y to be at fault and can only warrant the claim that the theory, in some manner, is at fault, and a further step to deny that any particular statement (or a theoretical subset of them) is at fault (regardless of whether it can be known to be). Or at least at first glance these are two theses. Epistemic/semantic collapses will be viewed in Section Two.

For White, the relativism of his suggestion lies at the level of the individual proposition. Some proposition is to be deemed true-relative-to theory T_1 yet false-relative-to theory T_2 . Propositional truth is coherence with the (rest of the) theory. An oddity is that White speaks of the truth makers of propositions as 'the theories themselves'.³⁶ This suggests that the coherence relation is doing all the work at the level of propositional truth. But I assume that, should the proposition be coherent with a false theory, that would not make it true-relative-to that theory but false. Otherwise one would have the strange situation of a proposition that is true although part of a theory that is (though in another sense of the word) false.³⁷ So, coherence with a theory is presumably not a sufficient condition for propositional truth but only a necessary condition; the other necessary condition being that it be a true theory that the proposition was a coherent part of. Thus, though a proposition that did not cohere with a true theory would be false-in that theory, it would also be the case that, were a proposition to cohere with a false theory, it would be false-in that theory. That is, it would be false in virtue of it being a part of a false theory.

We are examining the idea that what might be true for one theory might not be true for another. How does such strong relativism work on this view? Some proposition might be a coherent part of a theory T_1 , which corresponds to reality; it might also be a coherent part of a theory T_2 , which fails to correspond to reality. Thus it will be true-relative-to T_1 and false-relative-to T_2 . It may also fail to be a coherent part of T_3 , a theory corresponding to reality and would thus be false-relative-to T_3 as well³⁸.

This all seems fine assuming that earlier reservations can be accommodated somehow; this seems to be a coherent form of relativism. Furthermore, there seems

³⁶ White, 1989, p. 5. He remarks of this that this is a bold hypothesis about reality and not a trivial analytic claim.

³⁷ Not that this is incoherent, for two senses of 'true' are involved; it is strange though.

³⁸ Actually, various other ways of speaking of these sub-cases of falsehood are interesting, though a bit beside my present purpose. The case of X failing to form part of some true theory T_3 may be thought better classified as it bring neither-true-nor-false in T_3 provided that T_3 doesn't entail X's denial.

to be no inherent restraint on the number of theories which might be true³⁹ and which, moreover, might be both true and containing X as part. Now, consider the possibility that there is just one true theory in the correspondence sense, that there is a unique determinate way the world is and thus the nature of reality is capable of but one true and complete description. Even on such a view, some true proposition, X, would still be true in virtue of its coherence with a theory itself true in virtue of correspondence with reality. (Call that theory 'T₁'). But, in such a case, T₁'s truth would not seem to be relativistic at all, it is the one true theory corresponding to the way of the world. It is hard to see why one would resist calling this the absolute truth of T₁. If it is in some way still a version of relativism then just what the comparison absolutist theory could be is obscure. Moreover, there is a sense in which, as any statement is only able to be true by being a part of the absolutely true theory, it is tempting to think of it also as absolutely true. However, this is probably not well advised, for, despite being an integral part of an absolutely true T₁, X might also be part⁴⁰ of a false T₂. Thus, despite being part of the one absolutely true theory, X might be false relative to T₂.

The view is that of an absolutist correspondence theory of truth at the level of whole theories and a relativist theory of the truth of propositions. Though odd, there is nothing apparently incoherent about such a view. Though as remarked, it all depends on more sense being made of the theory of sense, reference and propositional identity upon which it rests than I could discern. It is not, however, global truth relativism and that is my primary focus of attention.

To avoid such absolutism at the theory level seems to require more than one theory⁴¹ being true of the one reality. Certainly White seems to view relativism as

³⁹ It is clear from various passages in each of the White papers that White sees a plurality of true theories as part of the relativist picture but this is not entailed by the views under present examination.

⁴⁰ Indeed conceivably, and curiously, each one of the constituent statements of T₁ may be also a part of some false theory or other.

⁴¹ Total theories, or theories in the same domain, that is.

centrally concerned to claim that there might be differing but equally true construals of reality. (1984, p. 334)

That can only be done with some sort of "plasticity" to reality, though not necessarily unlimited plasticity. Such a view is the topic of the next few chapters.

CHAPTER TWO

FRAMEWORK RELATIVISMS WITH ONE WORLD REALISM

INTRODUCTION

Concerning correspondence truth relativism, I argued that conjoining truth relativism with radical ontological suggestions about the existence of multiple realities did not assist its coherent formulation. Once referential ambiguity was cleared up, no special grounds for conceiving of truth in any non-absolutist way were provided by "many worlds" ontologies. That leaves a "one world" ontology and, after considering White's response to Newton-Smith, the challenge remains of making sense of global, weak or strong, framework truth relativism within a host correspondence theory and with just one world. Despite a host correspondence theory and a single world looking like the most difficult context within which to propose truth relativism, at least weak relativism is coherently achievable; and, moreover, achievable with discrete propositions as vehicles for correspondence truth. A restriction on this work's scope is that only framework relativisms are under investigation and it proves important for the articulation of correspondence truth relativism to explicate what is meant by 'framework', to make clearer just what the relativising relatum is. I turn now to that task before articulating a conception of framework relativism which escapes standard criticisms.

FRAMEWORK RELATIVISMS

The beginnings of intelligible correspondence truth relativism are found in work by Meiland. The key source is a 1977 article. In outline his idea is 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 relationship 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). (1977, p. 571)

The form of relativism which I wish to investigate is sometimes called 'framework relativism'. Accordingly, the first adjustment to make to Meiland's suggestion is to restrict the third relatum, the W. Closest to what I require on Meiland's list is: 'a set of leading principles' or: 'a world view'. Indeed, a loose family of such notions is used by relativists.

Harvey Siegel has remarked: 'In the literature on relativism, considerable attention has been paid to the kindred notions of "conceptual framework" and "conceptual scheme". The relationship between these notions and the doctrine of relativism is nonetheless, problematic. ...There are a host of alternative renditions of the notion (which I will refer to both by "framework" and "scheme"...) in the literature.' (Siegel, 1987, p. 32).

There is indeed a bewildering variety of notions occurring in the literature. To reiterate, Meiland lists: 'conceptual schemes, conceptual frameworks, linguistic

frameworks, forms of thought, Weltanschauungen, disciplinary matrices, paradigms, constellations of absolute presuppositions, points of view, perspectives, or worlds.' (Meiland & Krausz, 1982, p. 84). One could add: world view, world versions, categorical frameworks, semantic networks, languages, epistémés etc. Which of this bewildering array is best offered as Meiland's W?

Israel Scheffler's statement of a familiar distinction in trying to lend order to this medley is useful; he remarks:

This distinction may be drawn in different ways but the variations are irrelevant to the main issues at hand. We may express it, for example, as a distinction between concepts on the one hand and propositions on the other, between general terms or predicates on the one hand and statements on the other, between a vocabulary on the one hand and a body of assertions on the other, between categories or classes on the one hand and expectations or hypotheses as to category membership on the other. (Scheffler, 1967, p. 36).

Another distinction adds a useful crosscutting axis in a taxonomy of possibilities. This is Swoyer's distinction between 'strong relativism' and 'weak relativism'. The idea of strong truth relativism is that the same proposition is true relative to one framework (or W) and false relative to another. Contrastingly, with weak truth relativism a proposition which is true relative to one framework may be unavailable, 'simply inexpressible in ... another' (Swoyer, 1982, p. 92).

As a first approximation, these two distinctions give us four ways of trying to explicate Meiland's three-place relation. Using 'propositional web' (PW) as a convenient tag for the latter members of Scheffler's distinction pairs and 'categorical web' (CW) for the former, our matrix is comprised of:

- 1) strong propositional web correspondence truth relativism;
- 2) weak propositional web correspondence truth relativism;
- 3) strong categorical web correspondence truth relativism; and

4) weak categorical web correspondence truth relativism.

I will argue that 4) is the most satisfactory explication of Meiland's three-place relation; what, however, of the others? Let me first consider 1). Strong propositional web truth relativism was the subject matter of the last chapter. Although it is the most interesting variant of relativism, it was found to be in difficulty. The difficulty lay in the tension between the truth making role of the world (implied by it being a version of correspondence truth) and the role of the W, the propositional web.¹ How could the one reality make a proposition true relative to one PW and false relative to another? Making the propositional webs² themselves the truth makers seems a retreat to a coherence theory unless one could have the webs as a whole correspond to reality for their truth. But that could only be a globally relativistic view if there was the chance of more than one web corresponding to reality. And if the goal for such webs is strong relativism, this is impossible. The one world would have to make contrary webs each true. Option 1), then, is to be rejected.

What of the second candidate? Would it help achieve a viable propositional web relativism to have weak, not strong, truth relativism aimed at? This alternative fails immediately because the whole point about weak truth relativism is that the proposition in question, although statable in terms of one framework, is not statable in another's. Given this, the apt relativiser for weak relativism is not a propositional web but a categorial web. If one had a series of propositional webs, say five, and three of them employed one categorial web (but to state different series of propositions) and two of them employed a different categorial web, then, for purposes of weak relativism, one would not differentiate among the three. Each would have the same possibilities of propositional statement, a proposition endorsed

¹ There are variations upon this type of relativism (must the propositions constitutive of the web be beliefs of some cognitive agent, or community of such agents, or could the W be merely a set of propositions up for cognitive consideration? - and: how wide is the W being taken to be? A whole world-view? A more restricted theory? etc). But, for present purposes, there is no point in exploring such fine detail. The role of belief will be a major issue in the second section of the thesis - especially in Chapter Nine.

² Or theories - as we spoke of them in Chapter One.

in one propositional framework may³ not be stated by a theorist endorsing another one of the three but it would be statable, the conceptual resources would be there. So within that group of three propositional frameworks no weak relativism would occur. In contrast, the other two propositional frameworks of our supposed series would have their propositions such that they were unstatable with the conceptual resources of the first three; but it is beside that point that some proposition is endorsed by one of that 'pair' and rejected by the other. In short, for weak relativism, it seems to be the categorical framework that is of significance and not the framework of propositions that it is employed to state. I will proceed to discuss weak categorical framework truth relativism soon but, first, let me comment briefly upon the other of the two remaining candidates : strong categorical web truth relativism.

As it is strong relativism, the target is that of having the proposition true relative to one categorical web and false relative to another. The immediate objection is that the whole point of categorical web relativism is that two webs are two webs not one. What has been left obscure to date is the degree of inter-translatability, or categorical overlap, which is compatible with webs' individuation as different webs. Were this to be stipulated to be zero, that is, were the two webs to be incommensurable, or non-inter-translatable, then any proposition expressible in one web would be inexpressible in the other. If, on the other hand, criteria of web individuation were such that there were to be enough conceptual overlap for the same proposition to be expressible within each categorical web, then all of our earlier worries with strong relativism would arise again. If it is the same proposition and thus the same world that it is about, then how can the categorical web mediate truth making of a proposition by the world in a way that makes it true relative to one CW and false relative to another yet still qualifies as a version of correspondence truth? The difficulties facing such a view seem insoluble. Although I judge that the problems are insoluble and argue that the fourth, and remaining, candidate, weak categorical truth relativism, is the only

³ I say 'may' because I have not been concerned to indicate criteria for the individuation of propositional webs. In their absence, it is obscure whether or not propositional webs can intersect. To pursue this is beside present purposes but on such matters see Korner, 1970, 1984 and, in discussion of his views, Edwards, 1990. I shall discuss things further in Chapter Six.

defensible form within the confines of a correspondence analysis, let me examine strong categorial web relativism more thoroughly before pressing on.

First, let me refine the propositional web/categorial web distinction in the above taxonomy. In particular, I further sub-divide categorial webs. Consider these three propositions:

P₁: 'witches can turn people into newts';

P₂: 'witches do not exist'; and

P₃: 'there may or may not be witches'.

Present in each is the word 'witches'. Presumably, then, proposers of any of them have the concept of witchhood.⁴ However, the use to which 'witch' is put indicates different beliefs as to the extension of 'witch'. P₁ is committed to there being witches, P₂ against and P₃ is uncommitted either way. So, even someone stating P₂ has 'witch' in her understood vocabulary, and thus, in one sense, as part of her web of category terms. Even so, 'witch' is not a part of her web of categories in the sense that she uses it to categorise reality. Her very point in proposing P₂ is to deny 'witch' any usefulness in that role. By contrast, a stater of P₂ does have the applicability of 'witch', its success as a way of classifying the world's stuff, as a commitment. The P₁ stater conceives of the world in "witchy" terms in a way that the P₂ stater does not. If the P₂ stater becomes persuaded of the existence of witches (and shares the P₁ thesis about their powers), then this would not involve conceptual change in the sense that she would now understand a concept that she hitherto did not; rather, she would now give that concept and whatever else is appropriately semantically tied to it an ontological status which it did not previously have. 'Witch' would have become operative for her in a way it previously was not. In effect, a belief change has occurred, a belief change about the ways in which the world can be categorised.

⁴ Concerns about whether 'witch' might mean different things to different users of it can, for present purposes, be put to one side.

What the witchist stater of P_1 shares with the a-witchist stater of P_2 and with the "agnostic"-about-witches stater of P_3 I call a shared categorical repertoire. This at least contains the concepts of witchiness and whatever else turns out to be associated semantically⁵ with it (like, obviously, non-witchiness). I will also speak of P_1 's commitment to 'witch' being positively operative as a category term. There are some further complexities arising out of P_2 and P_3 and I will return to them in due course. So far, then, I have distinguished a term being part of one's categorial web in the sense of being part of one's categorial repertoire, from it being part of one's categorial web in the sense of being one of a set of categories which one takes to be positively operative, to be viable as ways of carving up reality. Now, to have strong truth relativism with a categorial web as relativiser, which of these two senses just distinguished is apt? Neither is; but why?

Relativising truth to a positively operative web of categories is more in line with the spirit of relativism. Framework relativism seems bound up with cognitive agents having conceptions of "the world" in the sense of placing a particular construal upon reality, of having a way of "seeing" the world. In explication, one may attempt relativising truth to propositional webs but I argued that these were unsatisfactory relativisers for strong relativism. Positively operative categorial webs seem more promising as explications. However, the promise of any coherent form of strong correspondence relativism turns out to be illusory.

One immediate difficulty concerns the notion of a positively operative category. Suppose that one person (a witchist) holds witches to exist and another (an a-witchist) holds them not to exist. This would mean that the witchist's web contains 'witch' as a (positively operative) category and the a-witchist's does not. But although the a-witchist does not have 'witch' as a positively operative category, she does seem to have 'non-witch' as a positively operative category. There is a commitment to the omni-applicability of 'non-witch'. Unlike the "agnostic" about witches, who would

⁵ It is of no present concern to examine how far such "associations" might go. Debates between holists and "discretists" are beside the point of what is at hand.

have 'non-witch' operative but of unknown universality of application. So it is not as if the a-witchist is un-committed about the categorisation of the world's stuff on the parameter witch/non-witch. So, though the witchist has 'witch' and 'non-witch' as positively operative categories, the a-witchist has only 'non-witch' so operative. Indeed, to distinguish the a-witchist from the "agnostic" about witches one could usefully speak of the a-witchist as construing 'witch' as negatively operative, unable to be used in categorisation of the world's stuff. She will of course be able to employ the term 'witch' in other ways, otherwise her a-witchism would be ineffable.⁶

To recap, the motivation is that of having one's relativiser being that part of one's construal of reality which is constituted by the categorisation web one endorsed as applicable, one's commitments as to the terms to be employed in forming accounts of reality. It is a sort of: "here's how this carves up reality and so the truth of various propositions are to be thought of as relative to this web" view. This inclines one to think of the category terms of the web to be those taken to be positively operative. But part of the conceptualisation of reality by a cognitive agent such as our a-witchist is that the world's stuff cannot be categorised by 'witch'. There is not just a web of positive categorial commitments to the applicability of say, 'table' or 'gold', there is a commitment against the applicability of 'witch' (or to the omni-applicability of 'non-witch'). If one is to pursue referentially operative categorial webs as relativisers, then it seems that both positively and negatively operative category terms are included.

Let me return to strong truth relativism. What is wanted is the same proposition being true relative to one operative categorial web and false relative to another. Consider P_1 again ('witches can turn people into newts'). How could P_1 be true relative to one

⁶ If one took it that one could only make statements about the world using positively operative category terms then, *prima facie*, difficulties exist with 'witches don't exist'. One could, in the face of this, proceed in ways made familiar as responses to Meinongianism like mounting some sort of Russellian analysis of such claims so that 'witch' is made explicitly non-referential but it doesn't seem to help here. Whether 'witch' is in subject position as a referring term or one has 'is a witch' in predicate role, we still have it as a categorisation term appearing in the *analysans*. And that is what is, by hypothesis above, barred. One could also analyse 'witches don't exist' such that 'witch' becomes metalinguistic yielding something like: " 'witch' is not a categorisation term that the universe's stuff can be categorised with' ". 'Witch' is thus mentioned, not used, yet one is still making a statement about the world; again this would be barred (by hypothesis). Each, however seems to be a coherent way of discussing the world.

web yet false relative to another? Such webs are less thoroughly "world making" than was the case with having propositional webs as relativisers in that one could have a claim like P_1 made false by the world even if there were witches (were they not to have the power attributed to them). A web may have 'witch' as positively operative but is not thereby committed to P_1 's claims about their powers. But if the "world making" prospects of operative categorial web relativism is comparatively diminished, it has not diminished to nothing. What if one considers the a-witchist's web? It contains 'witch' but with the status : 'negatively operative'. It looks as if, were one to relativise P_1 's truth status to the a-witchist web, then it would be false relative to that web; if not, what role is the operativeness of the web playing? But if this is so, then has not the role of the world in truth making been abandoned? It seems so, at least when it comes to the applicability to the world of category terms. This is brought out most starkly by considering propositions like P_2 . If P_2 is to be false by reference to the witchist's web and true by reference to the a-witchist's then the world seems to be playing no truth making role at all and this sounds more like strong coherence relativism than strong correspondence relativism.

The problem is obviously caused by the role of the commitment. It is the witchist web being distinguished from the a-witchist web in virtue of the former's positively operative status for 'witch', as opposed to the latter's negatively operative status, that has P_1 true or false depending on the relativiser. These commitments amount to the web being a version of a propositional web. It is thus no surprise that strong operative categorial web correspondence truth relativism proves no more able to be made sense of than its propositional web predecessor.

Yet the removal of the commitment element from the categorial web seems to leave a mere categorial repertoire. The witchist and the a-witchist will share webs⁷ and it is hard to see how, as it is the same web, a given proposition, like P_2 , could end up as anything but either true or false (but not both) relative to that shared web. To get

⁷ I'm ignoring as irrelevant to the point at hand the possibility of other sources of difference.

strong relativism one has to have two webs and when one has two categorial repertoires as the webs the problem becomes managing to have the proposition expressible in each. These issues have already been discussed in the last chapter's treatment of propositional web strong truth relativism (though the label awaited this chapter's taxonomy). This leaves weak categorial repertoire correspondence truth relativism as the remaining one of the four broad types of framework relativism in my taxonomy.

Even if some form of this proves viable, this result may seem disappointing in that what would be lost are some of the more radically interesting elements of relativism's neo-protagorean promise. Such, though, is the price of a coherent truth relativism that also tries to be a version of correspondence truth. If a relativist thought that having a commitment to the applicability of the category 'witch' was somehow world shaping, or world version creating, or whatever,⁸ then this has been lost. No matter how committed one is to the applicability of 'witch' the world may "refuse" to provide the right sort of stuff to form into class members. Short of abandoning the current loose realist-correspondence theory constraints which I am operating within, it is hard to see how any such world shaping power is possible.⁹ Some less extreme relativism, which is less challenging to the realist commitment to the ontological independence of what is from human conceivings, seems enjoined. But if it is weak categorial web relativism that is the correspondence truth relativist's best hope, which of the two versions of a categorial web is most apt?

First, let me examine having operative categorial webs as relativisers.¹⁰ The whole point about operative categorial webs is that part of what individuates webs is the commitment to the applicability of various categories which is implicit in the web. Thus a "witchist" web will have 'witch' as positively referentially operative, an "a-

⁸ Cf. Chapter One, above.

⁹ Or, indeed, helpful to strong relativism anyway, see above and Chapter One.

¹⁰ I am, as will be seen below, critical of the relevance of commitments as to webs' 'categories' applicability to the issue of weak relativism. I bother to outline my examination of this possibility as the final piece in an eliminative strategy in which the view I explicate is some detail is seen as the only feasible version of correspondence truth relativism.

witchist" web will have 'witch' as negatively operative. So, let us try P_1 as a proposition whose truth status is a matter of relativisation to a web. To say that P_1 is true relative to the witchist web seems comprehensible at first glance. It is weak relativism that is the goal so the idea here is that P_1 is expressible using the resources of the witchist's web of categories. And this seems so. As the witchist is committed to 'witch' being able to operate referentially, 'witch' is in her web and available for employment in P_1 .

The a-witchist, however, also has 'witch' in his web as a negatively operative category. But as it is negatively operative, does the web count as a different web in virtue of that difference in commitment? It does not much matter for present purposes, for whether the a-witchist's web is the same as the witchist's in virtue of each having 'witch' operative or different in virtue of a difference in type of commitment, each has the resources to state P_1 , although the a-witchist would not be inclined to do so. It is not as if P_1 is ineffable by use of the a-witchist's categorial web, it is just that to propose P_1 would be for the a-witchist to be inconsistent.

To get P_1 as not expressible, one has to have a greater web difference than the one between witchist's web and a-witchist's. Nor would moving to the "agnostic"-about-witches categorial web help. It appears to, for presumably the "agnostic's" operative web will not contain 'witch' at all for neither of the types of commitment that earn a category a listing in such a web is present. So, may the "agnostic's" web be one in terms of which P_1 is inexpressible? 'Witch' is absent, thus (assuming there are no witches) may not P_1 be true-relative-to the witchist's web but simply not be able to be expressed relative to the agnostic's? Perhaps so, but the progress here is illusory. 'Non-witch' is available in the agnostic's web; the applicability of it is not challenged. All that is in doubt is the extent of that applicability. The proposition P_1 can be expressed using a sentence employing 'non-witch' rather than that chosen above. In any event, it would be strange to have P_1 held to be inexpressible however hesitant

the agnostic is about expressing it. After all, it is the sort of thing about which he is trying to take an epistemic stance.

If one is to have P_1 inexpressible, then this would seem to be a matter of one's categorial repertoire, not of one's type of commitment concerning the applicability of that repertoire's category terms. But though one must at least have a different categorial repertoire for weak relativism (as opposed to differing commitments to the applicability of the same repertoire's categories) may one not also demand of any purported relativisers that it be endorsed by some group of cognitive agents as operating? Again, to do so, though more in the spirit of relativism's anthropocentrism than having a mere repertoire as relativising web, has severe difficulties facing it.

The first of these concerns the intelligibility of denial of the categorial commitments of some relativising web. Suppose that there is a web of categories X (to which the appropriate commitments as to the applicability of those categories have been made and it is thus an operative web). Suppose also that there is another operative¹¹ web, Y, which employs a different repertoire of categorial terms.

Consider some proposition P_x made employing the terms of X. The weak relativist suggestion is that the very concepts in terms of which P_x is made are such that P_x is ineffable without recourse to the conceptual resources of X. In particular, Y will not provide the concepts with which to propose P_x . So far there is no difficulty. But if P_x is to be proposable then what of $\sim P_x$? Presumably it, too, is proposable, or, at least, expressible. And presumably also, if its truth value is to be relativised, it will be to X and only X.¹² Included as such propositions are presumably claims denying the applicability of some category of X. For instance, suppose that one category of X is X_1 . As X is an operative web it has a commitment concerning X_1 - that it is

¹¹ Presumably the commitments which make the web an operative one are commitments made by different cognitive agents to those of the users of X. Contrast this with "bilinguals" with both X and Y category repertoires.

¹² Chapter Six goes into the issues of categorial repertoire individuation more thoroughly.

applicable. But although one wants ' X_1 exists' as an expressible proposition true relative (weakly) to X , one also wants ' X_1 does not exist' expressible, and presumably with its truth value being (weakly) relative to X . Suppose further that the world happens to be uncategorisable by X_1 . That presumably means that the claim that X_1 does not exist is true and that claim, although understandable only in terms of the categories of X , constitutes rejection of part of X 's commitment to the referential operativeness of its categories, specifically, it is denied that X_1 is positively operative.

In short, the case reinforces the intuition that for weak relativism, it is the categorial repertoire¹³ that is of importance and is the apt relativiser; and that an agent's commitments to the applicability of those categories to the world is neither here nor there to the weak relativist's concern with expressibility. One can understand X and Y , endorse Y , see Y and X as rivals and thus, using the repertoire of X and ignoring its commitments, deny one¹⁴ of X 's commitments by asserting ' X_1 does not exist'.

Another problem with the relativiser being a referentially operative categorial web is as follows. The relation of weak relativism is presumably some three-place relation of truth vehicle, categorial web and world. In comment upon Meiland's suggestion, Siegel (1987, p. 12) observed correctly that a proper restraint upon explications of this is that for a three-place relation one must have three distinct relata. It is not clear that that requirement can be met with committed categories. To elaborate: consider P_2 as our proposition in question. This does not seem sufficiently distinct from the witchist web's positively referentially operative status for its category term 'witch' to satisfy Siegel's demand that it be a distinct relatum. Even in non-existential propositions, like P_1 , there is an assumption that witches exist. Having the web as a mere categorial repertoire escapes this difficulty, as the next chapter, will show.

¹³ The notion of rivalry when one is speaking of categorial repertoires will receive explicatory attention in Chapter Six.

¹⁴ Or all.

In summary, if one is to espouse relativism within a correspondence truth framework, then it will have to be weak relativism with the relativiser being a categorial repertoire. Such relativism requires further explication. That explicatory task begins with the next chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

CATEGORIAL REPERTOIRE WEAK TRUTH RELATIVISM

INTRODUCTION

In the last chapter it was concluded that to explicate a three-place relation proposal for a viable conception of correspondence truth relativism, the most promising explication would have a categorial web, in the sense of a categorial repertoire, forming the relativising relatum of, in Swoyer's terms, a weak concept of relativism. In this chapter, such a concept of weak truth relativism is explicated and a substantive thesis of truth relativism articulated in its terms. In subsequent chapters, objections to such a truth relativistic thesis are considered and rejected and the thesis is further clarified and developed.

THE CONCEPT OF CATEGORIAL REPERTOIRE WEAK TRUTH RELATIVISM

The first thing to explicate further in the three-place relation of relative truth¹ is the W. The last chapter explicated the appropriate sense of 'categorial web' for weak relativism to be a 'categorial repertoire' and in this chapter, that is what I will mean by 'categorial web' or 'W'. I speak of a categorial web because it is plausible that various concepts are linked to others such that the applicability of some has implications for the applicability of others. How far this may go is not worth pursuing here.² For present purposes, debates between semantic holists and semantic "discretists" are an unnecessary complication. I avoid the more common

¹ I remarked in my 1988 paper that 'the only hope for relativism about truth (within a correspondence theory was) the three term relation suggestion of Meiland's' (p. 61). I also remarked that the suggestion had not been explored in the literature and that to do that 'would be a paper in itself' (p. 58). My 1994 was an attempt at that paper. The matter is further explored in my 1996. The latter summarises the last chapter's analysis. The former covers much of the discussion of this chapter and the next.

² The matter is revisited in Chapter Six.

'conceptual scheme' to avoid the unwanted suggestion of holism. The "W" having been given some initial clarification, let me return to Meiland's three-place relation for explicating the concept of relative truth.

Although admitting that his explication is incomplete and problematic, Meiland takes it to be adequate 'to begin to show that Husserl and other absolutists are making a great mistake by assuming that relative truth must be either nothing at all or else a variety of absolute truth' (Meiland, 1977, p. 572). Crucial to the viability of the explication is the requirement that the notion of relative truth does not include the notion of absolute truth (p. 574). In further clarification of his idea, Meiland says that one should not view the form of a relative truth claim as appropriately expressed by: 'P is true for W', for that raises the question: "what does 'truth' mean in this claim?" and encourages us to answer: 'absolute truth' and thus have our notion of relative truth include that of absolute truth. Rather, we should hyphenate, to get: 'P is true-for-W'. Here 'true' has no independent semantic role and is to be considered a mere part of a term 'true-for-W' much as 'cat' in 'cattle' is but a syntactic fragment and not to be taken to mean the same as 'feline'. (p. 574)

Siegel complains that the cases are disanalogous (Siegel, 1987, pp. 13-14). Though 'cat' in 'cattle' is not a meaningful part, surely 'true' in 'true-for-W' is. 'For it is, after all, a conception of relative truth ...' (p. 14) being offered. Siegel continues that, this being so, it has not been shown by Meiland that the concept of truth involved in the 'true' of 'true-for' is not that of absolute truth. There is something to Siegel's complaint here. In what sense, if any, are the concepts of absolute and relative truth both concepts of truth? What seems required of Meiland is a more generic notion of correspondence truth which has at least two species. If something can be done along these lines, then he could either withdraw his hyphenation and have 'true' in 'true for W' mean that broader concept, or retain his hyphenation and have 'true-for-W' meaning a species of the more generic notion of correspondence truth with absolute truth as another species. On this latter option, 'truth-for-W' would be meaningful

only as a whole and the whole would be a label for the species, relative truth, of the broader notion of correspondence truth. Use of the hyphenated label would be just a visual reminder that this is, after all, a relativistic variety of the more generic notion of correspondence truth.

This is promising except that it leaves obscure just what this general notion of correspondence truth may be which allows of these two sub-varieties. Meiland goes some way towards meeting this concern with his discussion of correspondence. Speculating on why Husserl sees any notion of truth as having to include the notion of absolute truth he says that Husserl 'perhaps thinks of absolute truth as correspondence with reality and also thinks that any form or variety of truth has to involve correspondence with reality' (Meiland, 1977, p. 573). Meiland responds by 'distinguishing between two-term correspondence and three-term correspondence. In other words we can bring both absolute truth and relative truth under the more general concept of correspondence with reality, although these two types of correspondence may differ considerably from one another' (pp. 573-574). But, as Meiland recognises, (p. 580) it is still obscure what is meant by the three-term relation of correspondence, 'P corresponds to reality for W', or, for that matter, what the more general, or generic, notion of correspondence is. Meiland's response is to claim that, obscure though the three-term relativist notion of correspondence and presumably the more general notion is, 'the relativist is in no worse a position than the absolutist at this point' (p. 580).

Siegel disagrees and claims that the relativist is worse off but, as he does not here consider the type of categorial web variants of W that are under present examination, his discussion does not neatly fit in with the present one and I will not directly address his remarks.³ It does, however, seem that Siegel is right and the

³ Siegel's discussion (p. 17) comes later in his chapter than his purported establishment of the collapse of Meiland's putative three-term relation into a two-term one. Siegel does address relativising truth to conceptual schemes, frameworks of belief and so forth in the second chapter of his book (pp. 32-44). Regrettably though, the categorial repertoire variant of framework relativism considered here is not discussed. Siegel is more concerned with epistemological relativism than truth relativism (and in my view blurs them too much in his discussion) and with notions of "conceptual scheme" rather more closely related to a substantial framework of belief than here discussed.

three-term relation is worse off than the two-term one in initial understandability.

Accordingly, I attempt to develop Meiland's notions further.

The traditional correspondence theory of truth has been widely criticised concerning the obscurity of each relatum and of the relation of correspondence between them but, at an intuitive level, it seems clear enough. There is a world "out there", just one world and there is an objective way that it is. Moreover, people have conceptions of it,⁴ and advance propositions about it and these propositions may correspond to how the world actually is or they may not.

Whatever difficulties emerge upon closer analysis there is an obvious commonsense clarity to this picture. Does the relativist have any such intuitively graspable three-term notion of correspondence, one that as easily gets to an intuitive "first base" of understanding? It is not clear that she has. The difficulty is just how the categorial web, the W, fits in. One obvious way is that any P employs the categories and concepts of a W but this does not help to distinguish the relativist's views for even the absolutist says that of course any P employs some W but, with P's sense established, the truth or falsity of that P is a two-place relation of correspondence of P and reality. Either reality is, or it is not, such that P corresponds to it.⁵ If it is not, the problem may well be that the W employed by P is the culprit, that the world just does not contain the kinds of thing envisaged by W and presupposed by P and thus P, presupposing W, will not correspond to it.⁶ But to admit this is merely to note one source of non-correspondence of P and the world⁷ and constitutes no grounds for conceiving of truth as some sort of three-term relation.

⁴ To use Siegel's turn of phrase (1987, p. 17).

⁵ For simplicity's sake, I speak here in an implausibly sharp-edged bivalent way.

⁶ Clearly if P is something like: 'W does not have application', then this will not apply.

⁷ Which will make P (absolutely) false or, maybe, neither true nor false if one is a Strawsonian about failed reference.

But if this involvement of W does not suffice, what is the contribution of W to three-term correspondence? If I am right, then it is a legitimate challenge to Meiland to say that there is more of a problem for the relativist than the absolutist in providing a way of understanding his suggestion about truth, even admitting it to be embryonic. Also, if one has both a two and a three-term relation of correspondence, what warrants deeming both to be sub-varieties of a more general notion? Put another way, what are the similarity and difference relationships of the three notions? Something can be done in answering these challenges that is plausibly construable as relativistic and also constitutes a development of Meiland's ideas, and thus can aptly be called 'neo-Meilandian'.

It is weak relativism that is at issue and a categorial web is our candidate as relativiser, but two other assumptions of what follows should be made clear. The first is that I continue to assume that just one world exists to play a truth making part for propositions about it.

However, though I assume that there is "just one lot of stuff out there", and not rival, or alternative, worlds⁸, I make no stipulation about that stuff's nature beyond something I will return to soon. That is, the world's stuff will not be assumed to be restricted to the "gritty" stuff of common sense or even the oddities of theoretical physics. It may include stuff categorisable into gods, hobgoblins, non-corporeal minds, abstract entities (like numbers and abstract propositions) and so on. Accordingly, I henceforth just speak of the world and its stuff.

In explication of Meiland's idea of a general notion of correspondence with two-place (absolute truth) and three-place (relative truth) sub-varieties, consider the following.

⁸ As it happens, it would not weaken the analysis were there to be more than one reality, but it wouldn't help relativism either; thus I stick with "just one world" for simplicity's sake.

First, the general notion, what I will call: 'The generic concept of correspondence truth' (GCCT).⁹

GCCT: P is true (*simpliciter*)' means 'the world is such that it corresponds to P.

And the associated concept of falsehood¹⁰ is simply that P does not correspond to the world.

This is just a version of the correspondence theory's usual vague intuition of true propositions as corresponding to the facts or to the way things are. It is vague, but all participants in this particular dispute are correspondence theorists and thus presumably consider the usual difficulties in spelling out a tighter formulation to be just that, difficulties, not fatal objections to the core intuition. Also, it is the task of the following, more specific, varieties to cash out this general conception. Let me move on to the explication of the notions of absolute truth and relative truth.

The positive idea of truth that absolutists have is that there just is a way that the world is, that it just has structures and features and its bits stand in relations and so forth and it is this natural patterning of, and relationships among, the world's stuff that we may, in part, capture with a true proposition. This is still close to a simple expansion of the generic notion; so let me select a little. A distinction can be drawn between two sorts of categorisation of the stuff of the universe. In the first, the categorisation may capture a natural kind, in which nature is, as it is sometimes put, "carved at the joints". Whatever the difficulties for the notion of a natural kind, the core intuition is fairly clear: the stuff of the universe falls naturally into kinds and these kinds are thus, in some sense, actual and not merely imposed upon the universe as a useful artefactual classification. Natural kind terms and conventional

⁹ Actually, there are difficulties associated with the concept of logical truth but I take them to be neutral to the present dispute and shall bypass them.

¹⁰ Again, I note, but need not pursue, issues arising out of the dispute between Strawson and Russell about failed reference.

classification terms differ, in the ontological status of the categories of stuff they correspond to. And, of course, putative natural kind terms may fail to be genuine natural kind terms yet succeed in referring to stuff which forms a conventional class.¹¹

A proposition which, for example, purports to pick out natural kinds and contend that they stand in some relationship seems able to be true in a clear cut world matching way. Either the world is such that it contains those kinds and they stand in that relationship or it is not. This is a two place correspondence notion. And I will employ it in crafting a concept of absolute correspondence truth (CACT).

CACT: P is absolutely-true' means 'the world is such that its stuff forms kinds corresponding to P's categorial proposals and is otherwise as P proposes.

And the associated notion of absolute falsehood is that the world is such that its kinds do not correspond to P's categorial proposals or is not otherwise as P proposes it to be.

In contrast, consider propositions which do not purport to pick out natural kinds but just conventional classes¹² and contend that those classes stand in some relationship. Such a proposition does not seem to be capable of truth in quite as clear cut a world matching way because, although the world-stuff so classified is there to be matched, the classifications are not there in the same ontological sense. The status of the third element, the categorial web, is different; it is, so to speak, more autonomous of the nature of the world than a natural kind categorisation. It is not, however, totally autonomous in that the world may resist being classified in some ways even if they

¹¹ A possible example is the pre-modern (and whale including) term: 'fish'. It is also worth noting that a putatively artefactual categorisation term might manage to pick out a natural kind.

¹² I here ignore possible complications caused were purportedly conventional classification terms to manage to pick out natural kinds.

are understood as mere conventional classifications.¹³ That is, not just any attempt at conventional classification of the world's stuff will succeed; try as one may, 'phlogiston' and 'hex' will, perhaps, be empty classifications.

The suggested explication of Meiland's idea is that this conceptual distinction¹⁴ between 'kinds' and 'classes' can be drawn upon to craft a notion of relative truth. Accordingly, I propose, as a three-place relation between a proposition, the world and the conventional categorial web associated with the proposition, the following concept of relative correspondence truth (CRCT):

CRCT: P is true-relative-to its associated conventional categorial web, W' means 'the world is such that its stuff is able to be conventionally classified by W as proposed by P and otherwise corresponds to P'.¹⁵

The associated notion of relative falsehood is that the world is such that its conventional classifiability is not as proposed or is otherwise not as P proposes. Having outlined these three concepts (GCCT, CACT and CRCT) some discussion and clarification is in order before I employ them to frame a substantive relativist thesis about truth.

First, almost any participant in the dispute would accept that some of the ways in which the universe is categorised are mere artefactual classifications. Moreover, almost any participant could go along with the above concept of relative truth and thus accept that some propositions are true relative to their associated conventional categorial web.

¹³ Or, at least, this is so for the higher order, or compound, classifications like 'horned horse'. Whether primitive, or simple, classifications can be resisted is another matter. I owe the concern to an anonymous referee for my 1994b; I will return to its discussion in Chapter Five.

¹⁴ Or purported distinction; as we shall see, the truth relativist will suggest that, as there are no natural kinds, the distinction is but a notional one.

¹⁵ Though it shares a rejection of natural kinds with it, I take such conventionalism to involve a distinct notion of truth to that associated with Putnam's internal realism. Putnam's notion is a form of coherence theory. See for instance, Putnam's (1981, pp. 49-74). Further, though sharing with Goodman a rejection of natural kinds, the conventionalism sketched above seems, on some extreme "versions" of Goodman's views anyway, less radical. See Goodman (1978); good critical commentaries of Goodman are Siegel (1987, ch. 7) and Scheffler (1980).

Second, for a categorial web to be associated with a proposition is not for that proposition to be thereby committed to the applicability of those concepts. Just how big a web is associated with any given proposition is not a matter immediately worth pursuing. However, I take it as axiomatic that the presence of any concept in the categorial web automatically entails the presence of the complement or negation of that concept. This is not of great importance when considering propositions of the form: 'A's are B's' but it becomes significant when there are disputes between propositions of that sort and 'A's are not B's' or 'no A's exist'. For a proposition to be such that it can be coherently claimed that 'A's are B's' and 'no A's exist' are contraries, their truth has to be relativised to the same categorial web, though clearly the former proposition holds that the classification 'A' is applicable and the latter does not. In the last chapter's discussion of operative and repertoire categorial webs, a distinction was drawn between the ontological commitments of a proposition which may include that some categorial, or classification, concept has application or that the stuff of the world can be so classified and the categorial web associated with the proposition. Thus, 'A's exist' and 'no A's exist' share an associated categorial web containing at least the pair A/not-A, though the propositions differ in their ontological commitments.

Thus, if one goes back to the introduction of CRCT, the phrase: '...classified by W as proposed by P ...' is hopefully clear. It has been chosen to allow for a P like: 'no A's exist' to be true-relative-to P's W (which would include the conventional classification 'A') even though the world's stuff is not classifiable, even conventionally, by 'A'. That it is not so classifiable is indeed the key proposal of P. In this case the denial of class term applicability is quite explicit but in other cases it may be less direct.¹⁶ Similarly, one way in which such a P may be false would be if,

¹⁶ Those interested in the detail of this are referred to Chapter Two of Schleffler (1967) and Chapter Two of Edwards (1990). Edward's book is, among other things, a good treatment of Stefan Korner's views.

contrary to its claim, more of its W was applicable than portrayed by P. That is, if 'A' were to constitute a way of conventionally classifying the world.

So far, no particular assumption has been made about the mutual exclusiveness of absolute and relative truth; thus it may be that a proposition is both absolutely and relatively true. W may pick out categories that form not just artefactual classes but also natural kinds. Moreover, some proposition P may be absolutely false but relatively true. The former because the terms of its W fail to pick out natural kinds as portrayed in P; the latter because the world is conventionally classifiable as portrayed in P. This last point emphasises that, though there is an associated categorial web for absolute as well as for relative truth, the crucial difference is the ontological status of the categories corresponding to the category terms of that W. But it may seem strange that only CRCT, and not CACT, was worded as a three-place relation. Appearances can deceive, however. Siegel remarked of Meiland's three-place relation that, to be genuinely three-place, the three relata must be genuinely distinct. (1987, p. 12) Construed as a web of artefactual classifications, W satisfies this requirement but would not if it formed a web of natural kind terms. The possibility of rival W's in the former case, but not the latter, is the key point here.

Clearly the interest of the weak neo-Meilandian concept of relative truth, CRCT, as a vehicle for at least some of the cognitive insights of relativists depends on the possibility of radically different categorial webs. It may well be that there are two propositions, P1 and P2, with two associated categorial webs, W1 and W2, which, while seemingly different, constituted mere verbal variations of the same web. That is, each may have the conceptual resources to be inter-translatable with the other and thus P1 and P2 be able to stand in some logical relations with one another. Were this to be the only sort of variation of categorial web associated with propositions that engage with the same phenomena, then the interest of CRCT would be minimal. What is clearly required is that the same stuff be radically differently conceived of

by two W's and that there be the possibility of the world's stuff accepting each classification. Moreover, although many in the dialogue would allow that this may to some extent, obtain, what is of importance for the interest of such truth relativism is the extent to which the world's description was only able to be done in terms of "competing", incommensurable, and but relatively true, propositions.¹⁷ But this goes beyond stating and clarifying the idea of relative truth and leads to interesting theses that may be formulable in terms of CRCT. Let me then proceed to that task.

THE THESIS OF GLOBAL CORRESPONDENCE WEAK TRUTH RELATIVISM

What constitutes a substantive thesis of relative truth that incorporates such a concept of relative truth? My interest is with global theses and, accordingly, I begin with an extreme thesis and later examine it to see if it suffers the usual problems of viability. So, consider the thesis of Global Correspondence Weak Truth Relativism (Th.GCWTR).

Th.GCWTR: All true¹⁸ propositions are only truths-relative-to the particular categorial web of conventional classifications associated with the proposition in question.

That is, for any P to be true is for it to be true-relative-to its W. Or, even more briefly, there are no absolute truths, only relative ones.¹⁹ On the view being explored, the motivation for saying this would be an ontological thesis that no

¹⁷ It is by no means clear that the incommensurability literature provides much optimism for the existence of rival W's as wanted here (see Putnam (1981, p. 115) and Davidson (1984, p. 184); and, in criticism of them, Sankey (1990). It would make no difference for my present purposes to have to resort to appealing to the possibility of alien conceptual webs to get a suitably radically distinct W to our own. I discuss the possibility of such radically "other" webs in later chapters.

¹⁸ In the GCCT sense.

¹⁹ I remarked earlier that CACT and CRCT did not, of themselves, rule out some proposition being true in both senses if some relevant conventional classifications happened to pick out natural kinds. The wording of Th.GCWTR is meant to rule this out and to propose truth as being exclusively relative.

natural kinds exist but only conventional, or artefactual, classifications; a thesis I label Th.CC in the next chapter.

In the next two chapters, I consider objections to this thesis but even if it survives those objections and seems a viable explication of truth relativism within the restraints of a correspondence theory of truth is it "worth fighting for?"²⁰

In any event such global relativism captures a lot of what relativists have intuitively grasped for. Though such weak neo-Meilandian relativism gives the world the power to falsify relativists' deepest beliefs, this is the price of the truth making role given to the world in any version of correspondence relativism about truth. Indeed, it would be an objection to the thesis were it to so collapse truth and belief. This would, to use Siegel's phrase, 'undermine the very idea of rightness' (1987, p. 4) and transgress the proper restraint that 'necessarily some beliefs are false' (1987, p. 6). Yet, though Th.GCWTR preserves objectivity, it does so without being open to the Husserlian concern, as reported by Meiland, that 'relative truth must be either nothing at all or else a variety of absolute truth' (Meiland, 1977, p. 572). CRCT is not a variety of CACT-style absolute truth. But though the world is seen on the above view as, in large part, the arbiter of truth, or the determiner of fact, cognitive agents are the determiners of 'the form of factuality'²¹. Therefore, if sufficiently radically "other"²² categorial webs can exist, the forms of factuality may allow for reality being carved up in radically different ways without rejection. In short, Th.GCWTR advances what looks like a coherent and genuine, though minimal, thesis of truth relativism. It may not satisfy all of the subjectivist standpoints that manifest themselves in relativist writings, but it is hard to find a place within a correspondence theory for the more subjectivist relativist views; and if nothing

²⁰ The phrase is Nelson Goodman's (1978, p. 20). An issue not addressed in this work is that of fighting for relativism. Shorn of its terminological proposals, the main substantive thesis is the next chapter's Th.CC. I will argue in the next chapter that this thesis can, without awkwardness, be held to be but relatively true. An issue not pursued is whether it can be argued for in a way of interest to someone initially not sharing it. Contra-Goodman (1978, p.22 and, in discussion of this, Harre and Krausz, 1996, p.27) my concern is explication and analysis, not advocacy.

²¹ To appropriate Mark Okrent's nice phrase; see his (1984, p. 347).

²² The turn of phrase is adapted from Michael Root (1986, p. 272).

coherent can capture such relativism, perhaps correspondence relativists ought be satisfied with what is salvageable. The next few chapters will explore objections that threaten even such minimal-looking relativism.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE TRUTH STATUS OF TRUTH RELATIVISM ITSELF

INTRODUCTION

A common source of objection against truth relativism concerns the status of the thesis itself. On the face of it, it is in trouble however one construes its truth status. If true, then it seems that it would have to be either absolutely true or relatively true. If absolutely true, then it would seem to constitute a counter example to its own thesis, to be self-refuting. Yet, if but relatively true, then will that not "parochialise" the thesis and make it true only for the relativist, and perhaps allow absolutism to be true for the absolutist?¹ How should the thesis of truth relativism's own truth status be construed? What is its referential relation to itself? Global truth relativism is my target for explication and this entails that, if true, relativism is but relatively true. Is this hope of having a global thesis a vain one? I think not; I argue that the sort of truth relativism which I have been exploring is indeed best construed as including itself in its own scope and as thus being but relatively true. Given the type of relativiser employed (a categorial web) such truth relativism turns out not to suffer from the usual concerns associated with truth relativism being relatively true. But first, what are the alternatives to this construal of truth relativism and why are they less satisfactory? Meiland has remarked that the difficulty with the possibility of not having the thesis of truth relativism included in its own scope is that the resultant 'dualistic theory of the intellect' would require some further account of the nature of such claims as that of truth relativism (1980, pp. 119 - 120). In what follows, I try to see how an account may go that can be consistently combined with

¹ Meiland calls this dilemma: 'the paradox of cognitive relativism' (1980, p. 115). See also Preston, 1992, especially pp.61-63. The version of the "paradox" discussed there is, however, one raising a concern that is outside this work's constraints. Developing some of Meiland's thoughts, Preston examines the concern that, though it might be coherent to have relativism but relatively true, such a stance is self-vitiating in that it becomes un-arguable for. As noted in the introduction, it is not within this work's scope to consider arguments for or against relativism but merely to discover coherent global forms, if any.

truth relativism about other claims, such as those of science. As will be seen, that task proves difficult .

TRUTH RELATIVISM AS NOT RELATIVELY TRUE

If truth relativism is not itself relatively true, then the most obvious possibility is for it to be absolutely true. Another possibility is to have the thesis true in some further way, some third sub-categorisation of truth that is neither absolute nor relative truth as so far outlined. A third possibility is to view the thesis as not being, in any sense, true or false; that is, as not being a vehicle for a truth value at all.

First, consider the possibility that, though true,² truth relativism is neither absolutely nor relatively true. The key notion employed to distinguish between absolute and relative truths concerned the ontological status of the groupings into which the stuff of the universe is sorted. If those groupings constitute natural kinds, then propositions employing terms for them would be absolutely true or false. If they constitute mere artefactual classifications, then propositions employing terms for them would be relatively true or false. For there to be a third category of truth would be either for there to be a third sort of categorisation of the world's stuff or for there to be propositions that do not employ categorisations. As the classificatory types 'natural kind' and 'artefactual class' are complementary, and thus exhaustive of the possibilities, the former of the above alternatives is ruled out. Furthermore, it is not possible for there to be propositions about the world's stuff that do not employ categorisations at all. As Nicholas Wolterstorff puts the point: 'in order to speak we must refer and predicate; and in order to do that, we must speak and think in terms of same and different so-and-sos'. (1987, pp. 259-260) To state, one must categorise and there can be only two sorts of categorisation, natural kinds and artefactual classes. It seems that the chances of having some third sub-category of the generic conception of correspondence truth are slim.

² That is, true in the sense of the generic concept of correspondence truth (GCCT) mentioned earlier. This continues to act as a constraint upon this section of the work.

But perhaps there is a flaw here. The propositions in question have been viewed as being about the world, as being object-linguistic. But the thesis of truth relativism is not in any straightforward way about the world³. Rather than being object-linguistic, it is meta-linguistic;⁴ it is a proposition about the truth status of propositions. Being meta-linguistic, the object-linguistic distinction between conventional and natural categories of the world's stuff looks inapplicable. Exhaustive as the list 'natural kind', 'conventional classification' may be of ways of categorising the world's stuff, if it is not the world's stuff at all, but propositions that are being categorised, then 'natural kind' and 'conventional classification' are perhaps as inapt as 'red' and 'non-red' are of symphonies or 'just' and 'non-just' are of rocks.

Perhaps a third sort of truth is, after all, possible, one apt for such meta-claims as the truth relativism thesis. Meiland puts the possibility of the non-relative-truth of truth-relativism thus: 'the careful relativist would ... say that all doctrines except relativism (and perhaps its competition on the meta-level) are relatively true or false' (Meiland, 1980, p. 121). Edward Beach remarks: 'The relativist may seek to elaborate a saving distinction between first-order and higher-order theories' (Beach, 1984, p. 160). Considering a similar issue, Carl Kordig portrays a related move as follows:

Roughly, (the relativist) may ... claim ... only that there can be no objectivity in science. There would be no self-referential problem in then, for example, appealing to neutral meta-facts which are about observation in order to deny that neutral facts of observation could exist.⁵

But, as Kordig went on to note almost immediately, the issue is whether the dualism of object and meta-linguistic concepts and claims appealed to here is justified; or,

³ Although it rests upon a metaphysical thesis about the absence of natural kinds.

⁴ Or meta-linguistic/meta-meta-linguistic and so on; Th. GCWTR includes any propositions at any level in its scope.

⁵ Kordig, 1971, pp. 80 - 81. Kordig's discussion concerns the Kuhnian/Feyerabendian incommensurability theses about science but readily transposes across to my broader concerns.

more precisely, whether justified use can be made of that dualism to remove the thesis of truth relativism from its own scope.⁶

In short, it may be that removing such philosophical meta-level claims from the scope of the truth relativism thesis is apt, for the concept of relative truth used in that thesis had its genesis in an ontological thesis about the categorisation of the world's stuff which focused on the stuff of the universe and our conceptions of, and propositions about that stuff, and not on meta-propositions about these propositions.

The global thesis of truth relativism in question (Th.GCWTR) involved the relativisation of the truth of all propositions. How can this be rewritten to more clearly show that it is concerned only with object-linguistic propositions? Restricting its scope to just object-linguistic propositions yields the thesis of object-linguistic correspondence weak truth relativism (Th.O-LCWTR):

Th.O-LCWTR: All true object-linguistic propositions are only truths-relative-to the particular categorial web of conventional classifications associated with the proposition in question.

On the face of it, this captures what is required, for, being a meta-linguistic proposition, Th.O-LCWTR avoids discussing itself. However, it is not as apt a clarification of the truth relativism thesis as it seems. My interest is in having truth relativism non-relative in its truth and, far from ruling that out, Th.O-LCWTR is simply silent on the status of anything but object-linguistic propositions. To have the thesis of truth relativism explicitly ruled out as relatively true, a more restricted version of the thesis is required.

⁶ I have in the past been sanguine about the success of this move (see my 1991) but, as will emerge below, I no longer think it defensible.

Th.O-LCWTR*: All and only true object-linguistic propositions are only truths-relative-to the particular categorial web of conventional classifications associated with the proposition in question.

How does this exclude Th.O-LCWTR* from being but relatively true? Obviously, because it is not object-linguistic and, on superficial examination, Th.O-LCWTR* does indeed seem to be non-object-linguistic. It talks, not of the world, but of propositions about the world and, as contrast, of propositions not about the world. It is not clear, though, that the object/meta-language distinction which is being appealed to can bear the ontological weight placed upon it.

The shift from Th.GCWTR to Th.O-LCWTR* depends on propositions and classificatory concepts not being part of the stuff of the universe. Clearly they do not pick out obviously "gritty" stuff, as 'stick' or 'stone' do; but if propositions and concepts are part of the universe's stuff, even if less than straightforwardly, then meta-linguistic propositions are just a variety of object-linguistic proposition. And that entails that Th.O-LCWTR*, no less than Th.GCWTR, is self-inclusive in its scope.

A comprehensive analysis of the ontological status of propositions is beside the present purpose. For present purposes, suffice it to say that there seem to be three types of possible theory. First, a proposition may be some, perhaps quite complex, social or behavioural phenomenon. Second, it may be something in the mind of a cognitive agent or some community of such agents. Third, propositions may be located in some abstract realm. If any theory of propositions falls into one or other of these categories, then it seems appropriate to ask whether propositions form natural kinds or are but conventionally classified; in short, to treat them as part of the universe's stuff.

Consider the first ontological thesis that propositions are some sort of social or behavioural phenomena. Whatever this amounts to, propositions are plausibly thereby phenomena of the stuff of the universe in some way.⁷ Similarly for brains. Non-corporeal minds and their goings-on may be thought more difficult to accommodate but I do not see why. Presumably minds are part of the stuff of the universe⁸ and thus, as much as brains and social or behavioural practices, open to questions about the ontological status of categorisations of their stuff. Finally, if there is an abstract realm of propositions, then it, too, is either a part of the universe, or of some other realm; either way, just the same questions are raised about the status of such abstract stuff's categorisations as would be in the case of more common stuff.

In summary, the crucial issue is that of the ontological status of categorisations and it does not seem of significance, in this context, to draw a distinction between propositions employing concepts carving up stuff of a straightforward sort and meta-propositions employing concepts to carve up such propositions. Of course, this sketch concerning the ontology of propositions may be wrong and Th.O-LCWTR* may be a more apt way for a truth relativist to develop her thesis than the explicitly self-inclusive Th.GCWTR. I think not, but as global theses are my concern here, I will not pursue limited-scope theses in detail. I regard Th.O-LCWTR* to constitute a "blind alley" and revert to Th.GCWTR as the basis for discussion.⁹

If Th.GCWTR cannot be weakened by appeal to an object-language/meta-language distinction, is there some other way of restraining truth relativism such that it does not deem itself but relatively true? Presumably, if even philosophical theses are

⁷ This need not be as crudely reductionist as it may seem.

⁸ Recall that it was an explicit assumption of our setting up of the truth relativism thesis in the last chapter that no particular restrictions were placed as to what could count as part of the stuff of the universe.

⁹ Note that this rejection, for present purposes, of such an ontologically based way of distinguishing philosophical theses (like that of truth relativism) from scientific (etc.) theses entails no particular stance upon other proposals, for other purposes, that appeal to *a priori*/empirical or analytic/synthetic distinctions to mark out the philosophical from the scientific.

construed as stuff-discussing, then the less-than-global relativists' only hope is to have the type of stuff discussed in such philosophical theses as being distinct from that talked about in more mundane claims. In particular, one would have to see philosophical theses such as Th.GCWTR as having associated categorial webs that picked out natural kinds. But is reserving such a status for the conceptual repertoire of such philosophical theses as truth relativism, and not for the conceptual repertoire of scientific theses, a genuinely available option? Of course ontological dualisms have been proposed in philosophy, from platonic realms, through mind-body dualisms to Popper's third world. What seems too difficult is co-opting such theses to discharge the "brief" set out above.

Take essences for instance. One could see the concept of relative truth as an answer to the question: 'What is truth?' As Paul Moser outlines, there is a long history going back at least to Plato and Aristotle, of construing such 'philosophical "What is X?" questions as essence seeking questions'. (Moser, 1992, p. 1) The task of the philosopher is construed as providing 'real definitions, ie, essence-specifying definitions that signify the properties in virtue of which something is located in its proper genus or species'. (Moser, p.1) The specification of the concept of relative truth (in CRCT) could be seen as giving the essence of relative correspondence truth. And, as the relationships specified would be among conceiver independent categories, CRCT would be seen as specifying a non-relative truth; it would be, if true, absolutely true. However, although this appears as a possible route to the non-relative status of relativism it is implausible upon closer examination.

For this "essence of relative truth" construal of CRCT to succeed, one would have to be deeming key notions in the essence specification given by CRCT to be conceiver independent categories. But the sorts of categorisation terms appealed to in CRCT are such things as 'conventional classification' and to be deeming this to be a conceiver-independent category is not coherent.

Also, while CRCT, as a definition, seems, at least initially, amenable to this "essence specification" interpretation, Th.GCWTR itself is less obviously so. Presumably one would construe it as giving the real essence of truth, that is, its essence is relative truth. But again, it is hard to make sense of having conventional classification schemes part of a real essence. In any event, even if one could see CRCT (or even Th.GCWTR) as real-essence capturing, the problem of the proposed dualism remains. Along what lines will one be able to argue that truth or relative truth has a real essence but not, say, gold?

In the face of these difficulties, and given that the "essence-seeking" meta-philosophical view seems more apt for CRCT than for Th.GCWTR, Karl Popper's "Third World" may be a more promising possibility to investigate. In comment upon the sort of "concepts-focused" essentialist views just touched upon, he emphasises that, unlike their concern with concepts, real definitions and essences, in his third world the more important entities are problems, theories, propositions, and arguments. (Popper, 1972, p. 123) For Popper, philosophical theses like Th.GCWTR would be entities in their own right. But Popper's third world proposal, even if plausible,¹⁰ has features which make it unpromising for present purposes. Although certain features of third world propositions are ontologically autonomous of humans and their second world ideas, the actual propositions themselves are held by Popper to be artefactual: 'the third world originates as a product of human activity' (1972, p. 159; emphasis in the original). Presumably this means that the categorisation concepts employed by a proposition are artefactual. Now, both philosophical and scientific propositions can be created in this third world and what would be required for our above relativistic purposes would be that the stuff picked out by the artefactual categorisation concepts form natural kinds in the case of philosophical category terms and mere artefactual classes in the case of scientific category terms. Whether or not such a dualism is possible, there is nothing about the third world, as such, to support dualism or monism about category types. That

¹⁰ And, for reasons outlined by Anthony O'Hear (1980, pp. 181-200) it is not clear that it is.

will depend upon ontological theses about the categorisation of whatever sorts of stuff constitute the truth makers for philosophical and for scientific theses. The difficulties lie with construing the categorisations associated with Th.GCWTR as natural kind terms. An obvious list includes 'proposition', 'true proposition', 'categorical web', 'conventional classification' and so on, plus, in conceptual contrast role, and thus part of the same web, such terms as 'natural kind'. It is hard to argue that these pick out natural kinds and even harder to argue that they do, and 'gold' or 'electron' does not. Even 'natural kind' which may pick out natural kinds (the kind: gold, the kind: electrons etc.) does not in any obvious way have those kinds themselves as a kind. Presumably, the kind's members would be the kinds picked out by such terms as 'proposition', 'categorical web', etc; but, as we've seen, 'conventional classification' seems to constitute an intractable difficulty for this view. The difficulties with construing the truth relativism thesis as absolutely true are severe and other construals of the thesis are worth exploration to see if they are less problematic.

The last of the three possibilities listed for the non-relative-truth of Th.GCWTR does not have it as a candidate for truth at all. On the face of it, this is not a viable view. One could see CRCT as a definitional proposal and thus not as a candidate for truth, but Th.GCWTR is difficult to construe as anything but a proposition. And, as a proposition, it presumably has a truth value.¹¹ In short, this option is a "non-starter".

TRUTH RELATIVISM AS RELATIVELY TRUE

After this exploration of ways in which the truth relativism thesis may avoid being but relatively true or false the question becomes: 'why try to avoid this status?'.

There seems to be no compelling reason. Indeed, Meiland has observed that to not

¹¹ Remember that the context of this section's discussion is a correspondence conception of truth and thus constructivist/anti-realist theories' non-bivalence with truth value gaps arising from an epistemic analysis of truth are not appropriate at this stage. I will return to consideration of such theories in Section Two.

have the truth relativism thesis subject to its own claims makes the thesis 'much less interesting'. A restricted thesis that does not discuss itself tells us 'much less about the nature of intellectual activity'. (1980, p. 161) It is helpful to note what the current suggestion about relative truth is not saying, for one merit of this form of truth relativism is that it is not open to the objections raised against some other truth relativistic theses. In what follows, some standard anti-relativist arguments will be considered and it will be shown why Th.GCWTR escapes them even if it is reflexively applicable to itself.

Being construed as but relatively true, or true-relative-to its associated categorial web, frees Th.GCWTR from the obvious "self-refutation by providing its own counter-example" objection that would apply if it was both within its own scope and absolutely true. But what is the cost of avoiding self-refutation by being but relatively true? Note that two common worries with other variations of truth relativism¹² do not apply to Th.GCWTR. By accepting relative truth as the truth value status for Th.GCWTR, the thesis is not automatically true for the relativist. It may not be true at all; it may be that Th.GCWTR is relatively-false, even for a believer in it. And, if it is relatively-true, then it is true even for those who do not believe it, like an absolutist who believes in natural kinds. This is because the relativiser in Th.GCWTR is not the individual believer in that thesis, that is, the relativist, but a categorial web. Thus all of the usual worries about anti-realist private realms, or subjective realities associated with a collapse of truth to belief are avoided.¹³ With natural kinds, and claims involving them that correspond to the way that the world is, Th.GCWTR would be relatively false and the thesis of absolutists, that some truths are absolutely true, would be relatively true. This is not odd given the notions of relative truth (CRCT) and absolute truth (CACT) employed here and it results from the status of the categorisation terms involved. Relative truth is not some inferior, personalised, truth compared to absolute truth and each sort of

¹² A recent paper by Jamie Whyte (1993) offers a summary of these standard objections in its section seven.

¹³ We shall return to a consideration of these in the second, coherence theory, section of this work.

proposition is answerable to the way the world is. The dispute between the absolutist and the relativist over the truth of Th.GCWTR is one where both disputants' propositions employ the same categorial web, the category terms of which are most plausibly viewed as conventional classifications. As the relativiser, the associated categorial web, is no different for either disputant, though each has different theories about its status, Th.GCWTR is best thought of as either relatively true or relatively false.

This merely emphasises that the underlying dispute is an ontological one about the existence of natural kinds and there should be no particular hesitation about the absolutist expressing his absolutism using the terminology of CACT had CRCT. It is worth focusing upon that core ontological issue. The relativist would accept as true-relative-to its associated categorial web, the following proposition:

Th.CC: No natural kinds exist, only conventional classifications of the stuff of the universe are possible.

The absolutist would accept as true, the following proposition:

Th.NK: Natural kinds exist.

The relativist's view of Th.NK is that it is relatively false; but even an advocate of Th.NK playing by the relativist's terminological rules and tying conceptions of relative and absolute truth to the ontological status of the associated scheme of categorisations, should regard Th.NK as relatively true.

What is important for the absolutist is the status of at least some propositions about the world, most notably those made by science, and not the status of just any proposition about the world. The thesis of absolutism itself being relatively true at

best may be a disturbing thought on other, more radical, conceptions of relative truth but it does not seem disturbing as relative truth is here construed.

It is perhaps conceivable that a categorial web exists which is sufficiently alien to that within which absolutists and relativists carry out their dispute such that Th.GCWTR is not formulable in alien terms. But that is no particular embarrassment to Th.GCWTR. The thrust of the thesis is the advocacy of weak relativism and Th.GCWTR is no more immune than any other proposition to being inexpressible using the categories available in some alien categorial web. Indeed, this is desirable. It maximises the interest of the thesis if no categorial web, including the one used in the expression of relativism, is without an alternative whose concepts cannot be used in the expression of propositions using the first web. Nor does this parochialise truth relativism. Th.GCWTR can be true of "propositions" made in terms of some categorial web without being expressible within it.¹⁴ For instance, an alien language may never have drawn the distinction between a natural kind and a conventional classification. Indeed, its users may never have reflected upon their linguistic practice enough to have thought about the ontological status of their classifications at all. That would not prevent their classifications from being merely artefactual if no natural kinds existed. This is no more mysterious about this than it being true of a witch doctor's activities that they constitute hypnosis regardless of whether the witch doctor's linguistic repertoire can express the concept of hypnosis.

Further, the applicability of Th.GCWTR to other, alien, categorial webs does not mean that Th.GCWTR has become absolutely true and thus reflexively refuting. Relative and absolute truth as here explicated, are not concerned with the breadth of scope of a proposition but concern the ontological status of the categorisations employed.

¹⁴ On this type of point see (my) Galle, 1983, p. 496.

Another objection, raised against truth relativism by Siegel, is that it 'undermines the very notion of rightness' (1987, p. 8).¹⁵ Siegel directs this attack against those sorts of relativism which collapse truth and belief and Th.GCWTR has been distinguished from these views. But if Th.GCWTR is only relatively true or right, does it escape Siegel's charge that ' "relative rightness" is not rightness at all'? (p. 8) The straightforward answer is that it does. If there were no natural kinds and CRCT and CACT express how 'relative truth' and 'absolute truth' are to be understood, then the world would be making Th.GCWTR right in an objective way. For Th.GCWTR to be right is for the world to be such that, when it is categorised in that thesis' associated artefactual categorial web's concepts, the "things" so classified are related as stated. In short, Th.GCWTR is immune to Siegel's UNVR argument, even if more subjectivist, and radical, versions of truth relativism are not. Siegel's other main assault on truth relativism is the "necessarily some beliefs are false" (NSBF) argument. The problem arises for relativist theses which hold 'that all beliefs and opinions are true'. (p. 6) Whilst clearly applicable to protagorean relativism, and even strong framework relativism, does this objection work against Th.GCWTR? No. First, if the relativiser is some belief system, or theory, then the NSBF argument may succeed as an objection. Suppose that relativism was true-relative-to the belief system of the relativist. Presumably this would mean that absolutism was false-relative-to the belief system of the relativist. But, relative-to the belief system of the absolutist, relativism would be held to be false and absolutism true. Thus, if relativism is true, it is but true-relative-to its belief system and this does not rule out absolutism as being a false thesis, for absolutism will also be true, that is, true-relative-to its belief system. And so on for any proposition, so long as it can be part of some belief system then it will not be false, but true-relative-to that belief system. Such coherentist construals of relativism will be considered later in this work¹⁶ but, whatever the vulnerability of versions of truth relativism which have a belief system as the relativiser to the NSBF argument, Th.GCWTR is immune to it. The relativiser there is a categorial web and it is quite possible for a proposition to be

¹⁵ Siegel's shorthand label for this argument is 'UNVR'.

¹⁶ And I considered such a view in a correspondence truth theoretical context in Chapter Two.

false-relative-to the categorial web employed in its making. That the person using some web of categories to propose something believes that web to be operative, and the proposition expressed using it to correspond to reality, does nothing to stop the belief being false. The world may be such that even when classified in those terms, it fails to be as the proposition states. Indeed, the concepts employed in the proposition are not even guaranteed applicability to the world. Propositions asserting their applicability may be relatively false.

The apparent fear of the radical subjectivity of truth behind the NSBF objection is misplaced with Th.GCWTR because of the substantial independent role it gives to the world as truth-maker.

In summary, there are no clear disadvantages to the thesis of relative truth under discussion being, "at best", relatively true; and, given the difficulties facing other possible construals of its status, the unrestricted Th.GCWTR is the most satisfactory version of the weak correspondence truth relativism developed in this first section. The chances for a global thesis remain unscathed.

CHAPTER FIVE

TOTALLY INCOMMENSURABLE CONCEPTUAL SCHEMES

INTRODUCTION

Until now, the legitimacy of a scheme/content distinction has been assumed. This is a distinction¹ between the world and the concepts in terms of which the world is categorised. It was also assumed, to make weak correspondence truth relativism philosophically interesting, that rival, but incommensurable, categorial webs were possible.

Donald Davidson challenges these assumptions;² he argues:

This second dualism of scheme and content, of organising system and something waiting to be organised, cannot be made intelligible and defensible. It is itself a dogma of empiricism, the third dogma. (1984, P.189)

Robert Kraut comments:

Much depends on how we take the phrase 'something waiting to be organised'. In one obvious sense, the world is waiting to be organised, and sentient beings, armed with interests and taxonomies, carve up the environment into nomologically viable classes. Thus construed, the scheme-content dualism is simply the dualism of world (which consists of items in principle representable via beliefs, desires and perceptions) vs. the representational apparatus itself (whether linguistic, psychological, or artistic). Content is what is represented. Scheme is how it is represented. (1986, p. 400)

¹ Recall, though, that this is not quite of the sort usually envisaged in that, as I've used the phrase, a categorial web includes concepts which are used to say what the world is not like, or even to express ontological agnosticism, as well as ones for making positive claims about the world; but the difference is not relevant to the discussions at hand.

² In a much discussed presidential address to the American Philosophical Association in 1973, 'On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme'. The paper has been reprinted in various anthologies. My quotations will be from Davidson's Inquiries Into Truth and Interpretation, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984, (pp. 183-198).

The scheme part of the distinction is not quite my notion of a categorial web but it is close enough and nothing hangs on the difference for present purposes. As the phrase is more usual in the works to be discussed, I shall, in this chapter, also use 'conceptual schemes'. Concerning the distinction, Kraut remarks:

This dualism, between representational acts and their immanent objects ('representings') vs. the items towards which such acts are intentionally directed ('represented') is surely indispensable to all, save an occasional idealist or textualist. (p. 400)

However, Davidson is dispensing with that dualism. His arguments need to be examined for the sort of weak correspondence truth relativism previously outlined has, as a prerequisite for its intelligibility, some sort of distinction between a conceptual scheme and the world of which it is a conception. These are two of the distinct relata of the three place relation of relative truth. Clearly also, for it to be possible for there to be more than one set of relative truths, it has to be possible for there to be more than one conceptual scheme.³

THE VERY IDEA OF A CONCEPTUAL SCHEME

Much of Davidson's argumentation is directed against the possibility of more than one conceptual scheme. One way of establishing the possibility of different conceptual schemes is to give examples; and participants in debates about incommensurability have advanced two sorts of candidate. The first sort is comprised of some past theories within science.⁴ The second is comprised of the belief systems of cultures other than ours.⁵

³ On this point, see Edwards, 1990, p.90.

⁴ On this point, see Kuhn (e.g. his 1970) and Feyerabend (e.g. his 1975) as the most prominent philosophers suggesting such candidates.

⁵ Lukes, 1982 and Whorf, 1956.

An instant reply to such attempts at giving examples of incommensurable conceptual schemes comes from Hilary Putnam: "To tell us that Galileo had 'incommensurable' notions and then to go on to describe them at length is totally incoherent." (Putnam, 1981, p. 115)⁶

One defence against such a swift dismissal is to follow Howard Sankey in complaining that 'Putnam and Davidson ... assume that the language into which an untranslatable theory fails to be translatable is the language in which the argument for incommensurability is couched' (1990, pp. 2-3). Sankey's point is that, say, Newtonian and Einsteinian theoretical languages or conceptual schemes are but a fragment of a total language, the other part of which can be employed as the language of argument, as a common meta-language in terms of which one can talk about both, say, Newtonian and Einsteinian conceptions of 'mass' (1990, pp. 3-5).

In short, Sankey conceives of the sort of incommensurability associated with Kuhn's and Feyerabend's discussions of cases from the history of science as but partial incommensurability, one involving the incommensurability of sub-languages. But, even if Sankey is right,⁷ if what is under discussion is totally incommensurable conceptual schemes, or whole language incommensurability, then the examples from the history of science escape Putnam's charge of incoherence only by not being examples of totally incommensurable schemes at all. And that is not much use if what we seek is total incommensurability.⁸

Similar remarks apply to the cases of the languages of various tribes, the oddities of which indicate the presence of incommensurable conceptual schemes. Either there is total language incommensurability - in which case a Putnam style objection applies - or it is some fragment of language which is conceptually incommensurable and thus there is not an example of the required sort.

⁶ Davidson argues similarly in his 1984, p.184.

⁷ And Feyerabend, at least, seems to intend something more radically global than this at times.

⁸ Issues concerning total and partial incommensurability, semantic holism and discretism, categorial webs and total and partial languages (and so forth) will be addressed in the next chapter.

But even if there are no examples in which one can coherently describe, in one conceptual scheme, another globally incommensurable conceptual scheme, isn't it possible that one might exist? Is it not conceivable that some group of humans or non-humans think about the way things are in terms that are, across the board, different to our own? Davidson denies such a possibility and rejects the concept of a radically different conceptual scheme as unintelligible.

Countering this in a satisfactory way is difficult, for, as Kraut remarks, 'Davidson's rejection of the conceptual-scheme idea involves subtle connections among the concepts of interpretation, translation, truth, reference, and observation'. (1986, p. 40) Notwithstanding this, a case can be developed. There are two main thrusts to Davidson's attack on 'conceptual schemes'.

Davidson's First Argument

The first involves Davidson's views on radical interpretation. Davidson's argument concerning radical interpretation: 'If an alternative conceptual scheme is translatable into the first conceptual scheme it is not "alternative", and if it is not thus translatable, nothing intelligent can be said about it to distinguish it from the first conceptual scheme. Since grounds for distinguishing a conceptual scheme from an alternative conceptual scheme do not obtain, the distinction collapses'. (Krausz, 1989, pp. 5-6) Gordon Bearn puts the argument more formally as follows:

- (1) Conceptual schemes are not odd platonic entities; they are languages.
- (2) Intertranslatability establishes sameness of conceptual scheme.
- (3) Translatability into our language is, the criterion for something's being a language.

So, (4) An "alternative conceptual scheme" would have to be BOTH

- (a) a conceptual scheme, hence, (by 1) a language, and hence translatable into our own language; AND
- (b) an alternative to our conceptual scheme, hence (by 2) not translatable into our own language.

So (5) The idea of an alternative conceptual scheme is in contradiction with itself.

But (6) "If we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we say that they are one".

So (7) The very idea of a conceptual scheme is unintelligible.⁹

The critical point of entry into this argument is (3). Why deem translatability into our language to be a criterion for anything being a language? Davidson himself notes of it that 'as fiat, the thesis lacks the appeal of self-evidence ... [and] ...should emerge as the conclusion of an argument'. (1984, p. 186)

Robert Kraut construes Davidson as offering this supporting argument: suppose that the task is to decide whether one is faced with another conceptual scheme. Clearly the techniques of radical interpretation or translation would need to be employed.¹⁰ Now, 'either translation succeeds or it fails. If it succeeds, we conclude that the one language is a notational variant on the other, using unfamiliar words to express the same concepts'. (Kraut, 1986, p. 401) In this case 'we have shown no need to speak of two conceptual schemes'¹¹ for, with successful translation, 'there is no evidence to support the claim that there is an alien conceptual scheme'. (Edwards, 1990, p. 93, my emphasis)

On the other hand, Kraut goes on, Davidson's point is that 'if translation fails then ... there is no inclination to impute any conceptual scheme at all (for we don't seem to be

⁹ Bearn, 1989, p.210, in Krausz, 1989; premise (6) is quoted from Davidson, 1984, p.198.

¹⁰ We can ignore differences between these for present purposes; see Edwards, 1990, p.45.

¹¹ Davidson, 1980, p.243, quoted by Kraut, p.401.

dealing with linguistic behaviour at all'). (p. 401) He quotes Davidson, 'if translation fails, there is no ground for speaking of two (conceptual schemes)'.¹² There are two points and each is challengeable. The first is the issue of the sort of evidence one might have for assigning the status of 'language manifestations' to a set of marks or utterances. Why should a failure of translation mean that nothing intelligent can be said about a conceptual scheme's distinction from the interpreter's? There may be something, apart from the capacity to translate it into one's own scheme, that counts as legitimate evidence of a radically "other"¹³ conceptual scheme. Others have argued that translatability is not our only evidence of the manifestation of a conceptual scheme in the utterances of others. The translatability argument seems to rely on a deeper claim that a precondition for the truth of a claim that a conceptual scheme different to ours exists is that we have grounds for identifying it as another conceptual scheme.

I will focus upon this deeper claim rather than the issue of evidence for language-hood. However, concerning the issue of evidence, Sankey maintains that other cues are available to the interpreter. 'Surely formal and contextual features count for something. Codes may be recognised as codes without being broken, fragments of bad languages may be recognised as such prior to translation. Travellers recognise native speech as the local tongue without understanding it'.¹⁴

Davidson could respond that he meant not just whatever evidence was currently to hand but 'the totality of possible sensory evidence'. (1989, p. 193) One might tentatively attribute language status to some marks or sounds as a hypothesis in the expectation that more evidence would confirm one's hypothesis and lead to a translation. But what if one had all the possible evidence at hand? If even this did not yield a translation, could one justify the attribution of languagehood? Sankey's

¹² Kraut, p.401; quoting Davidson, 1980b, p.243. (my emphasis).

¹³ The turn of phrase is adapted from Michael Root (1986) p.272.

¹⁴ Sankey, 1990, pp. 8-9; see also Richard Rorty, 1972, pp. 653-654; Bruce Aune, 1972, p.666 and Clark Glymour, 1982.

remarks do not give a reason for that, as opposed to construing the marks or sounds as mere marks or sounds.¹⁵

Davidson can have the point that if, despite all the possible evidence being at hand, a radical translator is unable to translate a putatively linguistic series of marks or sounds then there are no good grounds for the judgement that one has a language at all. But to move from the claim that it is impossible to warrantably assert that one has a language user before one, to the claim that one cannot intelligibly assert that one has a language user before one is not obviously sound. Of particular interest here is the move that, as one could never warrantably assert that one has a radically different language user before one, one could never intelligibly assert that one has a radically different language user before one. And as what is not intelligibly assertible is not coherent, the notion of a radically different language or conceptual theme simply does not make sense. Thus the possibility of incommensurable conceptual schemes is zero, for, at best,¹⁶ only one language or conceptual scheme is possible - namely ours. What are we to make of this?

Davidson's argument seems verificationist, and commits The Epistemic Fallacy.¹⁷ Just because one could never tell¹⁸ that something is the case, does that make incoherent claims about it being the case. Others also interpret Davidson in this way. For instance, Steven Edwards remarks, 'a distinct sympathy with verificationism may be discerned here'. (1990, p. 93) Richard Rorty states 'this argument is verificationist' (1972, p. 652), Clark Glymour speaks of Davidson's 'invocation of verifiability principles that are neither stated nor defended' (1982, p. 170), Chris Swoyer dismisses the argument as one that 'need not worry us unduly ... (because) ... verificationist ...'. (1982, p. 99) I would argue that the idea of there being more than one conceptual scheme has not been demonstrated to be incoherent; only the idea

¹⁵ To be fair to Sankey, he is more interested in actual translation puzzles when comparing theories in the history of science than in the more abstract concerns of Davidson.

¹⁶ Indeed, as we've seen (see (6) in Bearn's portrayal above of Davidson's argument) the point becomes one of dropping conceptual scheme talk altogether.

¹⁷ I borrow the title from Roy Bhaskar, 1989, p.13.

¹⁸ Even were we to have God-like "total evidence".

of our recognising more than one. Because of this, Davidson's contention that the dualism of scheme and reality should be rejected, as well as 'the concept of an uninterpreted reality, something ...[standing]... outside all schemes' (1984, p. 198) is unwarranted.¹⁹

The claim that Davidson is collapsing truth and warranted belief, appears to be true. Davidson himself says 'that for a theory to fit or face up to the totality of possible sensory evidence is for the theory to be true' (1984, p. 193, my emphasis).²⁰ This is a reason against further consideration of this argument here for it makes Davidson out as not having the realist - *cum* - correspondence account of truth that is one of this first section's assumptions. Although the truth-making role of the world has, in the type of relativism outlined earlier, been construed as mediated by a conceptual scheme, that sort of weak correspondence relative truth would still distinguish matters of truth and matters of justification more than Davidson seems to. Given the verificationist slant of Davidson's argument about translation failure, it is not profitable to pursue the issue within the context of a section assuming a broadly correspondence/realist construal of truth.

It might be thought that Davidson's views are located in that context, for in another paper he remarks: 'the theory I defend is not in competition with a correspondence theory, but depends for its defence on an argument that purports to show that coherence yields correspondence'. (1986, p. 307) Certainly what he goes on to say seems to explicitly subscribe to a correspondence theory of truth. He says: 'Truth ... depends on just two things: what the words as spoken mean, and how the world is arranged ... truth is correspondence with the way things are'. (p. 309) However, as Rorty points out, given Davidson's causal construal of meaning and belief, 'correspondence' is used in an unusual way. That is, correspondence is not seen as a

¹⁹ For this type of argument see Bontekoe, 1992, p.150.

²⁰ Davidson conceives of himself as a coherentist about truth, it seems, but, in his 1986 paper, Rorty interprets him as a pragmatist. See, however, Kirkham's suggestion that Davidson misconceives of what he is doing and '...[mislabels]... his theory of translation as a theory of truth' (1992, p.352, n.26).

non-causal 'relation between a sentence and a chunk of reality which is somehow isomorphic to that sentence' (1986, p. 343). Indeed, Davidson himself remarks that 'Beliefs are true or false, but they represent nothing. It is good to be rid of representations and with them the correspondence theory of truth, for it is thinking that there are representations that engenders thoughts of relativism. Representations are relative to a scheme; a map represents Mexico, say - but only relative to a mercator, or some other, projection'. (1989, p. 166)

The merits of a causal account of belief and meaning are beyond the scope of this work. The point being investigated at present is whether within a correspondence account of truth, a viable global truth relativism can be stated. Davidson's verificationist account of the radical interpreter's task provides us with no obstacle within those constraints. Perhaps those constraints are too severe but my focus is upon truth relativism and to challenge a correspondence theory of truth in any representing form is no special attack on relativism but simply a denial of the common framework assumed by absolutist and relativist alike in this section of the work. At the very least, Davidson's views on meaning, belief, truth and knowledge are contested and controversial and the scheme and content dualism is not obviously refuted by his first argument. However, Davidson has a second argument against the coherence of the scheme and content distinction.

Davidson's Second Argument

The view of relativism developed earlier is minimally ontologically realist in that it allows for a reality whose existence is not dependent upon cognitive agents conceiving of it. It is the object of their conceptions though and thus the view seems committed to a scheme and content distinction. Davidson explains: 'The idea is then that something is a language, and associated with a conceptual scheme, whether we can translate it or not, if it stands in a certain relation (predicting, organising, facing or fitting) experience (nature, reality, sensory promptings)' (1984, p. 191). As he goes

on immediately to say, 'the problem is to say what the relation is, and to be clearer about the entities related'. As Bearn notes, (1989, p. 211) we are being offered a way of making sense of languagehood that is different from Davidson's 'translatable into our language' criterion.

Davidson engages his own challenge by attempting a clarification of this scheme and content distinction. He suggests (1984, p. 191) that two main groups of metaphors are involved. The first is that of conceptual schemes organising something, the second of them fitting it. Although the "somethings" of which Davidson speaks are extensive, the ones relevant here are: the world, nature, reality and so on. My concern is only with the first, organisational, metaphor. Davidson gives two other associated organisational '...images and metaphors ...(in this)... first group... systematise, divide up...' (p. 191). Of this type of metaphor, Davidson remarks that we cannot make sense of organising a single object 'unless that object is understood to contain or consist in other objects' (p. 192). He employs the analogy of a closet; one can organise the things in a closet but not the closet itself.

The point is that to classify, one needs pre-existing individuals to place into classes and if two languages draw those individuals into different classes then that is easy enough to make sense of and, indeed, to inter-translate, by reference to the concepts employed in individuating those individuals. So, provided that that part of language is clear enough and common to two classification systems, sense can be made of failure of translation elsewhere, even with simple predicates. As Davidson puts it:

A language may contain simple predicates whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates, or even by predicates at all, in some other language. What enables us to make this point in particular cases is an ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects. We can be clear about breakdowns in translation when they are local enough, for a background of generally successful translation provides what is needed to make the failures intelligible. But we were after larger game: we wanted to make sense of there being a language we could not translate at all. (p. 192)

Let me allow that this looks plausible and return to the images listed under the 'organise' label for another of Davidson's images that promises not to be open to the arguments above. One of them is 'divide up' (p. 191). Now one might not be able to organise a closet but one can divide it up, and, moreover, divide it up in different ways. One can divide it into front and back, or wood and metal, or smooth and rough, or bits from Japan and bits not. Is this a more promising image to pursue? It seems to be close to the idea of conceptual schemes being different ways of "carving nature up" but not "at the joints".

But even in dividing up one divides up as.²¹ If one distinguishes bits of the world (the closet) for classification, then such bits must be distinguished in virtue of some common attribute.²² If this is so, then we are doing something very like Davidson's shuffling of individuals except that it is the shuffling of properties. What is envisaged hence is not Davidson's 'ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects' (1984, p. 192), but an ontology common to the two languages with simple predicates individuating reality by denoting the same basic properties. Even with 'dividing up' as the organisational image, there is a difficulty, one that Edwards paraphrases as: '... the world ... must already be differentiated, before it can be organised' (1990, p. 97). If one is to have radically different "carve ups" of reality, as opposed to ones that are mere alternative higher level collectings of a common set of simple properties, or objects, then one will have to be ontologically conventional in one's classification "all the way down".²³ And even if one cannot coherently divide up the world just anyhow, one had better be able to manage at least two non-translatable, from top to bottom different, schemes of classification²⁴ if one

²¹ The phrase is adapted from Ludwig Wittgenstein's "seeing as". (1958, Part II, xi)

²² I make some simplifying assumptions here. First, that class membership involves common property possession (as opposed say, to something looser, like a family resemblance). Second, I speak in a way that reflects what Keith Donnellan (1966) calls an attributive (as opposed to referential) sense of reference. As far as I can judge, the discussion's thrust is unaffected by these assumptions.

²³ I adapt the phrase from Putnam (1981, p.57).

²⁴ As we shall see in the next chapter, this is over-simplistic in its demand for two monolithic conceptual schemes. The complexities are, however, beside the present point.

is to sustain the sort of truth relativism at issue; for that required not just conventional classifications but suitably alternative conventional classifications to maximise its philosophical interest.

Is this a coherent possibility? Some philosophers argue that it is. Kendall Walton, for instance, draws a distinction between secondary and primary characteristics as follows. A secondary characteristic is one that is present or not depending on the presence or not of other characteristics. These latter characteristics then being deemed 'primary characteristics with respect to those secondary ones' (1973, p. 6).

Concerning the relativisation of primary-ness and secondary-ness of characteristics, he remarks: 'It should be noted that characteristics which are primary with respect to certain secondary ones may be based on criteria and hence secondary themselves'. (p. 7) He goes on, 'If there are properties which are not based on other ones at all, which are not secondary, I will call them basic characteristics' (p. 7). In this terminology, Davidson's point is that any characterisations or classifications that cognitive agents produce are secondary ones, ones relying upon other properties as their criteria.²⁵ Given that one is always reliant upon pre-existing differentiation, total organisational power is incoherent. That is, Davidson's point is that some properties must be basic.

Walton addresses the point directly:

But of course there must be some properties which are basic, one might think, whether or not we can say which ones they are; the properties we have concepts of, if not basic themselves, must be based ultimately on ones which are - there must be a reality "in itself" even if we cannot find it. But why could not all properties be secondary?²⁶ ... If this is true of all properties there is either an

²⁵ Walton is at pains to point out that a term might be a secondary predicate even if it is applied in an immediate way, without, that is, any inference from applying the relevant primary predicates. Indeed one might have no predicates for the relevant primary properties. (see p.14)

²⁶ I said in a note in the last chapter that it had been put to me that it was not clearly intelligible to speak of the world resisting conventional classification (at least if it is primitive classification). I take it that a corollary of Walton's view is that there need be no such thing as primitive, or primary, classification *simpliciter*. In any event, even if even a totally secondary conventional classification web had elements in it that the world's stuff could not 'refuse', so long as it was also accepting of

infinite regress of properties, or classes of properties each secondary with respect to the succeeding: or there is a circle (or circles) of dependencies, each property being secondary with respect to others, which are secondary with respect to still others, and so on until we arrive at a group of properties including the first one. Neither the regress or the circularity seems to me to be in the least vicious. Hence I conclude that there need be no basic properties, no properties which do not constitute a way of ordering other properties which is peculiar to a certain conceptual scheme. (pp. 24-25)

If Walton is right, then more sense can be made of the "scheme organising content" metaphor than Davidson allows. That any organisation presupposes prior differentiation does not preclude all differentiation being artefactual. It is not clear how the regress could work with cognitively finite agents but the "classificatory circle" suggestion looks benign. It is obvious that one has to break into it somehow. The categories in terms of which one naively organises one's perceptual inputs could be examples. But it does not matter how one enters into categorisation, for one can ontologically reappraise even the most natural-seeming starting classification as artefactual; secondary qualities like redness exemplify this.²⁷

If Walton is right, then one could escape Davidson's objection even if one reverted to the "systematising a collection of individual objects" construal of 'organise'. The ontological conventionalism advanced by Walton and Putnam goes beyond mere nominalism and what individual objects there are is not an ontologically fixed given. When it comes to "carving up" reality's stuff, the conventionalist views under examination are not bound by some fixed natural "count" of individuals. Though the host account of truth here differs from Putnam's coherentist view '... that truth is an idealisation of rational acceptability ...' (1981, p. 55) some aspects of Putnam's 'internalist perspective' (p. 49) parallel Walton's analysis. Putnam says in

other, appropriately alternative, classification as well, the thrust of this section's analysis would not be affected.

²⁷ Indeed, in the chapter of his 1981 in which is advanced the "internal realism" theses touched on below, Putnam says of his view that, as a first approximation, it could be seen as saying that '...all properties are secondary ...' (p.61, original emphasis). All very echoic of Walton, although the use of 'secondary' here is not the same as there in that it focuses on the possibility of all classification being relational (with the classifier being one relatum). Putnam's and Walton's ideas are nonetheless complementary.

explanation of his internalism that, unlike the case with 'metaphysical realism' and its view of the world as consisting '... of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects ... it is characteristic of ...[the internalist]... view to hold that what objects does the world consist of? is a question that it only makes sense to ask within a theory or description.' (p. 49; original emphasis) Or, as argued earlier, it only makes sense in terms of something like a categorial repertoire.

It seems reasonable to claim that, although Davidson may not be wrong, he is not obviously right and enough doubt remains to allow for the possibility of total categorial conventionalism and total object individuation conventionalism. Global weak correspondence truth relativism based on such possibilities is not ruled out. But as it is crucial for correspondence relativism's chances, further consideration is required. If weak truth relativism is to avoid full blown "multiple realities", then Davidson is right that 'it is essential to this idea that there be something neutral and common that lies outside all schemes...The neutral content waiting to be organised is supplied by nature.'. (1984, p. 190) As Kraut puts Davidson's point: "the dualism of scheme and content presupposes a 'common something', a scheme-independent stuff, which alternative schemes somehow organise ..." (1986, p. 401). Yet, 'this common something cannot ... be the subject matter of contrasting languages, or translation would be possible' (Davidson, 1984, p. 190) If it is already classified or individuated as "the subject matter" for semantic activity, then that lower set of classifications will be common ground to "rival" schemes. So, the stuff or content must be more scheme-independent than that. The content must not be "pre-packaged" to be appropriate as the common content that incommensurable schemes conceptualise differently.

Edwards describes this as the view that 'judgements ... have as their object a purportedly unconceptualisable scheme - independent entity'. (1990, p. 99) Edwards conceives of this as some sort of Kantian "thing - in - itself". Clearly if there is a

categorial way the world is, or if there are some natural kinds of basic particulars,²⁸ then this will favour some categorial scheme. Thus, the proponent of multiple schemes has to deny such a scheme to world link. In one sense, then, the world has to be independent of schemes. But that must not make reality ineffable, it has to be subject to organisation by different schemes and describable in their terms. It will not be conceptualisable in the sense that the world's real, determinate, nature will be so captured but that is not to say that it is not conventionally classifiable. If it could be "the subject matter of contrasting languages" in this sense, then this would not entail the possibility of translation. The world without natural differentiation into particulars or properties will be the subject matter of conventional classification, such classification providing 'the form of factuality'.²⁹ Nothing examined to date gives grounds for rejecting the possibility of multiple forms.

It is not claimed that 'the world lies outside of all schemes'³⁰ but that it is naturally and uniquely classifiable by none in particular. The truth of claims is not to do 'with an independent world - in - itself ... but with a world as constituted by someone's mode of thought'. (Swoyer, 1982, p. 98) And it can be constituted in incommensurable ways. If this is correct, then two of the preconditions for global weak correspondence truth relativism are satisfied. To satisfy the demand that the relata of our relationship be distinct, a scheme and content distinction can be drawn. To satisfy the demand that the thesis be global, conventionality of classification can go "all the way down". Moreover, Davidson's arguments for denying the possibility of incommensurable conceptual schemes can be countered. Here, another conventionalist thread emerged. It is not only categories that a global weak relativism denies as part of nature's "in-built" form, individuals are also conventionally individuated. Thus one necessary condition for the possibility of a suitable W^* for some web W seems plausibly met. There are, however, other restraints upon a suitable W^* and these are dealt with in the next chapter.

²⁸ Like, say, Quine's molecule moments or point events (see Quine, 1961, p.68)

²⁹ The phrase is Mark Okrent's. (1984, p.347)

³⁰ Lowell Kleinman, quoted by Kraut, 1986, p.413.

CHAPTER SIX

ALTERNATIVE CATEGORIAL WEBS

INTRODUCTION

The relativiser of the three place relation of relative truth, the categorial web or W, for short can be characterised as follows.¹ For any proposition, *p*, the categorial web W associated with *p* is comprised of the repertoire of those concepts classificatory of reality's stuff, the understanding of which is presupposed by the understanding of *p*. It emerged that these classificatory concepts were to be viewed as classifying reality's stuff into artefactual or conventional classifications as opposed to capturing, or matching, natural kinds. Part of the associated thesis was that of construing reality's stuff as only artefactually classifiable. Moreover, a part of the philosophical interest that a truth relativism thesis has lies in the possibility of there being, not just untranslatably different schemes, but schemes that are untranslatably different and applicable. The metaphor was that of reality being successfully "carved up" in different ways, none of them "at the joints". That is, that there be not just conventional classifications that are successfully applicable but that alternative classifications are possible. The next task is to explicate further the idea of alternativeness being appealed to.

HOLISM AND DISCRETISM

To state the thesis of relative truth does not require a resolution of disputes concerning the extent of the W associated with any given proposition. This is true for the bare statement of the thesis but for showing the possibility of the sort of interesting truth relativism alluded to above, attention will have to be given to this, and to other aspects of the holism/discretism dispute. Our understanding of W makes a considerable

¹ This arises from the discussion in Chapter Two.

difference to the sort of appropriately alternative W^* available. The conceptions of holism and discretism in question need to be refined.

'Holism' is hardly univocal but Jerry Fodor's and Ernest Lepore's recent book is a useful guide. Fodor and Lepore are not concerned with the truth of holism, they seek only to examine various arguments for holism and the assumptions upon which they rest. Their overall judgement is that, despite the popularity of holist theses among contemporary philosophers, no sound argument for holism is extant. They admit that, as they have not refuted holism but just undermined extant rationales for it, '...somebody may ...(advance a sound argument for it)... by early tomorrow afternoon'. (1992, p. 207)² But my only interest in versions of holism is whether they cohere with this section's correspondence truth relativism.

Fodor and Lepore distinguish holism from what they call punctate or atomistic semantic theories which countenance things like belief systems composed of a single proposition, or categorial conceptual webs composed of one concept. Contrasted with this are what they call anatomic (as in not-atomic) semantic theses. An anatomic semantic property is one which if anything has it then at least one other thing does. (p. 257) Holism concerning a semantic property is just extreme anatomism such that semantic properties are holistic if, '...if anything at all has them then so do endlessly many other things...' (2) , or perhaps just '...lots of things...' (p. 258).³

The main semantic properties of interest here are:

- being a truth vehicle; and
- being a classificatory concept associated with some truth vehicle.

Earlier, a distinction was drawn between what I called 'holist' and 'discretist' semantic theories and some connections need to be made between that terminology and Fodor's

² Actually, the target for this particular quote is a bit more restricted but the book makes it clear that the above is no distortion of Fodor's and Lepore's views.

³ I will henceforth shorten this to 'many things'.

and Lepore's. I spoke of holism in two contexts. First, in discussing truth vehicles, whole belief systems were not ruled out as truth vehicles, but it was generally assumed that propositions are the carriers of truth values. The issue was not settled whether the opposite to having a belief system as a whole have a truth value was to have propositions, severally, having truth values. The discussion was unspecific as to whether the having of a truth value by a proposition was possible in isolation (was punctate) or presupposed that other truth vehicles existed (was anatomistic). In any event, these possibilities were being contrasted to a holistic conception of truth vehicles. Second, a contrast was drawn between a whole conceptual scheme or language and a more restricted fragment of it. In effect, my discretism was an amalgam of punctate and (sub-holist) anatomistic possibilities which were jointly contrasted with holism.

There is now a need to reconsider these matters of the construal of the truth vehicles, and the extent of the associated web, in more depth. The specific concern here is with the idea of an alternative web W^* . Let me begin investigating the differences made to the account of alternative conceptual webs by having discretist or holist assumptions.

There are four possibilities within which to attempt global weak correspondence relativism. One has the truth vehicle as a discrete proposition and the relativising web as similarly discrete. Another has the truth vehicle discrete and the web holistic. Another has the truth vehicle holistic and the web discrete. Finally, one has truth vehicle and relativising web holistic.

DISCRETIST TRUTH VEHICLE AND RELATIVISER

Suppose that the categorial web associated with some proposition⁴ is less than a whole language, that it is a sub-language set of categorial concepts?⁵ Discretism of this sort is quite complex.

First, although the notion of a language has been left merely intuitively understood, another categorial web within the same language could serve as W^* . It is also conceivable that providing W^* 's for various p 's can be spread around a number of languages. Suppose that one had W_1 , a sub-linguistic categorial cluster of language L_1 , being associated with proposition p_1 . Suppose further that W_2^* , a sub-set of L_2 , is an appropriately alternative web to W_1 for our weak-relativistic purposes. Given our assumption here of semantic discretism, languages may well intersect; suppose that L_1 and L_2 intersect in W_3 . Now consider p_2 , another proposition expressed within L_1 , this time using the web W_3 . Clearly W_3 in L_2 is not an appropriate alternative web, indeed p is a proposition that L_2 obviously has the conceptual resources to express. Moreover, it may be that no cluster of categorial concepts within L_2 is apt as an alternative categorial web for p_2 . Another language L_3 , however, may be able to muster a web W_4^* which is appropriately alternative.

The point is that, once W is conceived of in discretist terms, one need not have a totally incommensurable whole language or conceptual scheme in order to have W^* 's for all of the p 's that may be expressible in some language. All that is required for our weak truth relativism to be global is that, for any p in any language, there be an appropriately alternative W^* to the W associated with that p . That those W^* 's all occur in one monolithically "other" conceptual scheme is not required. Moreover, to allow that bits of another language can be appropriately alternative to bits of an initial

⁴ I say 'proposition' though this is a special case of a discretist view of truth vehicles. Were a discrete "clump" of propositions to be the apt carrier of truth values it would not affect the substance of the analysis below and talk of a single proposition, p , is less clumsy.

⁵ That is, were web discretism to be true; meaning, in Fodor's and Lepore's terms, were being a member of an associated web to be a semantic property that was punctate or anatomistic.

language places less demanding conditions upon the possibility of global weak truth relativism than the demand of a single incommensurable language as provider of the suite of W^* 's for various p 's as is demanded in our present discretist assumptions.⁶

Two details are worth noting. Even if relativiser discretism is true, and a p 's W is less than a total language, it may still be that all the p 's expressible in a given language can have their W^* 's drawn from a single alternative language. This is not necessary but it is not impossible either. The other is that more than one W^* may exist for any given p and its W .⁷

The key notion awaiting explication is that of a W^* being a categorial web that is appropriately alternative to W . Just what counts as an appropriately alternative W^* and is it conceivable that any p and its associated W can have an apt W^* ? That this is possible is a requirement of interesting and global weak truth relativism.

Appropriately Alternative W^* 's

Prior to further explication of what features a set of categorial concepts need in order to constitute an appropriate W^* for some p , it is useful to summarise the ideas and constraints which have emerged and which form the context for this investigation.

First, the assumption is that propositions are truth vehicles, and that any proposition p will have associated with it a web of categorisation concepts, the understanding of which is presupposed by the understanding of p . A given W may be associated with more than one p (not $-p$, for instance, will share its web with p). Further, for a W to be associated with some p does not thereby entail that, by proposing p , one is committed to the applicability of the categorisation concepts of W ; it all depends upon the details of what is proposed in p . In short, W , the web associated with p , is not to

⁶ For that matter such discretism is also making life easier for the truth relativist than the more holist construal of W which would seem to demand as W^* a total incommensurable language.

⁷ This seems so whether W and W^* are construed holistically or discretely; there might well be >2 appropriately alternative ways of "carving up" the world's stuff.

be confused with the proposition's ontological commitments. Finally, in explicating relativism, the categorial concepts of a W are conceived of as marking off merely conventional, or artefactual, divisions of the stuff of the universe. For such truth relativism to be global is for every such p 's associated W 's to contain only such artefactual categorisation concepts. For it to be weak relative truth or falsity that is the status of any p is for there to be another set of categorial concepts W^* , in terms of which p is not expressible. Underpinning my examination of truth relativism is the ontological thesis (Th.CC) that the stuff of the universe contains no natural kinds (or individuals) and is but conventionally classifiable. For weak relativism to be of maximum interest, alternative classifications of that stuff need to be possible, with no classification being privileged as the only way of successfully "carving up" the universe's stuff. Further explication of this notion of alternativeness is I now required.

If semantic holism is true, then meeting this stipulation would require an entire alternative language or conceptual scheme. But if, as currently assumed, some "discretist" semantic theory is true, then the criteria for being a W^* are not so demanding. Indeed, a difficulty with the present position is that, as presently stipulated, it is too easy for some collection of categorial concepts to qualify as a W^* in terms of which some p cannot be proposed. This point leads us to a further explication of criteria for being a W^* . Suppose that the p in question is: 'chalk is brittle'. Now, there is nothing particularly exotic about a discrete web of categorial concepts like 'cheese, taste, nice, ...' which may be associated with the different proposition that cheese does not taste nice. One is not here appealing to the concepts of Hopi Indians or past scientific theorists or aliens from other galaxies. Yet such a "cheese" web qualifies as a W^* for the chalk-discussing p by reference to anything furnished so far in clarification of what could be a W^* . This goes against the basic intuition which this section seeks to explicate. That is, such a W^* is not an instance of an alternative way of conceiving of the stuff of reality such that one has the same stuff

"carved up" differently. Rather, the "cheese" web and the "chalk" web are simply apt for conceiving of, or "carving up" different bits of reality's stuff.

What is demanded of our W^* is that its concepts are classificatory of the same stuff that p is discussing, not of some other stuff. Can a satisfactory explication of W^* that takes account of this demand be given? It can be but even when that is clearer, the conception of what would qualify as a suitably alternative W^* needs further sharpening.

One example of different conceptions of the same stuff is 'creature with a heart' and 'creature with a kidney'. Ignoring the conceptual overlap involved with 'creature', is this the sort of W/W^* pair that is sought? Each concept picks out the same stuff but such an exactly matched extension means that there are not different ways of carving up reality but different routes to the same carve up. And, if reference,⁸ not sense, is central to correspondence truth/falsity, then propositions expressed using one classification can be expressed using the other. In short, co-referring expressions of this sort are too tightly about the same stuff. What is required cannot be "term-by-term" totally shared extension. What is required is partial extensional overlap.

For ease of exposition, it is assumed that an alien language is the source of W^* and the task is to work out in virtue of what features various categorial terms of that language would qualify as constituting a W^* for some p in our language.⁹ Suppose that p is: 'chalk is brittle'. A category in p 's W is obviously 'chalk'. Now the stuff that p is about is chalk, so W^* has to contain terms that manage to be about chalk without being co-extensional with 'chalk'. Suppose that the alien has as many subdivisions of chalk as the Inuit have of snow and, correspondingly, a spread of specialist chalk terms. Would this suit? No, for the combinations of such terms would provide an

⁸ Note that an assumption of all of this section must be the falsity of causal/historicist theories of reference and the truth or some form of descriptivist theory of reference (including causal descriptivist versions) because of the reliance of the former, but not the latter, on the existence of natural kinds.

⁹ Although, as remarked earlier, there is nothing obvious barring the conceptual repertoire of our language being rich enough to provide both W and W^* for some proposition, at least if discretionism is true.

extensionally equivalent semantic resource that could be used as suitably as 'chalk' to express p . Clearly, the terms of W^* have to relate to chalk in some more complex way than by just picking out subsets of it.

Could excessive co-extensionality be avoided by having the stuff classified as chalk not being classified only with itself? This could occur either by having the alien classify all chalk together with some other stuff to form an alien classification, or by having some chalk so classified. This looks like the path that the truth relativist has to take but, even at this stage, some problems are apparent. Even without resort to alien languages there are categorial webs that count as instances of a W^* , yet should not in the explication of relativism. For instance, chalk, along with other bits of stuff, is classifiable as stuff with a density less than such-and-such; or some chalk could be classified with some other stuff as white stuff. And propositions such as 'chalk is brittle' will not be expressible using terms like 'white'. In short, the same stuff is already classified into various groupings for various purposes. This can be done without any speculative recourse to alien languages. Explicating W^* with such categories as these seems unsatisfactory.

The concern is not that an illegitimate W^* is sourceable within the same language as W . Within discretism no restraint is placed upon the broader linguistic context within which a W^* may occur. Rather, the concern is that our existing language satisfies the criteria for W^* -hood yet just does not capture the intuitive idea of alternative ways of carving up the same stuff. 'Brittle' and 'white' are certainly different ways of classifying chalk but 'white' is merely an additional classification to 'brittle' not an alternative one. One should not misconstrue the sort of alternativeness required. In particular, one does not require rivalry in the sense that the applicability of one classification barred the applicability of another. For weak relativism to be interesting, alternative and equally applicable categorial webs are required. Compare 'round' and 'square' or 'dephlogisticated' and 'oxidised' as rival in the sense of mutually exclusive in application to the same stuff. Nonetheless, these two pairs have one feature that

'brittle' and 'white' do not; the members are in some sense variations upon the same classificatory task rather than participants in another task. What needs to be investigated next in the refinement of W^* , is the notion of alternative classifications on the same parameter.

Can the idea of "rival" or alternative classifications on the same parameter be used to further articulate what counts as a suitable W^* for some p ? Failure to explicate this coherently would mean that the role of the relativistic thesis (Th.GCWTR) as an explication of the weak relativist intuition that reality can be conceived of in radically different ways and that such plasticity forms the basis for an interesting conception and thesis of weak relative truth would be diminished. One can, of course, get two alternative classifications on the same parameter which are not both applicable to the same stuff. The examples of 'dephlogisticated' and 'oxidised' or 'round' and 'square' serve again. But what is required is a pair of alternatives that may each be successfully applied to the same stuff.

Earlier, when discussing the classificatory plasticity of the world, there was no particular scope constraint and it was argued that categorial conventionality could be total without absurdity, that global conventionalism was possible. Such global conventionalism raises a difficulty for the demand that, on the same parameter, the same stuff may be variously categorised by W and W^* such that a p conceived of in terms of W may not be conceivable in terms of W^* . To employ the same parameter in a totally conventionally categorised world is, thereby, to conventionally categorise the world. If one fixes the parameter as, say, colour, then this is to entertain the conventional categorisation of stuff as coloured. Or, if one fixes the parameter as chemical composition, then this is to entertain the conventional categorisation of the world's stuff as having a chemical composition. These higher level, parameter determining, categorisations are for global conventionalists as conventional as any others.

This seems to raise a difficulty. For instance, if W and W^* are rival systems of colour classification, will not p employing W and p^* employing W^* both have 'coloured' as a shared concept? Detailed "species" categorisation concepts presuppose the relevant "genus" concepts. So, one cannot have a W and a W^* on the same parameter without them intersecting conceptually on the parameter setting "genus" concept. The price of having the W^* appropriately relevant to p and to its associated W is conceptual overlap. This may seem a substantial objection to truth relativism of an interesting sort. The imagery employed earlier was of different categorial conceptions of the world that were potentially global, with no conception sacrosanct, or without a possible alternative. Yet, on the present conception, the concept defining the parameter upon which conceptualisation within W and W^* is occurring is shared ground, the difference is not total.

One way of responding to this difficulty is to suggest¹⁰ that the parameter-setting concept is not within W or W^* but is part of a meta-language which can be employed to speak of and compare both W and W^* . That is: 'W and W^* are both webs with colour concepts in them'. Were this to work, then it would remove the overlap of W and W^* ; but it does not work.

It does not work because of the way that the notion of categorial webs associated with some proposition was set up. The categorial web, W , associated with some p contains all concepts, the understanding of which is pre-requisite to understanding the proposition. Thus if a parameter upon which chalk is being discussed is colour, then W contains the concept of colour. If some other web is to count as an appropriate W^* and is thus conceptualising stuff on the same parameter, then it, too, contains the concept of colour. In short, the insistence that the elements of W^* be on the same parameter as those of W ensures overlap of W^* and W . The meta-linguistic attempt to avoid this fails. But this doesn't matter, for total dissimilarity of the classifications of

¹⁰ The suggestion is adapted from Howard Sankey's discussion. (1990)

W and W* is not to be a pre-condition of some classificatory web being a suitable W* for weak relativistic purposes.

Despite some parameter setting conceptual overlap, such a W* can still be suitable for the purpose of articulating the thesis that *p* is weakly true relative to W. This is because, despite partial overlap, it remains that W* is inadequate conceptually for the formulation of *p*. The proposition relies on more than just the concept of colour, it relies on particular colour concepts, like whiteness. But even if our *p* is inexpressible using a web of concepts that carve up the same stuff as *p*'s W and, moreover, carve it up on the same parameter, colour, the discussion points our attention to other *p*'s, ones using 'colour' rather than any particular colour words themselves. Thus, one may have: 'some things are coloured' as one's proposition. Now, if there is a more generic or abstract conception that being coloured is an instance of, then the above discussion transfers across. Indeed, the manoeuvre can be repeated as often as one cares; whatever categorisation term is involved, one could retreat to another level of categorisation in terms of which to set the parameter upon which the first categorisation was operating. For instance, there could be an alien without sense organs adapted to the reception of the visible spectrum, but with a highly developed x-ray sense. Its x-ray sense concepts and our visible light spectrum sense concepts may be classifiable together as electromagnetic sense concepts and thus that portion of the alien's language would count as an apt W* for the weak truth value status of our 'some things are coloured'. There are issues here that parallel ones already dealt with in the earlier discussion of the possibility of total categorial conventionalism.¹¹

The case rests upon the possibility that, for any proposition and its associated web, W, any category term in W can have a counterpart in some other web. The notion of a counterpart is that of a term and its counterpart being on the same parameter. And the parameter setting concept is also to have a counterpart concept on some further parameter. This process would be in difficulty if there were some basic categorisation

¹¹ See the discussion of Kendall Walton's ideas in Chapter Five.

concepts that were *sui generis*, but there seems no reason to think that the process could not circle back on itself such that any term on any parameter may have a counterpart on the same parameter. Thus, that webs must be in intersection for key terms to be deemed on the same parameter does not entail that any term is privileged in the sense of being without a counterpart.

What is required for the viability of weak truth relativism is the world being able to be "carved up" differently by differing conceptions with no conception semantically privileged in its applicability. So that, whenever a conception is categorially successful, there is an equally successful counterpart conception on the same parameter. That requirement seems coherently achievable.

DISCRETIST TRUTH VEHICLE AND HOLIST RELATIVISER

So far, the discussion has all been within relativism with a discretist view of both the truth vehicle and the relativiser, the associated categorial web. What difference would be made to this favourable outcome for discretist relativism if the relativiser was more holistic? This is the view that for any concept to be associated with some *p*, or part of *p*'s associated web, many other concepts would also have to be associated. In essence, this is the view that, for any *p*, its associated web is the whole categorial conceptual apparatus of the language in which it is expressed.¹² Briefly, it is a conceptual scheme or, interchangeably, a language. Now, a number of propositions may share an associated categorial web, for example, any proposition and its negation will share a *W*.¹³ If a whole language is a *p*'s *W*, then any proposition expressible by use of that language will have the same *W*, the whole language.¹⁴ And to get a *W** for any *p* involves appeal to the possibility of another whole language or conceptual scheme. That such another language be possible is a necessary condition of a

¹² My understanding is that if concepts were not so associated, then they would lie outside the language.

¹³ Not that it matters to the thrust of the present discussion but note that the semantic property of being a *W* is thereby anatomistic at least.

¹⁴ Assuming for the moment that one will still have discrete propositions able to be truth vehicles; we'll return to the point later.

philosophically interesting truth relativism within the assumption of web holism.

There seems no reason to doubt that the condition can be met.

One oddity with this view is that if there is a web of meaning such that the concepts associated with some p ('cat' and 'mat' if p is 'the cat sat on the mat', for instance) are semantically bound up with a whole language's conceptual repertoire, then p 's truth entails many other propositions' truth too. This seems obvious. That 'cat' is instantiated is one; that an animal sat on the mat is another. However this only shows that the truth vehicle is not atomistic, not that it is holist. Perhaps propositions must face the world in groups and the discretist/holist distinction is then about how big such groups must be. Presumably here, while a considerable number of propositions may stand or fall jointly with p , the number will be less than if p were to be holistically construed as a whole belief system or theory. In any event, such a view merits further investigation for its suitability as a host for weak truth relativism.

So, some discretely construed truth vehicle p , has a whole conceptual scheme¹⁵ or language as its associated web W_L . An alternative web for p will be W^*_L . Finding a W^*_L for a p generates problems that a mere discrete web W^* did not when it comes to understanding the alternativeness of the W^*_L . The problem lies in explicating "same stuff" and same parameter. On this holistic variation, "same stuff" seems, on the face of it, easy to satisfy. The language as a whole is about reality as a whole; it serves to categorise reality.¹⁶ So, the stuff that a p is about is reality and to make its claims it employs a language W_L . What constitutes a W^*_L is another language that, given this holistic conception of languages, is automatically untranslatable yet is about the same stuff - reality as a whole.

¹⁵ Still to be conceived of as a mere repertoire, recall, to avoid the committed or 'operative' (see Chapter Two) flavour of this term, I shall mostly use 'language', despite the slightly misleading nature of this terminological choice; 'misleading' in that one would normally speak of two translatable languages as two languages, despite a shared categorial repertoire.

¹⁶ I have misgivings about the coherence of such holism but it is not the role of this thesis to divert to discussion of such claims as such; rather, I wish simply to track connections to truth relativism.

An objection is that one could have a language which did not so much provide a full alternative conception of reality's stuff as provide a partial conception of it. Ionian scientists were not conceiving of X-rays differently so much as simply not having any conception of them at all. The language of some Amazonian tribe is not so much carving up the world of CD-Roms and H-bombs differently as not carving it up at all. In short, with a limited language, is the stuff it is concerned to conceptualise always all of reality? And if not, how can such an "alternative" linguistic repertoire to W_L qualify as conceptualising the same stuff as W_L ? And if it cannot, how can it be a suitable W^*_L ? Even when holistically construed, not just any other language can be a W^*_L because it may not be able to conceptualise the stuff that W_L is about.

There are two paths forward here. One is to construe even a limited or gappy language as having all of reality as its target for conceptualisation. Ignoring holism briefly,¹⁷ suppose there are spirits. Now a language that is totally materialistic, that only has concepts, say, of a nineteenth century scientific sort, would still be conceptualising spirits, but conceptualising them as material. It would not do so explicitly, because this language's users are not consciously rejecting a spiritual realm. To do that would require the language to have 'spirit' in its repertoire so that 'no spirits exist' could be expressed. Rather, it is implicitly an assumption of the completeness of the language's categorial possibilities.

A difficulty with this is that the relativisers, the categorial webs, are construed as repertoires and repertoires are conceived of as having no ontological commitments concerning their category concepts' applicability. As such, they could have no commitment to categorial completeness or to the emptiness of concepts not in the language. Languages are possible in terms of whose concepts there will be things of which they cannot speak, and if they cannot speak of something W_L allows, it cannot be the same stuff categorised by W_L that they are about. Thus holism, as much as

¹⁷ On the sort of holist view we are looking at, one can't start breaking up languages into discrete bits for consideration as we are doing. Despite this, the procedure I adopt is, in my judgement, the swiftest, easiest, way of getting my point across.

discretism, faces the complication that it must explicate the sense in which two languages could be about the same stuff. It cannot rely on it being just automatic that any two whole languages will be about the same stuff (i.e. reality as a whole).

Let me return to the discussion of discretist variants. It was argued that it would be of little interest if only inapplicable categorial webs were available for the role of W^* .

'Phlogiston' and its related terms are not the sort of W^* that is of maximum interest because reality resists being carved up as 'phlogiston' seeks to do it. So, although in our characterisation of the concept of relative truth, the W and the W^* were repertoires, for relativism to be interesting, for any p true relative to W , there would have to be a W^* that was in part positively referentially operative. Translated to the present holistic context, the point is that for any true p expressed in language W_L which would thus be appropriately referentially operative, there exists another language W^*_L in terms of which p was not expressible and that other language is referentially operative as well, that is, uses categorial concepts in terms of which reality's stuff may successfully be carved up.

This issue of a mere repertoire versus the referential/categorial success of that repertoire demands some further comment. If W^*_L is to be operative (for interesting relativism) then the earlier emphasis on W^* being a mere repertoire without ontological commitment seems beside the point. It is beside the point of interesting relativistic theses, but even with referentially operative schemes as W_L and as W^*_L , it is no part of W_L or W_L^* in its role as relativiser, as third relatum, in the articulation of the concept of relative truth that it has any ontological commitments. Rather, this is an extra, interest-driven stipulation from outside the concept of relative truth. And yet even with the stipulation that W_L and W_L^* be referentially operative, this does not by itself make any commitments about the extent of coverage of reality by the language's conceptual web. To say that 'material' has extension, is operative, says nothing about whether 'spiritual' also has extension.

In short, the complication persists for the holist; not all languages, even totally referentially successful ones, are assured of carving up all of reality and, if not, then it is not automatically an apt W^*L for the required purpose because it is not automatically about the same stuff as W_L . The issue is how, within such holism, to make sense of same stuff? What would it be like for two languages to qualify as W_L and interestingly alternative W^*L with respect to some p ? Some further explication is needed of 'interestingly alternative language'.

The holistic understanding of the referential powers of the W_L and W^*L causes the difficulty. A whole system of classification is to be thought of as succeeding in a "whole or nothing" way. If W_L carves up reality then it may carve it all up or it may not. If it carves it all up the demand on a candidate W^*L will be that it, also, carve up all of reality and, moreover, do so incommensurably such that its concepts are unable to be employed to express p . All of reality would have to be able to be carved up by means of at least two incommensurable schemes. This is not an easily dismissed possibility. What if, on the other hand, the language W_L associated with some p manages to carve up only some of reality's stuff? Can sense be made of the notion of an incommensurably alternative carve up of the same stuff by some W^*L ? An obvious approach is to re-apply the previous analysis for discrete webs in which W and W^* were portions of larger, categorially richer, languages. That analysis had two elements in it. Concerning same stuff, to avoid the problem of commensurability caused by referential matching of concepts, the proposal was to use the notion of partial referential overlap. That same stuff analysis transfers to the present case. More difficult is the second element.

To keep partially overlapping W and W^* sufficiently relevant to one another such that W^* could be construed as alternative to W and not merely additional, the analysis considered two webs' concepts being on the same parameter. But does the way that this was explicated when the associated and alternative webs for some p were discrete transfer to a holistic W_L and W^*L ? The difficulty with holding that it does is that,

with discrete webs, partial, high level, conceptual overlap of W and W^* was appealed to to explicate the concept of two categorisations being alternative categorisations on the same parameter. As the holist W_L and W^*_L have been set up above, however, there can be no such overlap. With W_L and W^*_L being incommensurable holistically construed languages, no concepts are shared and thus none are available to inconnect elements¹⁸ of W_L and W^*_L on the same parameter.

Is there a solution? It may be thought that there should be, that some error of omission or commission has occurred in the above analysis for it would normally be thought that talk of holistic incommensurable languages almost automatically inclines one to relativism. The difficulty is caused by the less than total scope of the categorial webs of the languages under consideration. Without appeal to the way forward employed before, what can be done?

One response is to revisit Sankey's (1990) meta-language suggestion. A second is to abandon the total incommensurability of W_L and W^*_L . A third is to abandon the "same parameter" stipulation that causes the problem.

Consider the first of these. The idea here is that one can stand outside of both languages and note features of them that were ineffable within just one of those languages. In this case, it would be meta-linguistically noted in W_{mL} that the concepts of W^*_L , though untranslatable with those of W_L , were nonetheless not only alternative categorisers of the same stuff, but on the same parameter. The meta-conceptual concepts of W_{mL} would provide the higher level parameter setting terminology by use of which 'same parameter' discussions of W_L and W^*_L 's categorial concepts are possible. Not being a part of W_L or W^*_L , W_{mL} is, so to speak, semantically "untainted" by either. Thus despite their incommensurability, W_L and W^*_L may be compared within W_{mL} within which they are mentioned or meta-linguistic counterparts are used.

¹⁸ If such individuation of conceptual elements makes sense at all on holism.

It is by no means clear that this language stratification strategy can sit comfortably with the meaning holism under assumption. The central holist idea is that of conceptual interdependence, of the meanings of various linguistic items being determined by their place in a semantic web. A consequence of such views is that conceptual additions are not just additive, but transformative. Thus, put meta-linguistic counterparts of the concepts of W_L into W_{mL} and they interweave with those of W^*_L via whatever parameter setting concepts are mooted. And, because of that recontextualisation, the meta-linguistic counterparts of W_L and W_{mL} will differ in meaning from the W_L originals. There appears to be no way around this difficulty.

The second response is to cease to demand total incommensurability of the two webs. If W_L and W^*_L were not incommensurable, then may they not share some parameter establishing concepts in the manner discussed earlier under discretism? While this is possible under discretism, this seems an unavailable strategy under holism about meaning, at least if that holism is construed as one where every term's sense affects, and is affected by, every other term's sense. With Fodor's and Lepore's way of characterising holistic theses, sense holism seems to be less narrowly conceived of. The idea is that one could not have any term having a sense unless many others did. This leaves open the possibility of asymmetric sense giving relationships within the web of meaningful terms, and such asymmetry allows for some concepts to presuppose others without reciprocity. For instance, particular colour concepts may presuppose the general concept of being coloured. If holism can be viewed this way, then the situation for relativism looks much as with the discretist variant previously discussed. Two languages W_L and W^*_L could be in partial intersection such that while some of the W_L associated with some p was not present in W^*_L and the latter was unable to express p , some was shared with W_L and could serve to establish that other parts of W_L and W^*_L were suitably alternative such that they could be different ways of carving up reality's stuff on the same parameter of classification.

In short, once some asymmetry of sense relationships is built in to holism such that languages' concepts can be viewed holistically without that entailing total incommensurability with other languages containing some different concepts, then holistic weak relativism seems possible.

The third possibility is to not insist that two alternative categorisations of the world's stuff only count as appropriately alternative if they can be collected together in a higher level grouping such that they could be construed as different categorisations on the same parameter. In challenge to this, why should a relativist not be delighted by a conceptual scheme or language so totally alien that it does not intersect with ours at any point? Surely this is at the heart of the purest and most radical form of weak relativism. The appeal of the challenge is obvious, but is at its strongest when it is frameworks of belief, or theories, that are in mind. If one has, say, a realist conception of stars, then an anti-realist, or idealist metaphysics that rejects the existence of spatio-temporally located objects and has, say, the spiritual world of the mind as the only metaphysically actual realm, is certainly a radically different belief system. Yet it is articulated employing a common language, a common repertoire of categorial concepts. What is envisaged by the holist weak relativist goes beyond this and is that theses using W_L are ineffable using W^*L . But, will a totally alien conceptual scheme not satisfy this ineffability requirement? Of course it would but recall "chalk and cheese" in the discussion of discretism earlier. Although a chalk web could not be used to articulate cheese propositions, it did not capture the relativist "carving up" intuition either. Nor does the "totally alien conceptual scheme" idea. Let me advance the point with a related example. Suppose that a primitive society had never thought about the world except in terms of concepts connecting with ordinary middle sized material objects and their manifest features. That is, they had no conception of non-observable theoretical entities like magnetic fields and deities. Suppose further that their conceptual repertoire was then extended to include such concepts. Now, the "languages" of physics and theology may count as fair approximations to being alien to the indigenous one. Yet the fact that 'this axe is

shiny' is not expressible in the "languages" of physics or theology is not a telling relativist point. The conceptual repertoires of physics and theology are complementary to that of middle sized objects and can be learned and added to our native's original language without being in any sense alternatives to it. It is as if a "chalk" web were added to a "cheese" web, or, better for present purposes, as if a colour web were added to a shape web. What is required is not just an incommensurable scheme but an incommensurable and appropriately alternative scheme otherwise one is not carving up differently but just adding more carving. In short, whatever variations of weak relativism arise from postulating an alien scheme,¹⁹ its mere alien-ness does not suffice for interesting weak relativism; it has to be alien and alternative. And for that, some sort of "same parameter" analysis is the route to understanding, a route barred by holistic semantics.

So, for a whole language or holistically construed categorial web, the only way of getting interesting weak relativism seems to be the second of our three possibilities; the only way to escape the concern about "same parameter" is to have a non-incommensurable (or not totally incommensurable) conceptual scheme as the W^*L .

HOLIST TRUTH VEHICLE

What then of truth vehicle holism? So far we have kept the truth vehicle discrete and had discrete and holist relativising webs as the foci for analysis. The two remaining possibilities are holist truth vehicle and discretist web and holist truth vehicle and holist web. I will consider these in turn. It is hard to make sense of the former, for if the holistic truth vehicle is an entire belief system, or theory, then such a belief system's associated web or categorial repertoire would have to be similarly holist to provide the conceptual resources for the articulation of the belief system's claims.

¹⁹ One set of twists and turns worth exploration is the notion of languagehood. If alien schemes can be patched in to augment a conceptual repertoire, then is there any principled limit to this? Even alternative webs might co-exist in the same repertoire, at least on a discretist understanding of sense.

Accordingly I move on to the more promising possibility of having a holist truth vehicle²⁰ and a holist associated web a language or conceptual scheme W_L .

Let the holist truth vehicle be T , for theory. So, T is to be true relative to W_L and, as it is a global thesis, all theories' truth values are to be relativised to a language.

Further, as weak relativism, for any theory, there is another possible language whose concepts cannot serve to express that theory. Finally, to be interesting correspondence relativism, for any W_L there is not just some other such language but a language that is suitably alternative to W_L . As with the previous discussion of the coherence of the idea of a suitable W^*_L for some W_L , it is the notion of an alternative and holistic web that is problematic. The discussion of this parallels that earlier one with the most promising path being the abandonment of the notion that such another language be totally incommensurable with W_L to qualify as a W^*_L , this being the price of making sense of the "same parameter" demand.

SUMMARY

The result of the foregoing is that the correspondence theory is able to accomodate a weak, though not a strong, concept of relative truth, one with a categorial repertoire as relativiser and with an inherently unsorted world's stuff as the object of truth claims. In terms of this conception, a global and, moreover, interesting thesis can be coherently proposed, most easily with discretist conceptions of truth vehicles and relativisers but also with holist elements as just investigated.

²⁰ One could loosely talk of truth vehicle holism, using Fodor's and Lepore's turn of phrase, as follows:

For some p to be true relative to a language, endlessly many (or lots of) propositions have to be true relative to a language.

This is, however, ambiguous between two versions. For the first, it is understood that the web is the same in each case. In the second, the p might be true relative to W^a_L and the other propositions to some language or other, but not necessarily to W^a_L . However, I take it to be more in the spirit of semantic holism for it to be the view that it is in virtue of them being part of the same theory that p 's truth has implications for the truth of lots of other propositions and thus that the relativising language in question is the same for all members of the truth vehicle theory.

CHAPTER SEVEN

TRUTH RELATIVISM WITHIN NON-REALIST THEORIES

INTRODUCTION:

To date, the discussion of relative truth has been constrained by the assumption of a minimal realism. The elements of this were ontological and semantic. The minimal ontological realism assumed was that a mind-independent reality existed, that is, mind-independent in the sense that the existence of that reality did not depend on the minds of cognitive agents.¹ Semantically, the discussion has assumed that propositions are about reality and that, in some sense, the truth or falsity of a proposition is a function of whether reality is as proposed. Within the constraints of these realist assumptions, the first task was to construct a viable concept of relative truth with the further constraint of having something like a belief - framework, or conceptual scheme, as the relativiser. The second was to construct a viable and interesting thesis of relative truth which was global, which was a thesis about all propositions' truth value.

What has been achieved is a demonstration of the possibility of being a realist (of sorts) and a relativist (of sorts). One could retain the realist view of truth as being a matter of succeeding in describing reality, yet not thereby reject all that relativists have been saying. Nonetheless could one defend more robustly relativist theses if one were to disengage truth from realism? The remaining task is to discover whether this is so.

One obvious way of being non-realist about truth is to abandon all three realist assumptions made to date. I will not, however, abandon the minimally realist ontological assumption of a mind-independent reality as its presence or absence will not affect the discussion.

¹ This is overly crudely put for the sake of ease of exposition; for instance, if minds are real then they can scarcely be mind-independent. The complications introduced by such considerations are beside the point of this work's inquiries however. (cf. Kirkham, 1992, pp. 76-78).

Of the two classical non-realist theories of truth, I will focus upon the coherence theory of truth.

THE COHERENCE THEORY OF TRUTH

Richard Kirkham observes:

Even the briefest survey of writings about truth, however, reveals that there is little agreement about what the philosophical problem of truth is. (1992, p. 1)

Kirkham crafts a taxonomy in terms of which to understand writings on truth. He distinguishes three main projects. The first, he calls: 'The meta-physical project' and it 'attempts to identify what truth consists in, what it is for a statement (or belief or proposition etc.) to be true'. (1992, p. 20)

The second, he calls: 'The justification project'; this 'attempts to identify some characteristic, possessed by most true statements and not possessed by most false statements, by reference to which the probable truth or falsity of the statement can be judged'. (1992, p. 20)

The third, which he calls: 'The speech-act project', 'attempts to describe the locutionary or illocutionary purpose served by utterances that by their surface grammar appear to ascribe the property of truth to some statement (or belief etc.)...'. (1992, p. 21)

So, how is the coherence theory to be construed? Coherence theorists differ as to the task for their theory. Many, like Nicholas Rescher², have construed it as most satisfactorily seen as lying within the second, or justification project, as advancing

² See his 1973 book, *The Coherence Theory of Truth*, for instance.

criteria or tests for truth³, rather than providing an analytical understanding of truth itself. But Kirkham notes that one coherence theorist, Brand Blanshard, is explicitly aware of something like Kirkham's taxonomy and advances the coherence theory as more than an offering within the justification project; he defends it as giving us '...the nature of truth ... the definition of truth ...'. (Blanshard, 1941, p. 260, quoted by Kirkham on p. 104) Ralph Walker also considers it as the 'radical thesis' that coherence is 'what truth consists in', 'a theory about the nature of truth'. (Walker, 1990, p. 25)

My concern, however, will not be with the justification project but with the coherence theory as an attempt to say what truth consists in.⁴ Of Kirkham's three projects, the relevant contrast for my purposes is that between the justification project and the other two. In particular, although distinct,⁵ I will be concerned with the coherence theory as trying to "fix the intension, the sense, the connotation of the predicate 'is true'" (p. 21), which Kirkham calls 'The assertion project'; or as trying to find conditions that, are individually necessary and jointly sufficient for a statement being true, called by Kirkham 'The essence project'. The latter belongs to the metaphysical project and the former to the speech-act project but, for my purposes, what is important is that each goes beyond the epistemic concerns of the justification project. It may be that the answer to the justification project is also the answer to the essence project but that requires extra argument. Such matters will be explored in due course, but for now, I will distinguish tests for truth from truth itself.

What is the coherence theory's analysis of the nature of truth? Alan White characterises it as follows:

According to the Coherence Theory, to say that what is said (usually called a judgment, belief, or proposition) is true or false is to say that it coheres or fails to cohere with a system of other things which are said... . (1970, p. 110)

³ Or just for necessary truth (see for instance, White, 1970, p.121 or Carr, 1988, p.89).

⁴ Or what 'truth' means; as noted below, the difference is irrelevant for present purposes.

⁵ See Kirkham, Section 1.4, p.14 in particular.

John Hospers characterises it as follows:

It is not the correspondence of propositions with facts that constitutes truth, according to this view, but rather the coherence of propositions with one another. (1973, p. 116)

In these two quotations a key feature of the coherence theory emerges; it is a semantically non-realist theory. Although some coherence theorists have been idealists, for example, Bradley, one does not, on the face of it,⁶ have to deny the minimal ontological realism mentioned earlier. All that is required is that such a reality play no semantic role as truth maker. The truth makers are other propositions, beliefs, judgments, etc..

But if a proposition's⁷ truth is to consist in its coherence with some set of propositions, then two traditional challenges arise immediately. One is to seek clarification of the concept of coherence appealed to. The other, of more immediate interest, is that, if it is possible for a proposition to be coherent with one set of propositions W, but not coherent with another W*, will that not entail truth relativism, in that the proposition will be true relative to the first set yet false relative to the second?

This is usually raised as an objection to the coherence theory as an account of what truth is, for the assumption is that a proposition's truth status is absolute. For my purposes, however, this putative flaw is a merit, for it looks as if relativism about truth might emerge as a natural consequence of the coherence theory. Contrast this with the difficulties that had to be worked through in the attempt to secure truth relativism within a correspondence theory. Moreover, more radical relativism might

⁶ Though Walker argues that every coherence theorist must (if he is to be consistent) be an idealist (p.40), the sense of 'idealism' is restricted (see pp. 38-39).

⁷ We will return later to the issue of whether propositions or beliefs are the more appropriate choice as a coherence theorists' truth makers/truth vehicles; for now I will speak of propositions as fulfilling this role. As a convenient shorthand, I will use 'W' for a truth-making set and 'W*' for a falsity-making set.

be accommodated within a coherence theory, for it looks as if strong, and not just weak, truth relativism will be coherent.

Before investigating whether this promise is fulfilled, note the following constraint. Walker claims that a pure coherence theory of truth is one that offers an analysis of all kinds of truths - not just, say, those of mathematics, or of necessary truths, or of evaluative truths (p. 6). In this section the goal is to investigate pure coherence truth relativism, theories in which, not only are all truths analysed in terms of coherence, but all truths are construed as relative truths. I will employ James Young's terminology and refer to such coherence truth relativism as global, rather than pure.⁸

GLOBAL COHERENCE TRUTH RELATIVISM

As with correspondence truth relativism, the aim is not to adjudicate the merits of the "host" theories of truth. I will simply assume that the idea of coherence truth is defensible and investigate the varieties best suited to theses of global truth relativism. Insofar as objections to coherence theories of truth are raised, it will be to their satisfactoriness as hosts to global relativism.

A number of issues require examination. These include:

- a) the nature and extent of the relativiser W;
- b) whether it is strong or weak relativism;
- c) the relationship of the truth vehicle and the W; and
- d) the status of the thesis of global truth relativism itself.

As a major merit for a relativist thesis in having a coherence theory as host is that strong truth relativism looks coherent, that will be my starting point.

⁸ I will be examining Young's ideas and arguments in some detail in Chapter Nine; the 'global' terminology appears first in his (1987).

GLOBAL STRONG COHERENCE TRUTH RELATIVISM

The notion of global strong coherence truth relativism needs additional clarification. The key notion with strong relativism is that the same proposition might be both true and false relative to two different frameworks. The strong/weak relativism distinction was introduced when discussing correspondence relativism. In his criticism of what is here termed strong truth relativism, Newton-Smith employed two notions of strong relativism. As strong truth relativism of any sort turned out to be unavailable within a correspondence/realist truth framework, I criticised the least extreme thesis, noting that, *a fortiori*, more extreme versions were thereby criticised also. In this section, with strong truth relativism more plausibly able to be stated in a coherent way, greater discrimination is enjoined and I will distinguish four strong relativistic versions. The first, and least extreme, I call 'limited possible-strong truth relativism'. Put briefly, it states that some *p* is such that it is possible for it to have different truth values relative to different possible frameworks. The second, I call 'limited actual-strong truth relativism' and it states that some *p* is such that it actually varies in truth value across different actual frameworks. The third, I call 'global possible-strong truth relativism'; it states that every *p* is such that it is possible for it to have different truth values relative to different possible frameworks. The last, I call 'global actual-strong truth relativism'; it states that every *p* is such that it actually varies in truth value across different actual frameworks.

As my concern is with global truth relativism, and as the coherence theory seems so promising as a host for relativism, I will investigate only the last two versions. The point about a global thesis is that there are no exceptions, that all propositions are to be like that. The limited views are less global and are theses that some propositions are like that.⁹ Mention has been made of propositions/propositional-frameworks as truth vehicles/truth makers, but beliefs and frameworks of beliefs are more common modern coherence theoretical candidates. Further, as a version of the latter, belief

⁹ See my 1988, p.55 and the work by Newton-Smith there alluded to.

focused or doxastic version, one could also have unbelieved propositions as truth vehicles. These considerations yield a considerable array of coherence truth relativistic theses and a brief taxonomy follows.

The first of these theses, one closely linked to the use of truth relativism as an objectionable consequence in terms of which to criticise traditional coherence truth theories, I will call 'global strong propositional coherence truth relativism' or for ease of reference, '**propositional relativism**'. For ease of comparison, let me list its features.

Truth Vehicle :-	proposition ("in the abstract")
Truth Maker :-	coherent set of propositions
Relationship of truth vehicle and truth maker :-	coherence
Strong :-	same proposition true relative to one propositional set and false relative to another
Global :-	every proposition strongly relativistic

Note that the propositions "in the abstract" which are acting as both bearers and makers of truth values do not need to be expressed, or believed. Thus the possible/actual dichotomy is collapsed. For instance, there might be some scenario involving various billiard balls which has never been explicitly conceived of, yet the proposition expressing it is true relative to Newtonian mechanics. Or some proposition might be true relative to some as yet unthought of theory, as the proposition that blood moves from arteries to veins would be true in 600BC relative to Harvey's biology although the latter was not then conceived of. It should also be noted that what governs the individuation of propositions and what constitutes their coherence relations with other propositions is, as yet, obscure.

Second, most modern coherence theories (though usually of knowledge, not truth) focus more on beliefs than on propositions. In the purest form of such a doxastic coherence theory, truth vehicles and truth makers alike are actual beliefs. Such a view ('global strong actual belief coherence truth relativism' or '**actual-strong belief relativism**', for short) has the following features.

- Truth Vehicle :- actual belief
- Truth Maker :- coherent set of actual beliefs
- Relationship of truth vehicle
and truth maker :- coherence
- Actual-Strong :- same actual belief true relative to one actual belief set
 and false relative to another
- Global :- every belief actual-strongly relativistic

A merit of this version, for a relativist, is that it preserves some of the anthropocentric spirit of relativism. As will emerge when it is developed below, truth making seems bound up with the act of belief on this view and that makes humans creators of truths as truths. As will also emerge however, it is not a satisfactory version; it is simply implausible that, for every belief, there will be two actually believed belief sets, one to act as truth maker and the other as falsity maker. But perhaps that is an overstated way of putting relativism anyway. Would it not satisfy relativistic intuitions if the thesis was more subjunctive, even counterfactual, in its talk of belief sets as truth makers, that is, if the thesis involved possible belief sets? There are two ways of doing this. One is to have propositional sets that are but "possibly believed" constituting truth makers in their own right. I argue that this is tantamount to merely having them as propositional sets "in the abstract" and thus reverts to our first version, propositional relativism.¹⁰

¹⁰ Actually, this is not quite so for only the truth maker, but not the truth vehicle, is thereby a propositional set. Such detail is beyond my purposes with this initial "scene setting" taxonomy however.

The second possibility deserves separate listing. On it, truth makers remain as actual belief sets and thus some proposition p might be true relative to some W and not false relative to anything because no appropriate propositional set, P_c , say, is actually believed. But despite this, were some cognitive community to believe P_c then p would be false relative to W^* (as P_c would be transformed into). Though p is only relatively true, it is possible for it to be, also, relatively false. This form of relativism might have some propositions actually both true relative to one set of actual beliefs and false relative to another, but that would be a bonus. Its real strength as a thesis would be to note the power of cognitive communities' collective and coherent belief sets in truth making. That a given p does not happen to be relatively false but only true, would not matter, for all such truths would be open to the possibility of relative falsehood where cognitive communities' coherent assenting histories are different. So, we can tabulate this view, (call it 'global strong possible belief coherence truth relativism' or '**possible-strong belief relativism**' for short) as follows:

Truth Vehicle :-	actual belief
Truth Maker :-	coherent set of actual beliefs
Relationship of truth vehicle	
and truth maker :-	coherence
Possible-strong :-	possibly, the same actual belief true relative to one actual belief set and false relative to another
Global :-	every belief possible-strongly relativistic.

EXAMINATION OF THESE VERSIONS

With this brief taxonomy in place, the examination of these versions can now proceed. The three candidates, propositional relativism, actual-strong and possible-strong belief relativism, can be trimmed to two for further scrutiny. To show this, let me begin with propositional relativism.

Propositional Relativism

For global strong propositional truth relativism to be possible each proposition¹¹ that was true, being coherent with one W , would also have to be false, in not being coherent with some other W^* .¹² As a strong thesis, it has to be the same proposition in each case and this requires discussion of the inter-relationships of the propositional sets governing the proposition's meaning/propositional identity and those governing the truth values of the proposition.

As strong relativism demands that the same proposition be true relative to W and false relative to W^* ,¹³ what is to constitute its propositional identity? Given the semantically non-realist nature of the theories under consideration, appeal to common realist construals of reference/extension etc. of two propositions as determining propositional identity is not available. Presumably, the answer here will be that propositional identity is determined by truth conditions. In the absence of some mind-independent reality or its absence in role as truth maker, these truth conditions will be constituted by the proposition's relations with other propositions. Thus the propositional identity of p_1 and p_2 would be set by their identical location in such a web of relationships. So, a proposition p , will have its propositional identity, its truth conditions, set by means of its relationships to some set of propositions P . What are the propositional identity determining truth condition relationships of p and P ? The most usual forms of modern coherence theory accounts of propositional identity appeal to the notion of warrant. To understand a proposition¹⁴ is to understand the conditions under which one would be warranted in asserting it. Now although this is sometimes advanced as a replacement for truth (that one should abandon talk of truth and substitute for it talk of warranted assertability) that will not be the stance here. My

¹¹ These are propositions "in the abstract" remember, thus the actual/possible distinction collapses.

¹² Or, perhaps, false in virtue of coherence with some other web that is incompatible with the first. Or false in that a contrary of the proposition was coherent with some such other web. These variations are beyond present purposes and will be distinguished below only as the discussion at hand demands that they be so.

¹³ See 8, above, again.

¹⁴ Or to understand the proposition expressed by a sentence; again, such fine nuances are irrelevant to present purposes.

interest is in explicating a viable coherence truth relativism, and thus not in abandoning the notion of truth. Rather, then, I construe warrantedness as an explicatory analysis of truth. So, the web of relationships establishing truth conditions for p is understood in terms of warrant. P is understood as the set of propositions which, if they are warrantably assertible, (and thereby true) make p warrantably assertible (and thereby true) and this relationship of p and P determines p 's propositional identity.¹⁵

What, then, of truth value? For p to be true is just for it to be warranted, that is, for the members of the warranting conditions set of propositions, P , to be appropriately¹⁶ true. Coherence truth relativism has truth relative to some set of propositions W ; on the warranting conditions version of coherence truth, it seems that W would be the same set as P . What, then, would be the W^* , the set by reference to which p is false? Recall that it is strong coherence truth relativism under current investigation. Presumably it is a set appropriately contrary to W and presumably p 's falsehood might be by the negation of p cohering with such a set.

So far, strong coherence truth relativism looks promising. A set P provides the sense of p by constituting its warrant or truth conditions. And the p thus identified might be true relative to W , where the members of P are warranted or false relative to W^* , where the contraries of P are warranted. But this is not yet an interestingly strong form of relativism. For that, one has to have p not just true relative to W or false relative to W^* , but true and false respectively.

Is this possible? Moreover, is this possible across the board, as a thesis of global coherence truth relativism? On the face of it,¹⁷ the answer is clearly 'yes'. Indeed, so clearly 'yes' that those inclined to seriously consider a coherence analysis of truth have sought to avoid this seeming entailment of relativism by propositional coherence truth

¹⁵ We will have cause to revisit and clarify these matters below, but this is clear enough for present purposes.

¹⁶ I say 'appropriately' rather than just an unqualified 'be true' to cover cases where one may have, for example, disjunctive warranting conditions.

¹⁷ As we will see, things are not quite what they seem, however.

theories (see Walker, 1989, p. 28). Walker notes "that (on any plausible understanding of 'coherence') virtually any proposition can be fitted into some coherent set". (1989, p. 3) Bertrand Russell raised such an objection against coherence theories using a proposition involving Bishop Stubbs and I henceforth allude to the objection as the "Bishop Stubbs" objection. That it is deemed an objection reflects the view that truth, if seen as some sort of cognitive virtue, should not be so easily come by that any and every proposition is true including both p and its negation. How much notice should be taken of such a worry when relative truth is under discussion is a matter revisited below. Certainly, if relativism is so readily attainable within propositional coherence truth then the latter is worth further examination. What, then, of doxastic relativism?

Doxastic Relativism

Walker remarks that the "Bishop Stubbs" objection misconceives its target for 'no coherence theorist would ever be tempted to think that the coherence relation held simply among propositions in the abstract, regardless of whether anyone believed them or ever would believe them ... Instead ... truth consists in coherence with a set of beliefs ...'. (1989, pp. 3-4) In any event, it was noted above that modern coherence theories are predominantly doxastic so the two doxastic relativistic theses are worth investigation despite Walker's hopes that, by embracing a doxastic coherence theory, the relativistic consequences of propositional coherentism claimed¹⁸ in the "Bishop Stubbs" objection can be avoided.

For anti-relativist coherence theorists, the best chance of avoiding an unbounded flood of truths is to insist that the truth making set be actual beliefs of actual cognitive agents. Appeal to merely possibly believed sets as truth makers constitutes no narrowing of the set of truth making sets from propositional coherentism. Were a propositional set to have the falsity making status of a W^* in virtue of being something

¹⁸ I say 'claimed' because, as will emerge below, substituting doxastic for propositional relativism is a failed manoeuvre in this context.

it is possible for some community to believe, then p would be false relative to that W^* . Possible-to-believe sets of propositions are as capable of yielding the radical nature of global strong truth relativism as propositional relativism. Indeed, there is no significant difference between the two proposals unless one envisages the truth making propositional sets of propositional relativism as including some that are impossible to believe. Accordingly, the option of having possible-to-believe sets of propositions as truth makers as a separate option to that of having sets of propositions in the abstract will not be considered. That these views can be conflated and that having possible-belief sets as truth makers is just as likely to yield relativism as propositional coherentism is, of course, nothing objectionable in the context of this work. However, one hope is that relativism will prove craftable within doxastic coherentism at its most defensible and presumably the problem is that the major doxastic coherence theories tend to limit what counts as a legitimate truth maker to a set smaller than the actually believed, not larger. Good as this attempted curtailing of truth makers might seem for avoiding the charge of relativism, it is one of the tasks here to see if something of the relativistic enterprise is nonetheless salvageable, to see if the objection resists coherentists' efforts to dismiss it.

Actual-strong Belief Relativism.

What is not defensible from the alternatives listed so far, and can be dismissed immediately, is the thesis of actual-strong belief relativism. It is simply too implausible to suggest that, for every belief, there is, or was, or will be, both an actually believed truth making belief set and an actually believed falsity making set. This view falls foul of the 'globalness' requirement. Global actual-strong truth relativism must thus be rejected in its doxastic form.¹⁹ Only the two global forms of strong relativism are being investigated but it is worth noting that limited actual-strong truth relativism is still viable. It is quite plausible that there are, have been, or will be, contrary, but suitably coherent, sets of actual beliefs. Thus if doxastic coherentists are

¹⁹ Which is its only distinctive form, in a sense, given the collapse of the actual/possible distinction for propositions "in the abstract".

disturbed by even this limited strong relativism some further truth maker restraints will be in order beyond 'coherent' and 'believed by a cognitive community'. Walker rises to the challenge by remarking that it is not just any belief system, any more than any old set of propositions in the abstract, that can serve as truth maker. 'Truth consists in coherence not just with any system of beliefs but with a certain specific one, and anything else, any alternative system however neat and self-contained simply is not truth' (1989, p. 28). Other coherentists more tolerant of relativistic consequences than Walker might have a more pluralistic specification of truth making sets and speak of a system of beliefs (e.g. Young, 1989, pp. 503-505 and 1990, pp. 373-374) but for Walker it is the system. As for specifying what is the system, 'The challenge to coherentists is to specify the system with which true sentences cohere ... without compromising²⁰ their position' (Young, 1991, p. 478 - my emphasis).

Now it might well be that something can be done by way of preferring just one²¹ belief set as the truth maker (via coherence) of its constituent, or of appropriately related, beliefs and/or propositions.²² However, the extent that such uniqueness of coherence truth maker could be achieved would be the extent to which a coherence theory of truth was a poor host for truth relativism. Accordingly, as coherence relativism is the goal here and not an objection to be avoided, I return to explication of coherence relativism.

Possible-strong Belief Relativism

Although actual-strong relativism is unsustainable as a form of doxastic global relativism, possible-strong relativism is not open to such swift dismissal. On this view, there is no guarantee that any proposition/belief will not, as it happens, be just

²⁰ The point about avoiding compromising coherentism is that one can't, say, prefer a system to others by appeal to its relationship (of correspondence?) with the world.

²¹ Perhaps only that set (assuming, *pace* Quine-Duhem, that it is only one) which is endorsed in 'epistemically ideal conditions' (Putnam, 1981b, p.55) or, Peirce-style, at the end of inquiry (1931-1958, e.g. Vol. 3, p.432).

²² The distinction is simply to recognise that while the truth maker may be a belief set, the truth vehicle may not be; the point will be revisited below.

relatively false because, as it happens, no potentially truth making set of propositions is actually believed by a cognitive community and thus it is not true relative to any belief set. Given its lesser demands on the cognitive activity of communities of believers, possible-strong relativism is at least not ruled out immediately. It is less radical than propositional relativism in that it is not global and actual-strong, not every proposition or belief will be both true and false relative to contrary propositional sets. It does, however, remain faithful to the relativistic thesis that truth is the product, not the object of the activity of cognitive agents. The truth making of a truth will be artefactual. And, although a given p might only manage to be relatively false it is always potentially true as well, that additional status dependent merely on how various cognitive communities' beliefs emerge.

SUMMARY

Two varieties of global strong coherence truth relativism are promising enough to merit further examination. One promises actual-strong relativism, the most radical sort, and employs sets of propositions in the abstract as truth makers. The other, using sets of actual beliefs as truth makers, can but promise possible-strong relativism. The first sits better with the mathematical constructivist connections of classical coherence theories; the latter with the sceptical rejection of semantic attachment to reality itself that runs through much quasi-coherentist modern writing from Wittgenstein through Quine and beyond. Young is the writer most concerned to pursue theses of this latter sort as a global account of truth and meaning and least concerned to attempt avoidance of relativistic consequences of global coherentism; thus Chapter Nine will focus on his work. First, however, propositional relativism will be considered further.

CHAPTER EIGHT

PROPOSITIONAL RELATIVISM

INTRODUCTION:

What has just emerged are two theses which warranted further development in explication of global strong truth relativism. One is propositional relativism. The other is possible-strong belief relativism. I will develop these theses further in reflection of more modern and sophisticated versions of the coherence theory and subject them to further critical scrutiny. Let me begin with propositional relativism.

ELABORATION

The key notion in the attempts at explicating the notion of coherence was that of warranting, or justifying. Staying with the language of propositions and sets of them as truth vehicles and makers respectively, this translates as follows. A given proposition is true if it coheres with a system of true propositions W and for it to cohere with W is for W to warrant or justify p . But for W to do any truth making it must itself be true or warranted.

At this point, a difficulty arises. I will first consider the case where one could appeal to some further set of propositions, W^a say, such that W^a , if warranted, would warrant W . The image here is one in which '... justification is passed ...'¹ from, in this case, W^a to W and thence to p . But looming immediately are coherentism's '... three lethal enemies ...'² a vicious infinite regress, a vicious circle, or foundationalism. Either W^a appeals to some further set of propositions, from which it gets its own warrant and so on endlessly to further new propositional sets; or such a chain of justification turns back on itself such that p is appealed to to warrant some W^n

¹ The phrase is from Laurence Bonjour. (1985, p.90)

² The phrase is John Bender's. (1989, p.8)

which was itself (indirectly) appealed to in warranting p ; or some W^n is granted the status of true/warranted in virtue of something other than its relations to other propositions. As none of these options is consistent with pure, or global, coherentism, it is worth looking for some other explication of coherentism to advance global truth relativism.

Bender offers a solution. He distinguishes '..."relational" and "systemic" notions of coherence ...' (1989, p. 2). The primary one of these two notions is that of systemic coherence. A system qualifies as appropriately coherent in virtue of such things as being logically consistent, having a high degree of probabilistic consistency, having a significant number of relatively strong inferential connections among its members and being relatively unified, that is, not dividing into relatively unconnected sub-systems³. The details of the characterisation of systemic coherence are the subject of debate⁴ but, for the most part, the details that are discussed by those with an interest in the Coherence Theory of Knowledge in its own right are complexities that can be ignored given our focus on truth relativism. In large part, arguments concerning the latter are unchanged by variations in the details of epistemic coherentism's various construals of coherence. Some detail had to be considered to avoid the difficulties arising with linear justification transference conceptions of the coherence relation of p and W .

Let me allow for the moment that something can be satisfactorily achieved in explication of the notion of the coherence of a system as a whole in terms of various internal features it possesses. What of the relational notion of coherence? What is the

³ This list is derived from Bender's page 5. As he explains in his end-note 2 (page 14) his list is, in turn, extracted from various parts of Bonjour's 1985. Bonjour is however not faithfully represented in at least two respects, as they contrast with the type of relativistic thesis under explication here. One is the so-called observation requirement (that they system must contain laws attributing a high degree of reliability to a reasonable variety of cognitively spontaneous beliefs, including introspective beliefs - Bender, p.5). I excise it as going beyond the currently examined inward looking anti-realist coherence framework. Bender quotes Bonjour's remark that '[c]oherence is not the sole basis for justification' (Bonjour, 1985, p.148). The other point of departure is that Bonjour is discussing systems of beliefs whereas my vehicle for development, is, for the moment, propositions "in the abstract".

⁴ As we shall see below, however, certain second-level, or meta, propositions concerning the system's coherence relations will prove to be both inescapable and awkward. Much of the coherence theory literature focuses attention on such meta-levels although usually with knowledge and belief rather than truth and propositions as the focus of theoretical concern. (See, for instance, Keith Lehrer, 1988).

coherence relation of p to W ? The answer is: system membership. This of course leaves it obscure just what qualifies a proposition for membership but those details do not matter for now. The significant notion is that the primary epistemic (and thus, in the present context, semantic) unit is the set and the justification of individual propositions is in virtue of one-to-whole relation of set membership. Indeed, as Timothy Day points out (1989, pp. 137-140; with Bonjour's endorsement, 1989, p. 292) one could grant set membership to some proposition in virtue of a linear relation by having some members of W (q and r , say) entail p . One does not have to eschew linear inference relations (and speak instead of holistic relations) at this level in order to avoid embarrassing justification chains or circles. The key is that although q and r entail p it is not as if q and r are warranted and, of themselves, transmit warrant to p by entailment. Rather, q and r are members of the justified set W and derive their justification from that membership. Their entailing of p gives p its set membership but not, directly, its justification. Rather, its justification just like that of q and r , is derivative upon membership of the set W , a set which has the power of having its members justified in virtue of its internal relationships of coherence among its members.

Let me review things so far. Although belief based coherence theories dominate the field, these were seen as unsuitable for the explication of global actual-strong coherence truth relativism. Accordingly, I have, for this chapter, reverted to the more traditional coherence theory stance of considering propositions as truth vehicles and sets of them as truth makers. In explication of the notion of coherence, I have followed modern thinking in construing it as epistemic, as in some way to do with justification or warrant. And to avoid the vicious chains of justification that seem inescapable with a linear "justification transference" conception of warranting coherence, I draw upon some ideas of Bender and Day to suggest that a quasi-Bonjourian construal of systemic coherence with a separate conception of set membership seems a more promising coherence construal of justification (and thus, of truth) within which to pursue relativism.

This shift has some implications for the way to state global strong coherence truth relativism. First, the concept of propositional coherence truth relativism (C.P.Coh.T.R.) emerges:

C.P.Coh.T.R.: For a proposition, p , to be true relative to some truth making (coherent) web, W , is for it to be a member of W ; and for it to be false relative to W^* , is for (one of) its contrary(ies) pc , to be a member of W^* .

Employing this, the thesis of global actual-strong propositional coherence truth relativism (Th.G.A-S.P.Coh.T.R.) is as follows:

Th.G.A-S.P.Coh.T.R.: Each proposition is such that it is true-relative-to some truth making (coherent) web and false-relative-to some other truth making (coherent) web.

As for understanding what constitutes a proposition p as p , this can remain much as before; p is to be understood in terms of its place in the web of propositions, W , the web whose internal coherence relations constitute the web's truth and, derivatively and relative to it, that of its member propositions. This is not quite the picture of the last chapter and for the purposes of the strong relativist it is crucial that it is the same proposition that is true and false relative to two different (coherent) propositional webs. The way that I have framed C.P.Coh.T.R., above, does not guarantee this, for it has the falsity of p relative to some web W^* as not a matter of the relation of p to W^* but of pc , a contrary of p , to W^* . Does this matter? - The answer is not clearcut. The move is a device to get around an awkwardness which has crept in with the reversion to propositions as meaning/truth vehicles and makers. With beliefs, one could have a set of warranting conditions, P , as meaning maker, setting the propositional identity of p , and then have the propositions of P (and thus p) either endorsed (or believed) or not. Thus the endorsed P became a truth making W in virtue of the extra step of that

endorsement; and if P was denied or disbelieved, then p was false relative to the believed set comprised of the negation of the propositions of P . In effect, P governed the common meaning of p in each of the two communities and then was true relative to one community's belief in P (W) and false relative to another community's belief in some contrary of P , P_C (W^*). The falsity making set consisted of some negation of P (as believed by some community) while the meaning making set was P . The warrant, (and thus truth/falsity) was added by a community's epistemic *fiat*.

The present proposal is different. It is the same relation of coherence that governs both propositional identity/meaning and justification/truth. It is in virtue of p being a member of P that it is p ; and, with no extra ingredient, that membership constitutes its truth as well; in short, $W = P$. But then, on this model, p_C will get its meaning from its membership of P_C . So, if talk of p being false (relative to W^*) is just talk of p_C being true (relative to W^*) has the univocality of p across our two web relationships been preserved?

In the doxastic version introduced last chapter it did not much matter for strong relativism's insistence on p 's univocality whether one spoke of p 's falsehood relative to some other set as being a matter of p 's failure in coherence with that some other belief set or p_C 's coherence with that other set. To see this, consider the following. First, I had p true in case that P , its warranting set, was warranted/accepted. Presumably for it to be false would be for that set to be unwarranted/rejected. That is,⁵ for some contrary of P , call it P_C to be warranted. Thus the warrantedness/acceptance of P_C constitutes p 's falsity. And that is exactly what is the case with the possibility of p being false via p_C being a member of some set which provides its warranting conditions and which is warranted. That set would be P_C and thus it would be the warrantedness of P_C (W^*) which would be the falsity maker for p . But, talk of the warrantedness of actual belief sets was not a promising path for the global

⁵ It is simpler to assume bivalence for the sake of expository brevity. More elaborate articulation of the point using a third value in the manner of semantic anti-realists such as Dummett, would simply complicate matters without affecting the main points at hand.

actual-strong truth relativist to pursue. Yet if propositions are the truth vehicles and sets of them are meaning makers and truth makers, then things become more difficult when it comes to falsehood.

A Problem for Strong Relativism

If p 's truth (and meaning) is a matter of its membership of W/P then it looks as if one could construe p 's falsity as either a matter of p not being a member of some other suitable set or of p_c being a member of some other set. The inclination is to say that the former is to be explicated as p failing to be a member of P_c ⁶ and the latter as p_c being a member of P_c and deeming these accounts to be two sides of the same coin. Is this viable? Let me look at the former, first. There are presumably a number of propositional sets which p may merely fail to be a member of but the danger for their employment in explication of strong truth relativism is that these might be not so much sources of p 's falsity as simply irrelevant to p . Hence our second version, with its talk of contraries of p . Any set that is a falsity maker for p has to connect to p somehow and one way that seems available for this to occur is for such a set, P_c , to contain p_c , a contrary of p . This might be thought to be too swift a move away from the direct use of p in our analysis. One might advance a relationship between p and some falsity making set W^* which is not just p lacking coherence with W^* but it being "actively" incoherent with W^* . That is, as opposed to p being just neutrally independent of some propositional set, have p as contrary to it. This, however, invites a demand for explication of the relationship of contrariety between p and W^* . The usual construal of the contrariety of x and y is that, *qua* contraries, both cannot be true. And, the understanding of that in this relativistic context is presumably that one cannot have x and y both true-relative-to the same W . And, as that sort of talk has been explicated above, it emerges that one cannot have x and y as members of the one

⁶ It would not be much use having p fail to cohere with some totally different web, say, Q , either another language/propositional system, were holism to be assumed, or another fragment than P of the same web. The relation in such cases would seem to be that of p 's independence of Q , of the irrelevance of Q to the issue of p 's truth or falsity, not of Q somehow being a falsity maker for p . I will return to this point below.

coherent propositional set. But that sort of talk is inclusive of what one might, pre-analytically, think of as "active" incoherence and mere "passive" non-coherence. Yet it is just the former I seek to analyse. If x is the p , and y is some putative falsity making set (for p) W^* then what one wants is that the addition of p to W^* would create an internally inconsistent set, that something proposing what p was proposing (something meshed coherently in with P) would produce incoherence when added to W^* . Recall that coherence has been explicated earlier along quasi-Bonjourian lines in terms of various (mainly) inferential links. Moreover, set membership might be earned by a proposition being entailed by some others in the set. Let me stick with this simplified picture for now so that the path forward is not obscured by a clutter of expository detail. If p 's set membership of P (p , q and r) is a matter of p 's entailment by q and r , then lack of such entailments by other propositional sets mean its non-membership of them. And for some stronger clash there would have to be a stronger relationship than mere non-entailment of p by, say, q^* and r^* . Yet, that (q^* and r^*) and p are contrary seems difficult to explicate in a way that goes beyond mere non-membership. Furthermore, having (q^* and r^*) entail pc (and thus having pc share membership of some set, W^* , with q^* and r^*) still leaves the initial problem - that it is not so much p 's relationship with some W^* , but pc 's relationship, that is appealed to in explicating ' p is false-relative-to W^* '. Let me return to the notion of coherence in an attempt at further explicating p 's clash with W^* .

One of Bonjour's elements of the relationship of coherence was that a coherent set is unified in the sense of not dividing into inferentially unconnected sub-systems. Adding a p that was merely "independent of" some propositional set (W^n) would thus bar⁷ it from being a coherent resultant set in virtue of this "unity" criterion. Put another way, if W^n is to be coherent it cannot have p as a member. But p could fail to cohere in other ways and the most important criterion on Bonjour's list for present purposes is 'consistency'. So, why not have ' p is false-relative-to W^* ' explicated as 'the conjunction of p and W^* is inconsistent'? On the face of it, there is no reason.

⁷ I overstate matters here; 'coherence' seems more to be construed as a matter of degree than an "on/off" matter of precision.

The resulting picture is a little odd though. $P=W$ so p is given both its meaning and its truth in virtue of its membership of P/W . When it comes to falsity though, p , with meaning set by P , is made false in virtue of its inconsistency with W^* . Now, were that inconsistency to be in virtue of the presence of pc , a contrary of p , in W^* then pc would presumably have its sense set by membership of P^*/W^* and be true in virtue of that and be false relative to W in virtue of not just failing to cohere with it but through being inconsistent with it in virtue of p and pc being contraries. So despite p and pc being contraries they have their sense determined by different propositional sets (P and P^* , respectively). How, despite this, can they stand in the logical relation of contrariety?

Let me come at this from a different angle. In discussing relativising webs in Section One, I observed that presumably the ' p ' in ' p ' and 'not p ' meant the same. Without that minimal semantic condition, one cannot make sense of the inferential apparatus appealed to in explication of 'coherent' as a feature of a propositional set. Yet what seems to emerge above is that p and pc have their sense determined by their places in P and P^* respectively. Now either 'not p ' = ' pc '⁸ or it does not. If it is identical, then as the p of the former is sense-set by P , just what is happening within P^* when 'not p ' is substituted for ' pc '? If it is not identical, then how do p and pc manage to sense-connect enough to be contraries? I will touch on these matters again but, for now, note inter-set comparisons/relationships are a major difficulty for strong propositional coherence relativism.

The problem exists at the set-to-set level as well. If p 's propositional identity is just a function of its place in P , and what pc is is similarly set in relation to P^* , then, given this relata-determining intimacy of relationships and relata propositions, for pc to be a contrary of p is presumably a matter of P^* being a web of relationships that is

⁸ I realise that I am fudging various types of denial of p together here but it doesn't affect the point at hand to fuss about the distinction between a contradictory and a contrary and so forth, so I shall, for expository ease's sake, let the conflation stand.

somehow contrary to P . Call such a contrary web P_c . But what is it for two relationship patterns⁹ to be contraries? The issue will be considered again in the next chapter but, for now, note that it is an unanswered and problematic question for strong propositional relativism's chances of viability.

Indeed, the problem is more widespread than the focus on contrariety suggests.

Although the issue of logical relations has been made salient with contrariety, what if I began with, say, entailment? So far, p 's relative falsehood has been the concern but the above worries could be paralleled with entailment. How is entailment normally understood? - as a truth preserving relationship. So, what would it be for $(q$ and $r)$ to entail p ? - for p to be true if $(q$ and $r)$ is/are and what is it for $(q$ and $r)$ to be true? - for it/them to be true-relative-to some set W . And what is it for it/them to be true-relative-to W ? - for it/them to cohere with W , which is for it/them to be a-member/members of W . But 'being a member of' was explicated in terms of 'entailment'; so, full circle; but not necessarily fatally.

Such intentional circles are not themselves worrying and it is true that the entailment talk that p 's relative truth was explicated in terms of is no less part of such a circling network of notions than the contrariety talk that p 's relative falseness rests on. There is one difference, however, in the type of circling going on. For either there is the peculiar result that p is false-relative-to any set of which it is not a member or, in subdivision of that, that p is not just not a member of W^* but is in some sense contrary to it. And the only sense that I could make of the latter was to have some contrary of p , p_c , as a member of W^* . That the circle of concepts involved in the analysis of p 's falsity seemed to have to appeal to p_c 's truth proves a difficulty. However, it is not my current concern to pursue this issue further as a topic in its own right. Let me allow that this propositional web interpretation of global actual-strong coherence truth relativism does have a coherent account of cross web contrariety. Even so, how does it fare?

⁹ For that is all the sets are.

A new difficulty arising from this account is that any understandable proposition will be, *ipso facto*, true and, in virtue of the understandability of a contrary to it, false. Perhaps this automaticity of propositional truth and falsity is of no concern for a global strong relativist. It might be an unavoidable feature of global strong coherence truth relativism but it is startling. An attraction of a coherence theory for a relativist¹⁰ is its chances of permitting a viable strong truth relativism. It is worth reconsidering whether some variation is possible that does not offer such an almost reductionist or redundancy account of truth and falsity.¹¹

The standard assumption among modern coherence theorists,¹² that beliefs should be truth vehicles and truth makers, has to be dropped if one wishes to have a radical actual-strong global form of relativism about truth. Yet the move by possible-strong belief relativism to counter-factuality (with subjunctive talk of some proposition *p* being such that, were the web with which it cohered to be believed, then the belief that *p* would be true) faced one of two alternatives. On the one hand, it would be not be totally global actual-strong relativism if *p* is false relative to some actual belief set but only potentially true relative to some other set of not ever actually believed propositions. Yet if a merely possible-belief set counts as a fully fledged truthmaker, then this is tantamount to having sets of propositions "in the abstract" as truth makers. And this latter option sees truth become a seemingly gratuitous semantic category. To be relatively true (and false) was automatic in virtue of being a proposition at all. In the correspondence theory section, there was an extra truth making element - the world. And in the doxastic version of coherentism also, there was an extra element, the cognitive agency of believers. In propositional relativism, however, truth is an affair entirely internal to propositions and their inter-relationships.

¹⁰ Recall that it is no part of this thesis' task to attempt to adjudicate among analytical theories of truth except in terms of their aptness as hosts for truth relativism.

¹¹ A proposition's truth being no more than the proposition's "propositionhood" (and similarly for falsity.).

¹² Of knowledge, admittedly, as coherence truth theorists are rare.

Part of this problem with propositional coherence truth relativism arises because p was understood, or had its propositional identity determined, by membership of P and the coherence relationships appealed to here were also what constituted P 's and p 's truth. It is this double duty for the coherence that leads to the above redundancy fears concerning truth values. Can separation be effected? And, if not, is it such a bad thing to collapse truth and meaning in this way?

Recall that the sets P and W were judged identical as a result of the following reasoning. I initially had P as the set of warranting-*cum*-truth conditions and then would have p true in case P was true (in case $P = W$). But despite that identity of propositional membership there was an extra, non-propositional, ingredient for P to become W , this was that the propositional set was warranted/true. Which led to the question: 'What warrants W ?'. On pain of some sort of vicious series, I rejected a linear model whereby warrant was passed to W by means of its relationships (e.g., "being entailed by") to some further set about which the same concerns would arise. What replaced it was a view in which p 's warrant was gained by set membership of a coherent web W . What was kept was the use of that set as both governing the propositional identity of p and, by itself, providing its warrant. Can this nexus be broken and the web determining the former not be the same as that determining the latter? Were this to be possible, then at least the redundancy concerns about the earlier versions of propositional relativism would be avoided. To break it is to abandon the semantic holism which has been assumed in this section. And, if such semantic holism is rejected¹³ and some sort of meaning web/truth web distinction explicated, then the same proposition and its sense-determining set of propositions might be able to appropriately relate to both the falsity making propositional set and to the truth making one. What would count as the appropriate relationship would parallel earlier discussion of p being true-relative-to W and false-relative-to W^* . And that would ease the concerns about the coherence of cross web contrariety raised earlier.

¹³ Which, despite holism's popularity, is not ridiculous, see Fodor and Lepore, 1992, pp.22-35; but defending or attacking the legitimacy of holism is no part of my present task.

In short, the price of non-redundant propositional relativism is that it abandon whole-web semantic holism. Meaning making would be the job of one set of propositions and truth making and falsity making those of further ones. Though I see no way for (non-redundant truth) propositional relativism to avoid this, it is a high price, for these demands are not ones that any semantic theory that I am aware of manages to satisfy. For propositional identity would have to be neither a matter of truth conditions nor of assertability/warrantability conditions (either, as we have construed them, as an analysis of truth-conditions, or as replacement semantic notions). Nor, given the absence of any semantic role for the world, is it possible to appeal to any of the causal/historical reference based notions of propositional identity.¹⁴

It might be thought that too much is made of the difficulties here. Why cannot *p*'s sense be given by a set of warranting conditions and its truth by those conditions actually being warranted? So, as a simplified illustration, the sense of *p* might be given by its relationship to *q* such that *q* coheres with *p*; '*q* coheres with *p*' would be *p*'s meaning maker and *p* would be true in case *q* was. *P* would thus be '*q* coheres with *p*' and *W* would be *q*.

Attractive as this seems, it is flawed. Focus upon *q*. What governs *q*'s sense? Presumably, appeal might be made to something like '*r* coheres with *q*' but that way lies the "regress, circle, or foundations" objection that I sought earlier to avoid. So, the story becomes one of set membership; *q* has its sense set by membership of some coherent set *Q*. Now, is *Q* identical with *P* or not? If it is, if each of *p* and *q* have their sense set by their membership of the same set, then what extra has to occur for *p* to be true? What *P* effects is that *p* is true if *q* is and its role in that relationship is all that there is to *p* being the proposition it is. On this alternative, the truth/warrantability conditions of *q* are also given by its membership of *P*. *P* presumably is to effect that *q* is true if *p* is. We learn that *p* and *q* "stand or fall" together and, in the absence of a further set or some extra (doxastic) truth making ingredient, what could make them

¹⁴ As made familiar by Kripke (1971 and 1972) and Putnam (1975b).

"stand" (not "fall") apart from their mutual coherence? This seems like a return to truth and sense being determined by the same coherence relations - and this generates the redundancy problem I was attempting to avoid.

If Q differs from P, then, although *q* is in P, it is also in Q and only that latter membership is sense determining for *q*. One could, and would here, have asymmetric coherence relationships such that they only contributed to the sense of one relatum.¹⁵ But whether something of this sort turns out to be possible, it would merely shift the focus to *q*. So *p*'s sense is to be given by P and this makes *p*'s truth depend on *q*'s. The truth of *q*, however, is governed by some other coherence relationships (as given in Q). But that gets us back in the "vicious series" problem again. It also seems odd that one would not conjoin P and Q to get the fuller story of the warrantability conditions of *p*. But if one does that, one loses the separation of P and Q that was sought. I cannot see how the separation attempt would assist the avoidance of a truth/meaning collapse if pursued along these lines. Perhaps the problem is with utilising a too crudely tight nexus of warrantability/truth conditions and the sense of *p*.

Could one distinguish among warrantability conditions such that some are determining of what *p* says and others not? - That is, something along the lines of an analytic/synthetic distinction. So, for instance, say *p* is 'John has cancer'. Now this might have its sense given by *q*, 'John has uncontrolled and abnormal cell growth' such that P would contain some proposition that *p* and *q* cohere. Suppose also that one has a highly reliable cancer detecting meter. Now the truth of the proposition, *r*, that that meter had such and such a reading with John, might warrant/make-true the proposition that John had cancer despite not contributing to its sense. Thus while both *q* and *r* are warranting conditions for *p*, only *q* is analytically tied to it and thus in P; *r* is, however, in W, the set of warranting conditions.

¹⁵ Say '*q* entails *p*' being part of what one understands by *p* but not by *q*.

The difficulty with developing anything of this sort is to have a principled account of the distinction between the sort of warranting condition that earns a place in P and the sort that does not. Within common realist theorising one has a *prima facie* distinction to work on. Those relationships captured in P would be mere logical-*cum*-linguistic relations; the rest of P's propositions, beyond *p*, would all be variations or partial variations of the proposition *p*. The other propositions which, if true, would warrant *p* (the elements of W) do not have that status in virtue of logico/linguistic features alone, but in virtue of the objective laws of nature, that just happen to be the factual connections among various states of affairs. Within an anti-realist coherence host theory however, nothing of this sort can be done. I cannot see how a full blooded anti-realist propositional coherence theory of truth can manage to semantically distinguish sense and truth; the redundancy problem seems unavoidable. Perhaps, though, construing this conflation of sense and truth as a problem is premature.

Ordinarily, one wishes to distinguish a proposition's sense from its truth - at least for synthetic propositions; having determined what is proposed, it is to be an extra matter whether what is proposed is true or false. But this is only because one is assuming something beyond the proposition itself as truth maker. But the anti-realist is proposing a radically un-ordinary account of truth; and intuitions derived from realist assumptions are not automatically appropriate restraints that should be governing the acceptability of anti-realist theories of truth. For that matter, even ordinary thinking about truth and meaning ties the two closely together in the case of analytic truths. Detach the world from any truth-making role and abandon the normal notions of reference, denotation, interpretation and whatnot and one seems left with a denotationless analytic truth. In such a scenario what semantic point is there in distinguishing sense and truth?

Moreover, the target has been global actual-strong propositional relativism. If any proposition at all is true-relative-to some web of propositions and 'true-relative-to' is unpacked in terms of warranting conditions (as above) then how else is one to get

such a guaranteed available relationship of warrant (from some propositions or other) for any and every proposition except by tying such warranting conditions to the understanding of p ? Indeed, never mind the demands of automatic propositional truth (and falsity), for even one p , how is one to have other propositions tied to it in a warranting way except by way of logico/meaning links? In short, the very radical internalism that characterises this sort of anti-realism makes a truth/meaning distinction difficult to draw because it is out of its proper context. Its status as a criterion against which to appraise anti-realist theories is thus hard to sustain.

Accordingly, the conclusion of the examination of strong propositional relativism is that the version least open to objection has both the sense/propositional identity and truth of p set by its membership of a coherent set/web of propositions (P or, identically, W). The major lingering objection is not the redundancy problem but the worry that the notion of trans-web contrariety might not be available. For on this thesis of sense/truth intimacy, the (relative) falsehood of p is as was seen earlier, problematic. The most satisfactory way of having p false relative to some W^* is to have P_c as the W^* and p false-relative-to it in virtue of a contrary of p , p_c , being a member of P_c and true-relative-to it. What remains unsatisfactorily explicated is the relationship of p and p_c . It is not clear that p retains univocality when negated.

Strong propositional relativism's robustness in the face of other standard objections to truth relativism has not yet been examined. These will be considered after I have explicated and critically investigated possible-strong actual belief relativism in the next chapter. I will then assess how each of the candidates fares in the face of such standard concerns as self-refutation.

POSSIBLE-STRONG PROPOSITIONAL RELATIVISM

To date, I have been investigating propositional relativism as a possible home for global actual-strong truth relativism, where every proposition is both true relative to

one propositional set and false relative to another. However, the viability of possible-strong relativism with beliefs as truth vehicles/makers has already been raised; what effect would it have on propositional relativism to move it closer to the less radical possible-strong variation? Earlier, I dismissed the actual-strong/possible-strong distinction, suggesting that the distinction between an actual and a possible proposition was chimerical. However, given the difficulties that actual-strong relativism faces, the matter is worth revisiting.

With possible-strong propositional relativism, a proposition is true relative to one propositional set but, on occasion, not false relative to another set because that other set is non-existent yet it is possible for it to be false were the apt falsity making set to exist. It is problematic just what talk of propositional existence comes down to, but the whole point of the contrast with doxastic relativism is that propositions are non-artefactual, thus they are available for truth-value-making regardless of cognitive agents. Thus it is not clear how one could explicate the concept of a "merely possible" propositional set. If one had a falsity making set P_c for some p , a contrary propositional set to P (the set which is p 's truth-maker), then one would be countenancing a situation where one had propositions existing yet not their contraries. This is hard to reconcile with most usual construals of the ontology of propositions. Moreover, it is obscure what might move a "not yet propositional" set's status from being merely potential to being an actual truth value maker. The obvious answer is that the transition comes with its move from possible to actual propositional set. But what brings that change about? With doxastic coherence there was an extra step - being believed by a cognitive community. The extra step was not one that constituted something as a propositional set but it did constitute it as a doxastic set; and that was what was important for truth value making. That is, the process of transition from potential truth maker to truth maker was clear.¹⁶ The corresponding move from potential proposition to actual proposition is less clear.

¹⁶ Or clearish; as will emerge in the next chapter, things prove more awkward upon close examination.

One could have propositions and sets of them as human constructs. That is, one could, have the actualising done by human beings. A propositional set comes into existence when conceived of by a cognitive community. The contrast with doxastic theories is that to be conceived of is not necessarily to be believed. So, propositions would not be construed as ontologically autonomous of us but as artefactual and would only become truth makers when conceived of by cognitive communities. Truth making power is a creation of cognitive communities. The very conjuring up of a propositional set,¹⁷ even if it is not endorsed, would grant that set the power to make true any proposition coherent with it.

Whatever the detail of such a view might turn out to be, a few features are clear. First, if it is the cognitive communities' propositional conceptions that are to have truth making power then this is a half way position between actual-strong propositional relativism's profligacy in dispensing truth values and the uneven handed parsimony of possible-strong belief relativism's truth valuing. Partly this is because there are less propositional conceptions than propositions in the abstract yet more of the former than of actual belief sets. Moreover, if to have a conception of a proposition is, *ipso facto*, to have a conception of its negation, then, to have a truth making set for some proposition would be to automatically have a falsity making set as well. Unlike the "propositions as abstract entities" view, and like the actual belief view, truth would be manufactured, not pre-existing and awaiting discovery; unlike actual belief relativism, a proposition could not just be relatively true. Any relative truth would be automatically a relative falsehood.

It seems that the view fails as an explication of relativists' intuitions. Propositional coherence theories focus on the propositions and their inter-relationships and defocus the cognitive agent. Truth is there in the relationships among a set of propositions, and is not to be created by cognitive agents. If this is as unappealing as having less abstract or common reality in the role of truth maker and, instead, one had truth as a

¹⁷ Or a set of propositional conceptions or eternal sentences or what not. The fine detail of what this sort of theory might have as truth makers is beside our present point.

cognitively constructive or artefactual affair, then possible-strong actual belief relativism is more attuned to explicating this intuition. On that view, truth is a matter of cognitive commitment; a group makes something true by its commitment to a belief system and it will not be false without a contrary commitment. With such full doxastic relativism, some proposition is not true just by virtue of some group conjuring up a propositional set with which it coheres. Indeed, one might have conjured up a set in order to reject it, yet, on the "conceived of" propositional set as truth maker view, one would be stuck with the proposition's truth relative to the conceived of though denied propositional set, although admittedly false as well, relative to the contrary set. If propositional sets in the abstract or reality in the concrete determine truth values, then such anti-protagorian theses suit the overturning of cognitive communities' commitments. But if one involves such communities to the extent that propositional sets are only truth makers if conceived of, then it is hard to see why one would not go the extra step to doxastic relativism. It is to that view that I turn next.

CHAPTER NINE

POSSIBLE-STRONG ACTUAL BELIEF RELATIVISM

INTRODUCTION:

Of the promising varieties of strong truth-relativism outlined earlier, possible-strong actual belief truth relativism is the most attuned to modern coherentism's doxastic tendencies, and remains to be investigated. The actual-strong thesis examined in the last chapter may be too extreme a relativism. Perhaps a less extreme version of relativism would be welcome provided that enough of the relativistic semantic vision is retained.

With a merely possible-strong relativism, though one would not automatically have actual belief systems of a contrary sort such that any p would be both true by reference to an actually believed W and false by reference to an actually believed W^* , note that for some P , were it to be rejected by some other community, then p would be false relative to that other community's beliefs. Perhaps this would be enough for even the strong relativist, for it doxastically emphasises the anthropocentricity of the making of truth values. And, although some p may not be false relative to any actual belief system, its truth is nonetheless but a matter of its membership of a believed web that is suitably coherent and, importantly for eliminating any trace of absolutism, it remains possible for even such a relatively true belief to be false relative to some other propositional web, even if that possibility is never actualised. And that seems to satisfy even the stronger of two versions of strong truth relativism encountered earlier when discussing Newton-Smith's criticism of relativism.¹ This was the view that: it is impossible for there to be propositions whose truth is invariant from theory to theory.²

¹ See Newton-Smith, 1982 and 1981, p.34.

² See (my) Galle, 1983; though I there spoke of statements.

So, possible-strong actual belief relativism looks worthy of further explication; given its separation of sense making and truth making, it looks like the version of truth relativism most likely to yield the benefit of having a proposition's truth value vary with frameworks with which it is related. The issue is whether this promise is fulfilled as a global thesis about the truth value of all propositions.

THE DEMANDS OF STRONG RELATIVISM

The first focus is on the "strong" aspect of the thesis. If some p is true relative to one framework and false relative to another, then it will have to be the same proposition in each case. Whether that can be so depends on the account of propositional identity employed. In the initial discussion of doxastic relativism, I remarked that the sense of some sentence, the proposition it expressed, would be given by its relationship with some other set P of propositions. The sense giving relationship would be an epistemic construal of coherence. P would be constituted of those propositions which, if true, would warrant/make true the given proposition, p . To avoid vicious epistemic chain arguments, I followed the suggestion that one had to understand this epistemic relationship of P and p as not that of P being warranted/true and transmitting warrantedness/truth (by entailment, say) to p , but rather that p was warranted in virtue of membership of P . That is, p is conceived of as not apart from P but as a member of P and given its meaning by that membership. Thus there is a holistic mutuality of meaning making among the set's members.

This looked promising as the coherence relationships among the propositions within the set P did not, of themselves, make p true;³ the same p could be true and false in virtue of the truth making and falsity making powers of two separate further states of affairs, those of P being endorsed, and of P being denied, by two cognitive communities.⁴

³ Compare the earlier discussion of strong propositional relativism and the difficulties it got into on this matter.

⁴ Or, what amounts to the same sort of thing, two time-slices, of the same, cognitively shifting, community.

Further examination exposes difficulties in this view. Imagine two cognitive communities, A and B, with p being true for A and false for B. The picture is that A's set of beliefs has at least two discrete sub-sets: P, the set of warranting conditions for p which set will include p and W, the truth making set. B, on the other hand, shares P but not W, believing instead a contrary set Wc . P is supposed to constitute the truth conditions of p and to share belief in P is to share an understanding of p .⁵ So, presumably to have that understanding is to believe a meta-proposition⁶ that, say, p is true iff P.⁷ For p to be true is for, say, A, to believe P, that is, for P to be (thereby) true. An extra belief, that P, is added to the meta-propositional beliefs constitutive of P.

So A's belief set is comprised of two components:

- p is true iff P; and
- P.

B's, on the other hand, comprises:

- p is true iff P; and
- not-P (or Pc).

When discussing propositional relativism, I remarked that, on pain of a trivialising redundancy of truth, by a conflation of truth and propositional identity, a meaning holism that has one's entire belief set constitutive of the meaning of any sentence has to be abandoned. The price there of strong relativism was division of one's beliefs into a meaning making set P and a truth making set W.⁸ That sort of distinction was a

⁵ Or, more accurately, of the proposition expressed by some sentence as I take it that "understanding-vehicles" are sentences. Such a distinction is beside the point of present discussion and to ignore it simplifies exposition.

⁶ Cf. my 1993, p.419; although that paper's discussion precedes my persuasion that p and P are properly related by set membership for global relativism's purposes.

⁷ Again, the coherentist story will be more complex than 'iff' portrays and, again, such complexities are beside the present point; the quasi-Bonjourian analysis given in the last chapter would presumably be the sort of direction a more sophisticated construal of "coherence meaning" may go.

⁸ Which will include P, recall.

pre-requisite for the intelligibility of strong propositional relativism. And, it now seems, the same is so of doxastic relativism. If one were to be totally holistic about the determinants of *p*'s propositional identity, then A and B could not share *p* and thus, *a fortiori*, not have *p* true and false respectively.

Sense Holism Revisited: Young's Views

Although I have just suggested that having holism of the sort that has all of a belief set⁹ contributing to the meaning of *p* is fatal to strong relativism, Young, the closest to a relativism-friendly global coherentist about truth and meaning I have found among modern philosophers,¹⁰ disagrees. His view is that:

... global anti-realists ... are committed to ... the view that the meaning of a sentence depends on an entire system of beliefs. This being the case, strictly speaking, every sentence will have a different meaning in the context of different systems. (1995, pp. 138-139)

Young is sanguine that strong relativism's demand that *p* be univocal across two belief systems survives this semantic entailment of his total meaning holism. He goes on to suggest how.

The meaning of any sentence depends most crucially on the theories which immediately warrant it. Consequently, two sentences can have, to all intents and purposes, the same meaning in the context of different systems, so long as the immediate inferential relations in which the sentence stands are the same. (1995, p. 139)

⁹ Actually, Young appeals not to an actual belief set but to a sanitised version, what he calls 'a maximal set' (1995, p.117). I will return to this later in this chapter.

¹⁰ Young remarks of his meaning holism that it 'has been frequently attacked, regularly attributed to other people but seldom, if ever, willingly endorsed. Such anti-realists as Dummett, Neil Tennant and Crispin Wright are unanimous in denouncing the sort of holism to which global anti-realists are committed. It is not quite clear, however, whom they have been criticising, since Quine, the writer most commonly suspected of adherence to the doctrine, anxiously denies any such allegiance'. (1995, p.100).

Young's own illustration of this (p. 139) involves 'the earth revolves around the sun' as an instance of what I have been calling '*p*'. As the meaning making P, he offers biconditionals linking *p* and Copernican theses.¹¹ And, he notes, *p* will cohere (in a truth making way) with a belief system containing, apart from P, Copernican theses themselves (call such a belief system W). In contrast, it will not cohere with a belief system not containing those theses (call it Wc). Young's point is that the biconditionals of P may nonetheless be shared by W and Wc; and, as they are the 'immediate inferential relations' of *p* and belief systems W and Wc, then, 'to all intents and purposes', the same sentence can mean the same in each belief systemic context and thus the same *p* be true relative to W and false relative to Wc. It is in virtue of a key intersection set P of the two systems W and Wc that strong truth relativism and Young's meaning holism are deemed compatible. Even so, on Young's holistic utilisation of a whole belief set in determining *p*, as what some sentence is to be understood as meaning, one simply cannot, as Young admits, have exactly that same *p* constituted by another belief set. So, strong¹² relativism is, on this view, impossible. But would it not be a sufficiently close approximation to strong relativism were *p* to be true relative to W and something that was almost *p*, call it *p*¹, to be false relative to some Wc? Call such a view 'semi-strong relativism'. If it is coherent, it does seem to capture much of the strong relativist's thesis. The trouble is that holistic semi-strong relativism does not seem to be coherent.

Fodor and Lepore consider a view similar to Young's but under the label 'content similarity'. Young's suggestion is that *p* and *p*¹, though not identical in content, are sufficiently similar in content for an interesting form of semi-strong relativism to be articulable. But, as Fodor and Lepore complain, our ordinary notions of content similarity are not available within holism; some new concept is required yet 'nobody seems to have any idea what this useful new sense of "similar belief" may be' (p. 19).

¹¹ As noted earlier, this is an over-simplified view of the coherence relationships that would be present within a meaning making set.

¹² Weak relativism will be addressed in a later chapter.

Of the two renditions of 'a colloquial notion of belief similarity' given by Fodor and Lepore, one is more promising¹³ as a way of capturing what Young requires. Suppose that John believes a, b and c; and Jim also believes a and b but believes d, not c (and d can be not-c). John's and Jim's belief sets are in substantial intersection and, in noting that common belief in a and b, one could speak of them having similar, though not identical, beliefs (see p. 18). This looks like Young's account. Young had two communities, A and B, sharing part of their belief sets, namely that part citing *p*'s truth conditions, though not sharing a belief that P (or that *p*¹⁴). One may say that A and B have similar belief sets in virtue of the shared truth condition stating set and thus, in view of this overlap, or similarity, judge semi-strong relativism to be articulable. As Fodor and Lepore observe, however, (pp. 18-19) the difficulty with the overlap view is that it assumes that each of a and b and c (and d) are separately identifiable beliefs such that one can speak of (in our case) a "two out of three" intersection of beliefs in virtue of the sharing of a and b. But for the holist there is no sharing of any beliefs if the belief set varies at all. One does not have a discretely excisable set of identical beliefs, a and b, to be part of each community's web of belief. As Fodor and Lepore point out, the present problem is not to make sense of believing-most-of-a,-b,-and-c; it's to make sense of believing *something-similar-to-a* - that is, believing *more-or-less-a*. (p. 18). Two semantically holist communities cannot share a belief set stipulative of *p*'s truth conditions without sharing all of their beliefs. In effect, every belief in a web will have some role in the constitution of the truth conditions of any of its propositions (including those in P). For Young, or any semi-strong relativist wishing to hold the sort of holist semantic theory under discussion, some response to Fodor and Lepore's objection had better be available.

How may it look? The coherentist construes meaning in terms of various inferential relations. P has been seen as a web of inferences with some sentence in that web

¹³ The other, less promising, interpretation is in terms of strength of epistemic commitment; John and Jim may each believe *p* but John's belief be similar to Jim's rather than identical to it because of his greater conviction that *p*.

¹⁴ Which is a corollary of the "*p* as member of P" construal of coherence I earlier judged wise for an epistemic account of truth conditions.

being taken to constitute the expression of p in virtue of its place in that web. As an explication of 'similar belief' then,¹⁵ one could retreat to talk of similar inferential webs. Thus p and p^* would be deemed similar in virtue of occupying similar places in similar inferential webs. This is itself in need of clarification however. In considering something like this notion, Fodor and Lepore offer some ideas which may be appealed to in analysis of the above idea. (see pp. 20-21). Perhaps what it is to occupy a similar position in a similar inferential web is for the inferences among p and other members of P to be mostly the same inferences as those among p and other members of P^* . Of this, Fodor and Lepore complain that this relies on a 'robust notion of *identity of inference*' across non-identical belief systems yet 'that is one of the things that meaning holism appears likely to deny us' (p. 21). They go on to observe that if two theories contained no identical beliefs then they would contain no identical inferences. This they see following from the fact that '*identical* inferences must have *identical* premises and *identical* conclusions' (p. 22). So for ' $p^* \rightarrow q^*$ ' to be the same as ' $p \rightarrow q$ ' requires that $p=p^*$ yet it is the unavailability of this identity across non-identical webs of belief that prompted looking at 'similar position in inferential networks' as a possible way of explicating 'similar belief' in the first place. In the absence of any trans-web identical beliefs one cannot have the sort of substantial overlap of inferences that the 'mostly the same inferences' suggestion demands. In the face of this, Fodor and Lepore remark that one may now retreat to talk of similar inferences but to do so is no less in need of explication than the notion of similar belief. Obscurity has replaced obscurity.

A response to Fodor and Lepore can be mounted, however. Let us go back to the "most of the same inferences" suggestion. Fodor and Lepore are correct that "'if the solar system is heliocentric then the planets go around the Sun' and 'Mars is a planet' entails 'Mars goes round the Sun'" and "'if the solar system is geocentric then the planets go around the Earth' and 'Mars is a planet' entails 'Mars goes around the

¹⁵ Again, for ease of exposition I am not fussing about the fine precision of separating out sentences, propositions, beliefs and so on as we talk of meaning vehicles, truth vehicles, cognitive state vehicles, or what-not. Such distinctions are not germane to the present discussion's purposes.

Earth'" are not the same inference in virtue of their non-shared premises and conclusion. Yet these two inferences do share a logical form; each instantiates 'if p then q , p , so q '. What makes one deem the two inferences as non-identical is that something other than participation in that inferential pattern has been appealed to to individuate the participating propositions. Yet, on the coherence suggestion under consideration, were a total belief system to be comprised of the "Copernican" inference above and another of the "Ptolemaic" one, then, as they model each other, they are identical belief systems; the inferential patterns are held to be the whole story. In short, what if one takes seriously the anti-realist's total inwardlookingness when it comes to sourcing meaning? One does not then have the normal distinction between uninterpreted and interpreted calculi according to which, to interpret a calculus is to allocate classes of objects (etc.) as the referents (etc.) of terms in the calculus. A theory, or belief system, would seem to be like an uninterpreted calculus, with the sole source of meaning being the web of inferential relationships. If that is so, then the identification of premises and conclusions of an inference is not independent of identifying location within an inferential web. In which case, one may note the similarity of p and p^* by noting the formal isomorphism of inferential webs. For this to work requires that, even if the premise and conclusion claims of inferences are being construed as something like uninterpreted place holders in inferential schemata, the ' \rightarrow ' of entailment has to be discrete in some way such that one can trace overlap by correlating ' \rightarrow ' in scheme P with ' \rightarrow ' in scheme P^* . If so, inferential relation terms are not to be holistically understood. And that is to depart from the purity of mutual meaning making inside the web that is distinctive of thoroughgoing holistic coherentism. Yet if, with Young (pp. 140-143) the sentences that embody a system's inferential rules are themselves a function of the system, then how is one to get the cross system comparisons that seem requisite for strong relativism? Like Fodor and Lepore, I see no way of making sense of similarity of proposition, or belief, across sets while retaining total holism. And that means that Young's semi-strong relativism is no more obtainable than strong relativism.

Of course, 'someone may come up with a robust notion of content similarity that's not question begging by early tomorrow afternoon' (Fodor and Lepore, p. 206). Even if that is so, however, worries remain for Young's way of getting strongish truth relativism. The way he explains things seems to privilege a subset of the web of inferential relations as more meaning determining than the rest. Rather than have p and p^* as similar beliefs if they have mostly the same inferential links, Young has p and p^* as similar 'so long as the immediate inferential relations ... are the same' (p. 139). And that seems to imply that two belief webs could be totally disjoint with respect to their substantive beliefs yet overlap on some hypotheticals and thus, in virtue of that, perhaps quite minimal, overlap, manage similarity of p and p^* . Young outlines an example considered earlier, if p is 'the Earth revolves around the Sun' and p^* is the similar 'the Earth revolves around the Sun', then all that the cognitive communities in question have to agree on is the immediate inferential links that would attach p to a web of belief were it to be believed. That is, they have only to agree that 'the Earth revolves around the Sun if and only if '<Copernican astronomical theory>' and sharing that is enough for the similarity of p and p^* . In particular, that one community's belief system actually contains a belief in Copernican theory, and one does not, does not affect the similarity of meaning p and p^* 'to all intents and purposes' (p. 139). Unlike the "most of" type of overlap which I was investigating earlier in discussion of Fodor and Lepore, the overlap here is not quantitatively construed but qualitatively. It is not how much of the two belief systems intersect¹⁶ but which bits. This looks very much like the construal of some of a proposition's intra-web relationships as analytic, as meaning determining, and the rest as synthetic. That is for the thesis to be, not holistic, but molecularist.¹⁷ With propositional relativism, what constitutes a proposition, p , as that proposition, is a matter of its membership of a set of propositions P with which it stood in various inferential relations. What makes p ¹⁸ (relatively) true, however, is being believed by some community. So although the meaning of p would be as with propositional relativism,

¹⁶ Remember that we are, for the present allowing that some sort of explication of propositional or belief similarity (across holistically construed belief systems) is available.

¹⁷ Or, as I earlier called it, discretist.

¹⁸ Together, presumably, with other propositions appropriately inferentially linked to p .

its truth would not be.

Young is close to abandoning semantic holism here. And, given the unresolved difficulties facing the explication of the notion of trans-web meaning similarity, the strong relativist may as well accept that semi-strong relativism is a dubious fall-back position and acknowledge that strong doxastic coherence truth relativism presupposes the abandonment of semantic holism, and the privileging of some inter-propositional relationship beliefs as meaning determining.

That done, strong doxastic truth relativism is readily articulable as a coherent thesis. Two cognitive communities can share the inferential net of relationships *P* constitutive of *p*'s propositional identity yet differ in their endorsement of those propositions whose truth would (as specified in *P*) warrant *p* as true. Thus the same *p* can be true relative to one community's web of belief *W*, and false relative to another, *W*_c. With something like an analytic/synthetic distinction, doxastic strong truth relativism appears as comprehensibly statable as its propositional counterpart.

TRUTH, BELIEF AND COHERENCE

One objection that remains, however, is that it collapses the distinction between truth and belief. As Siegel puts it:

... if relative truth amounts simply to belief, then the relativist thesis is trivialised, and we are left wondering what the fuss is all about. That there exist rival, incompatible truths reduces to the innocuous observation that there exist differences of opinion, i.e. rival, incompatible beliefs. ... if ... (relativism) is to be worth attending to, [it] must say more of relative truth than that it comes down to mere belief. (1987, p. 15)

The concern is a common one. Swoyer is concerned to see whether there is some form of relativism which is plausible but not so diluted 'that it, no longer deserves the name' (1982, p. 96) and places as a constraint upon plausible relativism that any

serious relativist must be constrained by, 'that there are many things which are true even though no one believes them, and that there are other things that most of us believe which may turn out to be false'. (p. 98) As Preston puts it: 'On pain of failing to persuade us that the concept of relative truth is a concept of *truth*, the relativist must try to cleave as closely as possible to the ordinary concept of (absolute) truth.'. (1992, p. 61) 'We must maintain the gap between belief and truth.'. (p. 60)

Relativists themselves seem to wish to avoid the charge of conflating belief and truth. As Siegel notes (p. 16), Meiland, a prominent contemporary relativist and target for Siegel's criticism, observes:

To say that some belief ... is true ... for a society or an individual is to say more than simply that that society or individual holds that belief. (Meiland and Krausz, p. 4)

Meiland is not a coherentist but attempts truth relativism within the constraints of a correspondence/realist account of truth. However even Young, a coherentist of a doxastic variety, wishes to avoid the collapse that various philosophers from different sides of the truth relativism debate, seek to avoid. Young remarks: 'The anti-realist (relativist) does not identify truth with what someone believes.'¹⁹

This commitment by a doxastic truth relativist like Young to distinguishing truth and belief seems incoherent.²⁰ But there are two features of Young's explication of such relativism that promise to reduce the view's openness to the charge of subjectivism, a charge which appears to be widely construed as damaging to relativism. The first is that Young does not propose that the truth maker for an individual's belief be that that individual believes it. As he remarks, 'Nothing about global anti-realism commits global anti-realists to saying that a sentence is true if a single individual believes it is true'. (1994, p. 137) Nor is it even that individual's web of belief that is explicitly²¹

¹⁹ 1989, p.505. Although this is an early paper the point is reinforced in later writings and this is its crispest statement.

²⁰ And I have, in the past, argued against Young's views on these grounds (1993, pp.416-417).

²¹ What Young holds explicitly and what his views commit him to may, however, diverge here; I will return to the point below.

held to be the truth maker for such a p . Rather, p 's truth is relativised to the belief set of a group, a cognitive community.

But this does not seem much assistance. Swoyer and Meiland are as concerned about collapsing a proposition's truth with a group's belief in it as with an individual's belief in it; so, what if the whole cognitive community believed p would that, *ipso facto*, make p true? After all, Young wishes to avoid having mere sets of propositions in the abstract as truth makers and what seems to distinguish his doxastic from mere propositional truth relativism is the power of group belief as truth maker. Yet one of the interesting things about the way that Young has set up doxastic relativism is that even the truth making group can fail to make p true by believing it. A group can believe something false, that is, false-relative-to its own truth making activities. How can this be so?

Young's answer is that p is not made true by being believed, no matter by how many people, it is made true by the group believing those propositions constitutive of its truth conditions. Put another way, p is true relative to some set of sentences W where W is some community's system of beliefs and p coheres²² with W . Presumably some p may cohere with W without the W -believing community's members noticing this and without them believing that it does.²³ It may be objected that the propositions that make up the belief system W are nonetheless made true just by the community's doxastic *fiat*. And this objection succeeds in that such relativism clearly grants communities that sort of power over groups of beliefs.

As Young realises though, the truth relativist cannot just leave it at that. Some restraints must be placed upon a belief system to qualify it as truth conferring beyond it merely being believed by a cognitive community. Notably, no individual will believe the whole set of beliefs believed by the members additively and yet the set

²² I spent time earlier unpacking what this comes down to and won't complicate matters now with that detail.

²³ As with some unproved theorem in an axiomatic system perhaps.

formed by simple summation of members' beliefs will be inconsistent. Consistency is not sufficient for coherence but it is necessary. Thus some abstraction and idealisation from the set of actual beliefs is enjoined upon the doxastic relativist. Young's suggestion as to how this should be done is as follows. Of the many ways that the inconsistent set formed by the conjunction of all of the beliefs of each of the community's members may be trimmed to restore consistency, Young proposes that the truth making set for members' beliefs be 'the maximal set, the one which preserves as many as possible of the beliefs of the members of the community'. (1994, p. 117)²⁴

Young's conviction that raw belief sets of communities are not proper truth makers as they stand appears sound. One cannot have truth of a proposition as a matter of its membership of a specified coherent set of beliefs and then explicate what would constitute a specified system by appeal to the inconsistent total actual belief set of some community. Something has to be done to modify the strong doxastic truth relativist thesis in the face of this objection. Yet it is not clear that Young's way out is viable.

One difficulty with this modification of the "set of propositions actually believed by community A" proposal is that there may be more than one way of sanitising a community's total actual belief set. Thus, if instead of relativising p 's truth to an actually believed, but inconsistent, set W one wants a modified, sanitised truth making set, then the worry is that it is possible that consistency can be restored in two ways, by trimming W to W^1 and by trimming it to W^2 , then the spectre looms of some proposition being true relative to W^1 and false relative to W^2 . Such an outcome would not be particularly troublesome for propositional truth relativism, for it would simply be a way of identifying sets of propositions in the abstract as truth/falsity makers. With actual belief doxastic relativism, however, the possibility of two maximal sets is troublesome. The doxastic intuition is that the coherence of a

²⁴ Young's name for such a system of beliefs is 'A *practicable system*'. (p.117)

propositional set "in the abstract" does not grant that set truth making powers; rather, before the members of a set become true and truth making, the set has to be not just coherent but believed by a community. On such a view, it is communities of agents that have the power of making propositions true. But now the possibility is raised of a single community making a proposition both true and false with the two maximal sets derivable from their "raw" set of beliefs.

Young himself notes that his proposal may be objected to in much this way and responds that 'two replies can be made' (p. 117). The first response simply denies that one will have two maximal sets as a possibility. Young argues that although one may think that two belief sets may overlap except on, say, just one proposition, such that one contains 'Jane Austen liked port wine' and the other 'Jane Austen disliked port wine'²⁵ this seems most unlikely. Unlikely because beliefs of a discrete sort such that inconsistencies can be similarly discrete will not usually occur. The belief sets are not just collections of propositions believed by a community, they are also coherent systems of beliefs. Because of the inferential connectedness which is thereby a feature of any truth making web, although W may have parts disconnected from some other parts because of its creation by simple conjunction of members' beliefs, a maximal set will not.

Young seems to conflate two possible features of belief sets here. One is consistency and the other is some stronger, inferential web, notion of coherence. If one crafts a set, W, by summing community members' beliefs, one is assured of neither coherence in some tight, inferential web, sense of the word nor consistency. And if one moves from W to W¹, a set that eliminates inconsistency whilst preserving as many beliefs as possible, one is not thereby assured of coherence. One can have beliefs that are consistent but inferentially independent of one another. Thus it is

²⁵ Young's own choice of example is, to me at least, puzzling. He imagines there being two putatively maximal sets identical except that one contained 'Jane Austen wrote ten sentences on November 17th, 1807' and the other has instead of this 'Jane Austen liked port wine'. I fail to see why the maximal set wouldn't just include both, they are not inconsistent with one another. What one wants is something more like what I employ.

possible that one has two maximal sets, W^1 and W^2 , each consistent and yet disagreeing on some proposition.

One could make more stringent requirements upon maximal sets and insist that they not just preserve as many beliefs of the conjoined W as is compatible with consistency but also that they restore coherence. Let this be a requirement. After all, maximal sets are not required for their own sake, they are required as truth makers and, given our coherence truth restraints, having our truth making maximal belief sets as coherent, and not just consistent, makes good sense. Difficulties remain. Even with maximal-coherent sets as the proposed truth making idealisation of the conjoined W , one may still get, not just W^1 , but W^2 as well. Clearly if inferential web coherence characterises a W^n , then isolated inconsistency is no longer possible, but could some W^1 and W^2 be disagreeing in a more widespread way? Could one have more systematic contrariety across W^1 and W^2 ? The picture here is not one of single contrary propositional pairs but of contrary sub-sets. It may be thought that the demands of coherence would eliminate this possibility too but I think not.

The demand is that some raw set W of the community's beliefs be sanitised into two sets, W^1 and W^2 . W^1 contains two sub-sets W^1a and W^1b ; and although W^2 has one sub-set (W^2a) which is identical with W^1a it also has another, W^2b which is inconsistent with W^1b . Despite this incongruence of W^1b and W^2b , each can cohere with a common set. Whether it is possible will depend on the details of the coherence relationship demands. For instance, it would be possible if all that was asked of W^1b and W^2b was that they severally entail $W^{1/2}a$. One may have a community comprised of a mix of Ptolemaists and Copernicans with a common set of planetary movement observation beliefs. Such an incoherent subset of community beliefs seems to be trimmable to a Copernican W^1 and Ptolemaist W^2 , each coherent and with W^1 and W^2 sharing planetary-record belief subsets but not theoretical-belief subsets.²⁶

²⁶ This is, of course only possible with, *contra* Young, meaning holism's abandonment. But I have already argued that would be the price of strong (or even semi-strong) relativism anyway.

The second of Young's responses seems intended to block this. In effect, one tightens up the criteria of membership of a cognitive community and thus avoids major clashes among any maximal-coherent truth making sets derived from that community's conjoint raw belief set. It seems that Young's restraints will not do this though. He remarks that, provided that the two maximal-coherent sets 'preserve logic, mathematics and scientific method ...[they]... will vary only in comparatively minor respects ... any disagreement will be insignificant' (p. 118).

Young's claims seem implausible for, as the Quine-Duhem thesis maintains, one has no such guarantee for 'any two sets of beliefs' (p. 118). The logical/mathematical/philosophical commonalities alluded to can be present yet there be wildly different substantive beliefs elsewhere. One simply does not have a guarantee that one set will not include, say, geo-centrism and the other helio-centrism. To do that one will have to stipulate further commonality by having shared astronomical beliefs as a criterion of cognitive community membership. But then variation of members' beliefs when those beliefs lie outside these criterial beliefs will still be possible. This means that there is every chance of there being two or more maximal-coherent sets as truth makers for members' beliefs.²⁷ And, thus, as before, this leaves such a view open to the charge that, for some beliefs, *p* will be true-relative-to one set and false-relative-to another.

In summary, the problem seems intractable, but should this worry the strong doxastic relativist? Something like Young's approach seems enjoined to achieve coherence of the truth making set if one does not just have a group's raw beliefs as truth maker. Yet having a group's beliefs as truth value maker involves sanitised sets then the doxastic intuition of the truth making power of the group to create truth by belief is lost. It is counter to that intuition to have some group possibly making a belief true and false. If one is going to do this, then why one not just opt for propositional relativism? Assuming that the truth making set being believed by the cognitive community is crucial to the thesis, how, if maximal sets, or even maximal-coherent

²⁷ Actually, Young has sentence types as truth vehicles but, as with other "blurrings" elsewhere, the infidelities do not affect the point at hand.

sets will not work, could one avoid having a cognitive community's sanitised belief sets make a belief both true and false? Presumably one way is that one could have yet further restrictions on what sub-set of the composite union set of the members' beliefs counted as truth value making. For instance, instead of the union set it could be the intersection set. The difficulty is that this set may be too small to act in a truth value determining way.²⁸ That is, a set of such a restricted sort simply may not allow many propositions from the rest of the members' belief sets to be inferred at all. Also, one has no guarantee of the intersection set being coherent or even consistent. And, if not, the above discussion's concerns apply again.

So, to have more than one individual's belief set counted adds to the incoherence of the resultant set. To remedy this without more than one sanitised truth making set requires stringent demands on either the member beliefs criterial of community membership or of the way in which one conceives of the community's joint beliefs arising from its members. Each way, problems present themselves. Which is the best way for a doxastic strong coherence relativist?

Two key intuitions demand preservation, for without them explication of this theory type would simply be abandoned in favour of adopting another. On the one hand, no propositional set can be truth making without being believed, that is what makes it doxastic. On the other hand, not just any believed set will be truth making. The set must have the internal relationship of coherence. To generate two sanitised belief sets from the one raw, incoherent, set and then have some proposition made either true or false, depending on the variety of sanitised set one relativises it to, is to be not sufficiently doxastic. It is one thing to say that some believers can make some proposition true by it being inferable from some set of their beliefs or even that it can be true relative to their beliefs at one time and false relative to their beliefs at another time (Young's sec.21, pp. 129-134). It is quite another to have a proposition made both true and false by a community's belief set. To remain true to the doxastic arm of

²⁸ Unless the concept of coherence appealed to in determining the truth value of some candidate *p* is suitably weak (like mere consistency) but then both *p* and not-*p* may be *consistent* with a limited *W*.

the theory I suggest that strong doxastic coherence truth relativism craft the truth making set out of raw beliefs as follows. First, abandon the insistence on a cognitive community of more than one person as the possessor of the truth making set of beliefs. The major concern that relativists have with the belief set of just an individual believer is avoiding the objection that this collapses truth into belief. But the demand that it be possible for there to be truths not believed and beliefs not true is provided for by the coherence requirement upon truth making sets and not by numbers of believers.

Even within a single believer's set of beliefs, however, there is the chance of inconsistency. Moreover, to resolve an inconsistency one can eliminate either half of the clashing beliefs. If an agent has inconsistent beliefs and one half are coherent with her other beliefs then the other half should be discarded. Moreover, even if, quite consistently, various other stray beliefs are in a belief set, then they, too, ought be discarded in the sanitisation of the set to form a coherent truth making set.

Consistency may be a necessary condition of coherence but it is not a sufficient condition. Further, if the type of inferential web constitutive of coherence²⁹ is such that the inconsistent raw belief set could be sanitised to form not one, but two, clashing coherent sets that differently appraise some p , then it would seem that that agent's raw belief set is inappropriate as the raw material of a truth maker. A truth making set is not just to be believed, it is to be a coherent system, and if it cannot be sanitised into one coherent system³⁰ which speaks with one voice on any given proposition then it cannot constitute an acceptable explication of the twin demands of doxastic coherentism about truth. In short, some belief systems are sub-standard for truth making's demands.

Adding people to form a community may be necessary for strong relativism with a semantic holism that collapsed issues of meaning and of substantive belief but this is

²⁹ Much depends on just how tightly bound the notion of coherence, upon further explication, demands a propositional set to be. I am not going into this beyond the brief earlier discussion.

³⁰ Or a series of self-contained coherent sub-systems of a complementary sort (say in different domains of inquiry); no assumption of doxastic holism is being made, recall. But this is a distinct matter from clashing, or rival, sanitised systems.

unsatisfactory as a basis for strong relativism. One may still insist that language is communal³¹ and that people form linguistic communities without them thereby sharing a large number of substantive beliefs. Thus there would be the possibility of a shared propositional understanding yet unshared assent. On such a view it is not clear why one would insist that the truth making coherent belief set has to be a group, not an individual. Finally, note that, although the truth making set is a set of beliefs, the truth vehicle need not be. A proposition may be true relative to some set without anyone believing it, indeed with the truth making believer denying it. Despite the link of truth and belief in a doxastic theory of truth, they are not collapsed.

AN AWKWARD OBJECTION

Strong relativism is the goal and this requires that the same p is true relative to one believer's coherent belief system and false relative to another. This has caused problems and remains problematic. For Young, the identity of a proposition is a matter of its truth conditions. These, in turn, are conceived of as warranting conditions. And warranting conditions are understood as follows. To be a warranted-*cum*-true proposition, p , is to have those conditions (that, if warranted, would warrant p) as indeed warranted. And what counts as that coherent warranting set being indeed warranted? It being believed; but believed by whom? Young advocates a cognitive community, and I suggest that an individual may suit. But which cognitive community or individual - any one? It seems that the strong relativist has to answer 'yes'; the coherent belief set of any³² cognitive community or individual serves to render a given proposition or belief true/false relative to it. It is not clear, however, that this could be so. Let me go back to the understanding of p . Some language community³³ is supposed to understand p in virtue of a grasp of its

³¹ I do not here assume that one could not have a private language; it may even be that all languages are idiosyncratic in that way; my point is merely that with something of an analytic/synthetic distinction assumed one can have matters of meaning being communal yet beliefs, even truth making beliefs, not being communal.

³² Young actually demands that it be a *current* community. My (negative) comments on this are in my 1993, p.421. This mild infidelity to Young's views does not affect current concerns.

³³ I will henceforth drop the '(or individual)' for brevity. The discussion is unaffected as to whether it is an individual or a group that create meaning and believe truth making belief sets.

relationships to a web of propositions that provide its warranting conditions. But this understanding would also take it that it is that same group whose beliefs have truth making power. That is, the meaning makers for p would have some group of believers in mind as warranters. Having that group's, and not just any group's, beliefs as the truth makers would be semantically bound to the very understanding of p . If this is so, then one could not have p false relative to some other group's beliefs, for their beliefs would be irrelevant to the truth status of p as set up by its meaning makers. That it is so, for Young, seems obvious from the account given of sentence meaning as a matter of relating the sentence to others in the language of that group (see Young's chapter 3, especially section 13). The upshot of this is that different communities cannot share an understanding of p and thus that strong doxastic truth relativism of this sort is not possible.

One last possibility is worth attention. Young holds that a group of people may change belief such that, at one time, they believe one set of propositions and, at another, its contrary. If that set is the truth condition set for some proposition p , then it seems that p is true relative to that set when it is believed in, and false relative to it when belief in it is replaced by belief in some contrary set.

The group continues as the same linguistic community across this belief change and so, as it is their beliefs that are being understood as having truth making powers and their beliefs that are at first making p true and then making it false, the objection is satisfied. Moreover, to satisfy most strong relativists, there does not actually have to be such a belief shift. All that is needed for possible-strong relativism is that, for any group's truth value determining belief set, relative to which p , say, is true, it is possible for belief in that set to be replaced by belief in some contrary set whilst keeping p 's sense constant and thus possible that p be false. So, any proposition that is true, relative to some group-believed set of propositions, is also false, relative to some other set of propositions, if the same group believes that second set and it is always possible for them to do so. This is not the traditional relativistic picture of

different cultures, societies, epochs etc. having different doxastic attitudes to some common proposition, p , such that p is true relative to one's framework of belief and false relative to the other's. Nor is it even the less radical view that this is possible. Rather, given the point that bound into the meaning of p will be some selection of a particular group as doxastic truth value maker, it can only be the possibility of one's own group's alternative doxastic tendencies which the possible-strong doxastic relativist can appeal to. Though this does not salvage all relativistic intuitions, it preserves a good deal and offers a chance for some version of strong relativism. Of course, how it fares in the face of standard objections, like self referential worries, is another matter.³⁴ As for relativism across cognitive/linguistic groups, this looks to be more an issue of weak relativism and the discussion of weak relativism comes next.

³⁴ See my 1991 and 1989 for some discussion of such matters; also see Preston, 1992. I turn to these issues in Chapter Eleven.

CHAPTER TEN

WEAK TRUTH COHERENTISM

INTRODUCTION

To date, the investigation of coherence truth relativism has been limited to varieties of strong (and not quite fully strong) truth relativism. Despite the initial promise of the coherence theory of truth in providing a host theory for the relativist that would support a strong, and not just a weak, truth relativism, that hope has not been fulfilled in a clear cut way. It seems that coherence construals of truth may be no more suitable than correspondence theories for the explication of the more radical relativist intuitions. Whether they are even on par may turn out to be a matter of the fate of weak truth relativism of a coherence kind and it is the investigation of that possibility that follows next.

If the target thesis is a variety of coherence truth, then the truth value of some truth vehicle (say, a proposition) will be a matter of its coherence with some truth making set of propositions. And if it is weak relativism, then no proposition able to cohere with some truth making set could cohere with some other, suitably alternative, set. This is not because, as in strong relativism, the contrary of that proposition coheres with that rival set; rather, it is that there is a conceptual alien-ness of proposition and set such that that set is not relevant to the proposition's truth or falsity. Weak relativism is thus first a theory about sentence meaning or sense, or, what in an anti-realist theory amounts to the same thing, propositional identity. What makes p , p , or gives some sentence s - p the sense it has? The way forward seems clear in broad outline. Propositional identity is to be conceived of as a matter of p 's place in a web of inferential relationships P with other propositions, and each of these other propositions is also to be so understood. To understand the sense of s - p ¹ is just to

¹ I shall, where it is harmless, move from talk of sentences to talk of propositions without awkward pedantry.

understand the place of $s-p$ in that inferential web. So far, this is familiar ground; all that is new is the focus on having p inexpressible by use of the language employed by some other system of propositions, rather than seeking to have it expressible but false relative to some other system. We also have as familiar ground, such distinctions as holism/discretism, meaning/truth, proposition/belief, truth vehicle/truth maker, meaning vehicle/meaning maker etc.. Rather than engage in repetition I will just allude to previous discussion. One of the listed pairings is that of proposition/belief. I begin with weak propositional (truth) relativism.

WEAK PROPOSITIONAL RELATIVISM

Consider a sentence $s-p$ whose sense is given by its relationships with $s-q$, $s-r$ etc. within some web of such sentences, P . Let these relationships be inferential and the sense of $s-p$ be set by its position within this inferential web. P may be considered a whole language² or a sub-set of a language. As the issues vary depending on which of these is chosen, I discuss them in turn.

Holistic Variation

On this variation, the meaning of any sentence in a language is bound up with the meaning of any other. That $s-p$ expresses p is not understandable without understanding that $s-q$ expresses q and so on; and similarly for $s-q$, its sense is, in part, a function of its relationship with $s-p$. Thus the web of ideas connected semantically to $s-p$ is the whole language. Such semantic holism is not considered for the first time here. It is worth noting though, that when I considered holism and weak correspondence relativism, the subject matter of the propositions, what they were propositions about, was mostly some external reality that had independent objective existence. It may have been sorted by the classifications of the language but it was still the world under discussion, its stuff was the subject matter of propositions.

² How one gets to individuate languages is a problem that, fortunately, I need not address in this context.

The present host theory is, however, a coherence theory of truth and meaning - it is not clear that one can have the former without the latter; and, even if this does not entail idealism, it does detach the world's stuff from semantic relevance to language. So if $s-p$ is used by some agent to express p , what is p about? According to the purest form of coherentism at least, if p is about anything, it is the rest of the propositions with which it is semantically associated. In the present, holistic, variation, that set is all of the propositions expressible in the language. The proposition p has its identity constituted by its place in that "semantic space".³ Given this, no sentence from a language could be used to express any proposition from any other language. Weak relativism's chances would thus rest on the possibility of another whole language with no shared concepts. All of this may seem to be much like what emerged for weak holistic correspondence relativism. There are some extra features though, caused by the semantic anti-realism of the coherentist view of propositional identity and sentence sense.

One notable problematical feature is that the coherence version does not seem to allow for any conception of the two languages being two alternative ways of conceptualising the same something-or-other. There is, on the current view, a mutual inward lookingness about the members of P such that they are "about" each other and their inter-relationships and not about any thing at all that is external to the sentential/propositional web. In the correspondence version, "raw unclassified reality" is the common stuff being variously conceptualised and the object of substantive claims made using those alternative sets of terms and sentences. There is no corresponding idea here. If each web/language is, so to speak, "complete unto itself", then the sense of alternative webs is different from that of Section One, perhaps too different for it to constitute a suitable form of weak truth relativism. How could such a concern be addressed?

³ To borrow a nice metaphorical phrase from Paul Churchland - see, e.g., his 1991 - I don't pursue his reductionism though.

Experience as a Semantic Object

One could, of course, keep languages and their concepts semantically detached from the external world yet give them something other than themselves to discuss by having their semantic object become experience, sensations and the like. Two observations are pertinent. One is simply to note that the theoretical picture is then closely akin to that explored in Section One but with raw sensory inputs⁴ rather than raw objective reality as the "stuff" conceptualised. Much of that section's discussion would then transfer across. Such appeal to experience as semantic object is a move away from a pure coherence theory. As another observation, making such a change also favours one of two possibilities on a parameter not yet discussed. I have spoken of a language as holistically determining the sense of its sentences etc.. What has not been addressed is whose language it is. So, if Harold uses *s-p* to entertain the proposition *p*, his understanding of *s-p* is set by his understanding of its inter-relationships with the rest of P, a whole language in this case. Now, can Harold and Horace share a language? Not obviously, and this is not for the normal worry about the lack of total overlap of semantic repertoire for language community members. Rather, if what Harold's language is about is the stuff of experience then it is his experience that is the object of the concepts of his language. Or is Horace's experience also what Harold's *s-p* is about? To say so is possible, but it is then odd that Harold's language could have semantic links to one part of the reality external to him (Horace's experiential "raw stuff") but not to other parts, like chairs and electrons. Such anti-realism is a version of partial realism. Yet if one had one's own raw experience as the semantic object of one's language but not of any other person's, then one could not have an object of semantic attention for one's language that is shared with anyone. The reason why Harold would not share *s-p* with Horace would be that they were speaking of "different worlds", each of his own experience. All of this is, of course, to entertain seriously the notion of a private, as opposed to a public language. Arguments of a Wittgensteinian sort against private languages are not incontestably successful, not

⁴ Plus other sources of raw experiential "stuff" if there are any.

many arguments in philosophy are.⁵ I will, accordingly, consider idiolects with personal experience as their object as possible. My task is simply to attempt to connect weak relativism to them.

Construing private experience as the semantic object does not automatically preclude weak truth relativism, just weak truth relativism with an alternative conceptual scheme or language provided by someone else. It would still seem possible for a single agent to re-conceive of his own experience in terms of a new, and incommensurable language. Whether this is likely as a point of psychology is not the issue, is it logically possible? This seems not only possible but actual, indeed, unavoidable, at least for the holist. On the radically holist meaning theory under consideration, the meaning of every sentence is, at least in part, a function of its place in a network of other sentences,⁶ a network comprised of the whole language's repertoire. So, with any change in language, everything is changed. Thus, on the assumption that an individual's language is not static over her life, such holism entails the occurrence of the sort of incommensurable conceptual schemes that actual-weak relativism demands. There is one difficulty however. As the "theory-laden-ness of observation" and "seeing-as" literature has construed things,⁷ one does not have a pre-existing pool of raw sensory experience that is then, as a separate step, given order by an imposition of the categories of one's language (and the same sensory "stuff" then being re-ordered by one's next incommensurable language) rather, the conceptual scheme is partly constitutive of the experience as opposed to being added to some sort of "proto-experience" as a provider of shape like a potter's hands to pre-available clay. The correspondence/realist weak relativism of Section One had a continuing, objectively existing, focus for each language's semantic attention. On currently considered theories of experiences and sensations however, there would not be a continuing common focus for semantic attention, even within one mind. This is because, even if

⁵ Suffice it to say that there are constructivist theories of meaning and language acquisition/invention which receive a serious hearing by the relevant linguistic experts.

⁶ With some place for experience as well; the details of this are beside present purposes, however.

⁷ Such claims by Hanson, Kuhn, Feyerabend etc. have been received without much dissent from either philosophers of science or psychologists of perception.

it is just Horace's experiential life, and Horace who is shifting conceptual schemes, adopting a new incommensurable language, by moving from L_1 to L_2 , there is no common stuff for L_1 and L_2 to be about. The L_1 infected memories do not have a discrete sensory input component that L_2 can semantically engage with. Of course, from "Gestalt switch" time on, it will be L_2 that does the meshing with sensory inputs to yield current experiences with L_1 no longer influential, but that is not for L_1 and L_2 to have engaged with the same semantic object.

Let me review. What has been under consideration is the meaning of some meaning vehicle such as a sentence as a function of its place in a whole language. To have two linguistic sets that are genuine alternatives, rather than just irrelevant to one another, what is required is some common "object" of semantic attention. If sense is entirely a matter of the internal relationship among sentences, then languages would be either identical or, given the present holist assumption, different in all sentences' sense if any changes are made. Thus if sentences are semantically focused on other sentences, then incommensurable languages cannot have the same object. To modify the theory of meaning to make a whole community's experiences play a semantic role conflicts with the anti-realism that distinguished this section's candidate theories from those investigated in the last one. Yet to make a single semantic agent's experience the semantic object of his own, private language is, even with language change, to still have no common object of the semantic attention of two languages.

At this point it is worth deploying a distinction made earlier when considering strong relativism, that between actual and possible sets of beliefs. Translated to the current context, the suggestion is that the above analysis errs in that it focuses on the process of an actual agent suffering actual linguistic change. Apart from anything else, a remembered L_1 constituted experience is, when it comes to be transmogrified by being conceptualised by L_2 , already a memory, an experience state. If L_1 was "semantically working on" anything, it is not an experience or pre-existing proto-experience but sensory inputs or whatnot; in any event, something not part of one's

conscious experiential life. This sort of post-factum reconceptualisation was rejected as unsuitable for weak relativism. But this is to be too bound to the psychological possibility of reconceptualisation. If one is happy to just have a logically possible reconceptualisation, then one could entertain the idea that at time t_1 when L_1 was being used by Horace to interface with sensory inputs in the construction of his experiential life, it need not have been L_1 that was used. In another possible world one has L_2 in place at t_1 in Horace and it semantically focuses on those same sensory inputs' contribution to Horace's experiences in that "world". So could one have genuine weak relativism using possible other schemes resulting in Horace's experiential life being distinct?⁸ It seems that one can.

Apart from pessimism that the history of discussion of phenomenalism may cause concerning such a semantic theory, there are other concerns with such move away from a pure coherence theory. The idea is that a proposition is about experience. Experience is more than an artefact of one's conceptual scheme and has some sort of independent sensory input that can be variously meshed with by different conceptual schemes to generate differently organised experiences. But this portrayal of propositions' semantic focus sounds more a sort of correspondence theory than a coherence theory. The version of correspondence involved is not one that is straightforwardly realist about truth makers to be sure but it will nonetheless be something non-propositional that is their focus - experience, something external to the web of truth vehicles. The proposal looks like that of Section One except that it is (conceptual scheme/web/language) organised experiential inputs that stands in place of conceptual web organised external-world "stuff" as the truth making relatum in the three place relation I there explicated. Yet if this sort of anti-realist, but nonetheless correspondence, account of propositions' semantic focus is allowed, then does not the propositional network drop out as truth maker? If propositions are about experience as opposed to about other propositions, then why would their truth/falsity not be a matter of whether or not experience was as proposed? What role in truth making

⁸ Such possible weak relativism was all that proved viable within the correspondence theory after all.

could the propositional framework be playing here? Presumably if the proposition had inferential links to others in the web then they, stand or fall together but if it is a discrete proposition or a network of them, then standing or falling depends on what experience is like and that is a function of more than language. This semantic intrusion of experience yields something not best thought of as an impure coherence theory of truth: rather, it yields a form of anti-realist correspondence theory. Its discussion would parallel that in Section One. One other obvious entailment of this experience-directed semantic construal of what propositions are about, is that strong truth relativism seems ruled out.⁹ If it is some conceptually organised experience that is construed as a proposition's semantic object, then the same proposition could not be true of it and false of it - no matter what that proposition's relationships to two different frameworks of belief may be. Even if raw sensory inputs share with a set of categorial concepts the task of experience making, and that sharing thus extends to the truth-making role of sensory inputs being shared with, or moderated by, a conceptual web or language that is not, of itself, for it to share truth making power with a set of propositions.

Would it help in the articulation of a genuinely coherence relativism to have propositions-in-the-abstract, that is to have the truth makers, instead of mere languages/webs, as co-determinants, with the raw inputs, of experience? The answer is 'no' and the discussion would simply rehearse that of Section One. All that would be different would be that instead of raw external "stuff" being acted upon by a propositional web, it would be raw internal "stuff".

In summary, the cause of viably explicating weak coherence relativism is not advanced by having experience as the semantic focus of propositions. So, if this common sensory input focus for semantic attention is not adequate, are there other explications open for a properly coherentist weak truth relativism? Obviously one or other of the theses collectively in tension must be modified. One could just cease to

⁹ A result carried across from Section One.

demand that two languages have a common semantic focus as a prerequisite for being vehicles for weak relativism. It was trying to meet that demand which led to the appeal to experience. By dropping this requirement the way is open to a version of weak holist propositional coherence truth relativism. However, my view is that such relativism is trivial. Yet to seek a pure coherentist construal of some common semantic object, one not appealing to the external world, to the objective stuff of reality, or to some sort of raw sensory input, seems futile.¹⁰ Would it help to abandon holism or to move from propositional to doxastic relativism?

Discretist Variation

Discretist coherentism has sentence meaning determined by its inferential relationships to other sentences but not to all of the other sentences of the language. Though there may well be other reasons for preferring discretist coherentism, it does not assist the goal of having a common semantic focus for the two sentence sets to have them discrete, not holistic. If anything, the problem is exacerbated for it seems that if a language has discrete groupings of sentences such that *s-p* has one such sub-set as its sense determining P, and another, *s-a*, has another sub-set A, then, though they may in no appropriate sense be alternatives to one another, being complementary parts of the one language, it will still be that A cannot express *p* and that makes such weak relativism too weak¹¹. What is needed for weak relativism within pure propositional coherentism is to have one set P of propositions which is sense determining of *s-p* and another X as what *p* is about such that another proposition, *a*, whose *s-a* is sense determined by a different set A, could nonetheless be about that same X and *p* be inexpressible in A. Perhaps sense could be made of this but it is difficult to see how propositional coherentism can effect such semantic separation of sense and "aboutness". Getting from 'merely different' to 'appropriately alternative' as the status of another web to P remains an unresolved objection to the viability of weak

¹⁰ Recall that talk of the experiences of others as a semantic focus, social constructionist style, is for any linguistic agent to be semantically focusing on what is external to her mental events. Even more so is appeal to the practices of a semantic community.

¹¹ Compare the discussion of Chapter Six.

and pure propositional coherentism. One could explore impure coherentism again and attempt to explicate the demand that such webs be appropriately alternative by appeal to sensory input or whatnot as a semantic focus and insist that appropriately alternative webs have the same focus in this sense; but the move is futile. The discretist variation's difficulties parallel that of the holist one, with similarly unsatisfactory results.

In other respects, discretist weak propositional relativism has predictable features. Most notably, if, contrary to the above, sense could be made of the notion of alternative webs, the task of providing alternatives to a semantic agent's various sense giving webs could be sourced across partly semantically alternative languages rather than demanding as alternative a total conceptual scheme.

In summary, the issue of the appropriateness of two sense giving sets of sentences, whether holistically or discretely construed, as alternatives for the weak truth relativist having an interesting thesis concerning the unavailability of *p* within some other web, is unresolved and stands as a more troublesome objection to weak propositional coherence relativism than it was in the weak relativist thesis of Section One with its common unsorted stuff of reality as the language's or discrete web's common semantic focus.

WEAK DOXASTIC RELATIVISM

What if the relativist moves to a doxastic theory, could some form of doxastic weak coherence relativism prove viable? On the face of it, no. By moving to doxastic coherentism there is no gain with respect to the "alternatives needing common focus" problem which has proved difficult for propositional variants. The major apparent merit of working within doxastic relativism, lies elsewhere, and concerns the strong relativist focus on truth and falsity, not the weak relativist focus on meaning. Nor does "experience as common focus" seem any more successful with doxastic than

with propositional coherentism. Indeed, just as having the proposition *p* about experience undercuts any coherentist truth making role for a propositional set, so it undercuts any truth making role for a set of beliefs. However, given doxastic coherence theories' dominance among coherentists, and the problems with strong doxasticism, weak doxasticism deserves further investigation.

The key feature of doxastic, as opposed to propositional, coherence theories is the separation of powers for truth making and meaning making. The latter is a matter of a sentence cohering with some meaning making set of sentences. The former is a matter of coherence with some truth making set of sentences which is, as a further element, believed by some appropriate truth making group.¹² The reason why it looked attractive to have doxastic coherentism as one's host theory for strong relativism was that one could share meanings with a rival cognitive community yet differ on the truth value accorded to commonly understood propositions by virtue of different doxastic commitments to them. With weak relativism, the point is that the proposition made true relative to some truth making set of beliefs in virtue of its coherence with it would not enter into such relationships with a suitably alternative belief scheme; it would be inexpressible in terms of the concepts employed in such a scheme. And the important thing for this to occur is that the meaning determining sentential webs or languages be suitably alternative; yet that key feature for the articulation of weak relativism is not affected by whether it is doxastic or propositional coherentism under discussion. The discussion of having the host coherentism doxastic parallels some of the earlier discussion of strong relativism.

As it is exclusively global relativism that this work concerns itself with, the target doxastic weak relativism is to be global. That is, for there to be, for any proposition expressible in a given language or discrete linguistic web, and true relative to some set of beliefs, some other, alternative, language or discrete linguistic web in whose terms it is inexpressible and, *a fortiori*, not true.

¹² Or, as with Young's maximal set suggestion, abstracted in some way from this.

One can distinguish variations of weak relativism depending on the availability of the alternative web or language. Clearly, while it makes for the most extreme form of weak relativist thesis, it would be implausible to suggest that, for any p there actually is some alternative web/language in whose terms the given p is inexpressible. Rather, one will have to appeal to counterfactual possibilities such that, for any p (employing the concepts of some conceptual web) it is possible for there to be another, alternative, web in whose terms p is inexpressible. If so, then, as with possible actual belief strong relativism, one could have what I will call 'possible actual alternative web weak relativism'. With strong relativism, the problem was with two belief systems both having the same proposition as their common object of appraisal; here the difficulty is trying to make sense of two webs/languages being appropriate semantic alternatives, as opposed to being merely different webs/languages. Much of the discussion would parallel that of propositional weak relativism. As before, a common semantic object seems unavailable within pure coherentism.

What if one moves to an impure theory, one with experience in some semantic object role? Could one then satisfy the demands of weak relativism by having various possible categorisation webs of some raw experiential "stuff" such that propositions about that stuff that rely on one web's concepts would be inexpressible by appeal to the others? Perhaps, but the difficulty is to have this weak theory in tandem with a doxastic account of truth makers. If one appeals to some "raw experiential stuff" as the common material for different webs' conceptualisations and have p using web P and p^* using web P* as conceptually about the same stuff, then p 's truth is a matter of that stuff as conceptualised in terms of the web P being as p proposes. Yet that means that the cognitive community's web of belief W, with which p coheres, has no truth making role. Nor will it help to have the doxastic web W, as opposed to the categorial web P, as what shapes the nature of the experience.¹³ If experience is totally determined by a doxastic web, if beliefs self-guaranteeingly make or create their own experiential world to be about and true of, then in a sense, some p of that web would

¹³ It is, of course, considerably more plausible that beliefs, as opposed to propositions-in-the-abstract, could perform such a truth maker shaping/making task.

be made true by that web's role in determining the experience that it was about. Yet the scenario remains one of correspondence truth of the sort talked about in Section One, Chapter Two, where multiple realities were discussed, not of doxastic coherentism about truth.

Moreover, weak relativism requires appropriately alternative categorial webs such that some p , expressible in terms of P , is simply not available in terms of P^* , the P and P^* are conceptually treating of the same raw stuff. But in the just outlined scenario, there is no common stuff.

Nor does it help to have the doxastic web W , instead of just the conceptual/categorial web P , as but a partial determinant of experience, for in virtue of the other raw element of experience, one again reverts to the sort of correspondence theory outlined above.

SUMMARY

Whether our coherentist host theory is propositional or doxastic is of little importance for the possibility of global weak coherence relativism. The difficulty is the same in each case - that of having the webs or languages by appeal to which some proposition's identity is set as appropriately alternative such that a proposition expressible in one web/language is not expressible in an alternative web's terms. If this "alternativeness" demand upon the other web is considered legitimate, then it is fatal to global coherentist weak relativism. To escape, something else than other web/linguistic elements have to be the semantic focus for a proposition, what it is a proposition about. Yet such impurity of coherence meaning/reference theory has its own difficulties. On pain of abandoning the anti-realism that distinguished this section's theory type from that of the first section, the common semantic focus could not be the external world. Yet, if one modified pure coherentism to have propositions as being about experience, it could not be anything but an individual's experience.

So, weak "coherentism" seems to require private experience as what an individual's propositions/beliefs are about. They are about the raw input to experience that combines with a conceptual scheme to form experiences one is actually aware of. As with weak correspondence/realist relativism, a proposition is construed as about an objective but unsorted, "world" that could also be what incommensurable propositions are about. What may be thought of as "impure weak coherentism" of a private linguistic sort seems as articulable as our earlier weak correspondence realist relativism but only because it is a sort of weak correspondence anti-realist relativism. Truth making is removed from propositional or doxastic webs. The price of weak truth relativism is abandoning coherentism. All in all, coherentism as a thesis about truth making has not proved to be a congenial host for either strong or, especially, weak relativism.

Next, weak coherentist relativism and the most promising variations of strong coherentist relativism will be subjected to some standard anti-relativist objections.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

COHERENCE RELATIVISM AND STANDARD OBJECTIONS

INTRODUCTION

Surprisingly, the attempt at being a relativist within the confines of a coherence theory shows little promise.

First, as strong relativistic theses, I considered propositional and doxastic variants. The propositional view finally arrived at was one in which one embraced a semantic holism in which truth is redundant as a semantic notion. With such holism, a proposition's truth seemed automatic. So, propositional strong holist relativism is one possibility for further investigation. The other possibility within strong relativism was the doxastic thesis of possible-strong relativism with the relativisers, the belief sets doing the truth value making, connected to the one linguistic community.

As for weak relativism, things looked more difficult, at least within a coherentist theory of truth making. Within a propositional host theory, explicatory investigations yielded two chances for the relativist.

First, within a holist host theory, if one insists that the alternative languages have to be languages about the same domain in order to be appropriately alternative, then the only "non external world" way of doing that appeals to experience as the semantic focus of propositions and requires that some element in experience is not a function of a language or propositional set. With that supposition it seemed possible that it could mesh with another language to give alternatively conceptualised experiences. The difficulty is that although a proposition can be seen as the truth vehicle on this view, the modifications lead the view away from one in which some set of propositions acts

as truth maker. The introduction of experience as what the propositions are about grants experience truth making power in a way that, although anti-realist about an external world, is still more like a variant of a correspondence, rather than of a coherence, theory.

Similarly for a discretist semantic variation; the price of weak relativism is that truth making ceases to be located in coherence with other propositions and is rather a matter of experience being as proposed.

Things are no better with a switch to a doxastic host theory. By all means one could have truth vehicles conceived of as beliefs but if they have experience from the common semantic focus spoken of above, then such experience, rather than the "believed" status of the beliefs or their coherence acts as truth maker. A sort of "anti-realist correspondence theory" seems the result, and coherence doxasticism viewed as a theory of truth makers receives no satisfactory explication. Viewed as a sort of anti-realist correspondence theory, it seems that holist and discretist variants may obtain. The propositional/doxastic distinction within weak anti-realist relativism, is not a distinction among variations of coherence truth makers but just of truth vehicles.¹

So, the upshot is that, if one insists on a coherence theory of truth making, then weak relativism is dubious and the two strong truth relativist theses from Chapters Eight and Nine are the major candidates for further examination. However, although I will consider our two strong truth relativism candidates, I will also consider the vulnerability of weak coherentist theses to standard objections.

¹ And curious in that the Youngian strong doxastic coherentism examined in Chapter Nine made no demand that truth vehicles be beliefs.

SELF-REFUTATION

The classic objection to relativisms of various sorts, including truth relativism, has been the charge of self refutation.² Meiland puts the objection in the form of a dilemma:

- (1) Either the relativist's thesis applies to itself, in which case it too is only "relative" or "subjective";
- (2) Or it does not apply to itself, in which case there is something which is (according to the relativist) absolutely and objectively true. (1980, p. 116)

The self-refutation charge clearly concerns the second horn of this dilemma where the thesis forms its own counter-example. In the face of this, one could retreat from global relativism and limit the thesis' scope in some way such that the relativistic thesis itself was not what it was discussing. Whether this can be done in a satisfactory way is a source of concern but, as the focus of this thesis is exclusively on global relativism, the matter will not be pursued further. This leaves the first alternative, having the thesis of truth relativism fall within its own scope such that it is but relatively true if true at all.

There are two sources of concern with this. The first is whether it can coherently be self-including or whether nonsense results from the attempt. The concern is a special case of challenges to the globalness of the thesis. The status of the thesis itself is not the only challenge which raises counter-examples whose truth is difficult for a relativist to account for. I will return to other cases below.

Even if the thesis of truth relativism can be deemed relatively true, a second stage of objection has it that for it to be but relatively true is not enough. The claim is that to advance the thesis as being merely relatively true robs it of interest or enfeebls it

² As Meiland explains the point, however, this label is possibly not the most apt one possible.

somehow. On this second objection, to be but relatively true is not good enough. I will address these objections in turn.

The first is whether it is coherent to speak of truth relativism's relative truth. The following truth relativistic theses remain as significant candidates:³

- (a) holist propositional strong relativism;
- (b) doxastic possible-strong relativism;
- (c) discretist propositional weak relativism;
- (d) holist propositional weak relativism;
- (e) discretist doxastic weak relativism; and
- (f) holist doxastic weak relativism.

For present purposes I will not distinguish among weak relativistic varieties and will group them together as generic weak relativism.

(a) Holist Propositional Strong Relativism and Self-refutation

Take (a), could one coherently conceive of it as giving an account of its own truth?

The holist part of (a) served to make the meaning making P and truth making W sets connected with some p identical. This meant that one would have one set W, as p 's truth making set and another W^* , as its falsity making set in virtue of it being the truth making set for pc , the contrary of p .⁴ What was thought to be a strength of (a) was that, as the truth value makers were sets of propositions in the abstract, and assuming these to have some sort of human-independent existence, W^* , a set with which pc , the contrary of p coheres, seemed readily available for fulfilling actual-strong relativism's demands.

³ Of these, remember that only the two strong versions were (semi-optimistically) viewed as variants of coherence theories of truth making. (Theses (c) to (f) are deemed "in contention" still so that weak relativism doesn't cease to be examined - despite its unpromising standing as a result of the last chapter's criticisms).

⁴ Doubts were, however, expressed about the notion of cross set contrariety.

For the current concern, the question is: what if *p* is the truth relativistic thesis (a) itself? Is this possible? On the face of it, various propositions (P) would be semantically bound up in the very constitution of the propositions constitutive of truth relativism's identity. Various other propositions (arguments for relativism?) would constitute W and others again (various arguments for absolutism?) would constitute W*. What this means is that not only will relativism be true relative to W but also false relative to W*. But there is nothing incoherent about allowing absolutism to be relatively true in this latter way.⁵ There seems to be no special reason for holding that the relativistic thesis' own propositions are in more trouble as candidates for *p* than any others. Presumably, the propositions constitutive of (a)-type relativism are not of a type that is *sui generis*.⁶ Rather, what seems plausible is that they will be members of such classes as "meaning propositions", or "semantic propositions", or "epistemic propositions", or "philosophical propositions", or, perhaps, "analytic/necessary/a priori propositions". So, are these types a problem for holist propositional strong relativism? The answer again seems: 'No'. If anything, the truth of such philosophical propositions about meaning, truth and proof are more likely to be the internal function of conceptual schemes or propositional sets than more prosaic ones about⁷ mountains, trees and protons. If there are doubts about the global scope of coherence theories, then the more common focus of such doubts has been common propositions that seem to be about middle sized objects and their observable features, and not the abstract propositions of philosophy. I take it, then, that the coherence of the proposition that relativistic thesis (a) is but relatively true can be presumed.⁸ Given that global type (a) truth relativism has not been shown to be impossible, then the second objection is that mere relative truth is not truth enough.

⁵ Whether or not an absolutist would be happy with this is another matter; the mere relative truth of absolutism may not be status enough.

⁶ Cf. Meiland, 1980.

⁷ I should perhaps employ "shudder" quotes as a reminder that coherence theories, relativistic or not, have difficulty with the nature of assertion and an unintuitive construal of what some propositions are about.

⁸ To say this is not, of course, to say that (a)'s relative truth can be presumed. Recall that it is no part of my brief to argue for relativism. My concern is the limited one of trying to articulate forms of coherent global relativism.

One worry is that a major point of advancing truth relativism is to deny absolutism. Yet on this holist propositional version of strong truth relativism, it and absolutism, have the same status - true relative to some propositional set or other W or W* respectively.

The first point to note is that absolutism is not granted the status of absolute truth, just truth relative to W*.⁹ Though this is so, the point remains that, if the relativist is trying to elevate his thesis above that of absolutism, then the enterprise has failed.

Absolutism becomes just as true as relativism. Earlier, (a) was presumed coherent.

But as (a) is a strong thesis, it is not enough to speak of (a)'s relative truth, it must also be relatively false, and that was construed as absolutism being relatively true.

That looks fine but that presumption merits reconsideration. Can one, after all, make sense of the relative truth of absolutism?

The absolutist thesis to be contrasted with version (a) relativism would itself be coherentist and, let us allow, even agree with (a)'s holism. Being coherentist, but absolutist, makes the locus of disagreement with the relativist the nature of the truth making set. The strong propositional form of relativism currently under scrutiny permits many propositional sets. The truth value makers were propositional sets,¹⁰ propositions in the abstract. The strongness came from those sets being rich enough to provide truth making and falsity making sets for any proposition. Absolutism, requires that each proposition only have one truth value in its relationship with sets having truth value making powers.¹¹ Thus, truth relativism would be false by reference to the apt truth making set and absolutism true by reference to its appropriate

⁹ It is worth remarking in passing that this does not stop them being rival theses, "relative contraries", to coin a phrase. Sets by reference to which relativism is true will be ones by reference to which absolutism will be false and vice-versa.

¹⁰ Albeit coherent ones - a notion not fully explicated in this case as it is not germane to the discussion.

¹¹ Law of the excluded middle denying "anti-realists" would hasten to point out that some propositions may fail to be accorded either 'true' or 'false' by reference to that appropriate set but such complications are beside the present point and I will speak in bivalent way. In any event the implausibility of bivalence is at its strongest within doxastic, not propositional, coherence theories.

set.¹² That it is true by reference to its relationship to some set is not, of course, for it to be true only relative to that set; it is merely a reflection of the context which concerns coherence truth.

The only ways in which one could have absolute propositional coherentism would be if there was some preferred set by appeal to which every proposition's truth value was determined; or, if not one meta-set, then sets such that only one set was relevant to the task of determining the truth value of any given proposition. Whichever absolutist variety one contrasts to (a), the scope of the thesis is global.¹³ That means that it is saying of itself and (a), that there is some preferred¹⁴ set PS which makes absolutism true and relativism not. And it is saying of other sets that they do not have truth making powers. Here lies the nub of the dispute. Does it then make sense to say that the proposition that only PS¹⁵ has truth making powers is true relative to PS but false relative to PS*? On the face of it, no. And if not, then (a) fails, not because it cannot be relatively true, but because, contrary to strong relativism's demands it cannot be (relatively) false. Absolutism, although expressed with the concepts of P and epistemically supported by the propositions of W*, is not just about those propositions of those two sets. It talks of any set of propositions at all and marks off one¹⁶ such set PS, one including W*, as truth value making. By reference to it, truth relativism is false and absolutism true. W is also discussed by absolutism and denied truth value determining status. According to absolutism, it is not just (or at all) that relativism is false relative to W*, (PS) it is false *simpliciter* and certainly not true relative to W for W has no warranting power. And absolutism is not just true relative to W*, it is true *simpliciter*. If absolutism has to be relatively true to meet the

¹² Presumably the set making relativism false would be that making absolutism true.

¹³ Not that it has to be, of course, in order to be what I called 'a relative contrary' to W.

¹⁴ Again, although some sort of principled account will presumably be given of the basis of preference of this set, it is no part of my present concern to explore such a basis. Putnam's or Peirce's suggestions (alluded to in an earlier chapter) better suit doxastic variants of coherentism, and the rationalistic hopes of earlier, more idealistic coherence traditions to which propositional relativism seems more akin, have familiar difficulties in being global.

¹⁵ I will ignore the complications of talking of the other possibility of a spread of preferred, but domain specific, sets.

¹⁶ Again, perhaps, as we saw earlier, sense can be made of greater than one truth making set (for different domains of thought, perhaps) but such complications are not relevant to the point at hand.

demands of strong relativism, then the demand seems unmeetable. A pale relativistic counterpart of absolutism may be coherently articulatable but not absolutism-proper, for that view denies of itself the merely limited status allowed it by (a) as but true relative to W^* . If absolutism is true then its own account of itself is that it is absolutely true.

In summary, holist propositional strong relativism fails in the face of these objections. Part of the point of espousing relativism is to deny absolutism. A global relativism will allow itself only the status of being relatively true and yet, as strong relativism, must give to absolutism the status of truth relative to W^* . But it cannot give absolutism-proper that status and thus (a) is not coherent with respect to meeting its strong relativistic demands. Even if, somehow, it could allow absolutism its full self-accorded status as absolutely true, this would vitiate its own intellectual mission of opposing absolutism.

(b) Doxastic Possible-strong Relativism and Self-refutation

This is the other variant of strong(ish) relativism that largely escaped the critical concerns of earlier chapters. It is a doxastic thesis with, not just coherent sets, but sets believed by cognitive agents, as truth makers. It was called 'possible-strong' to allow for limitations on what is actually believed by actual epistemic communities. Rather than any proposition¹⁷ being held to be true relative to one actual belief set¹⁸ and false relative to another actual belief set, doxastic possible-strong relativism accepts that not all propositions have even one truth value let alone two. Which propositions got which truth values relative to which belief sets was contingent upon the assenting histories of the relevant epistemic communities. However, even if some proposition p only ever has the status of relative truth because only W and not W^* was ever actually believed, this status is still that of relative and not absolute truth, as it is always possible that the falsity making set be believed. What, then, if p is the

¹⁷ Recall that it was not a necessary condition for something being a truth vehicle that it be a belief.

¹⁸ Of an appropriately coherent sort.

thesis of doxastic possible-strong relativism itself? If W is actually believed, then *p* (relativism) is true relative to W. As for W*, it is immaterial for present purposes whether it is actually believed or not, all that relativism (b) states is that were it to be believed, then such relativism would be false relative to W*. Is this conceivable?.

Taking doxastic possible-strong relativism as a collection of propositions,¹⁹ one can have various views denying elements of that thesis, but the most interesting one as absolutist rival to (b) is the coherentist doxastic thesis that, although a proposition's truth is a matter of its coherence with a set of actual beliefs,²⁰ or some epistemically idealised set,²¹ just one such set possesses truth making powers. Thus relativism is false *simpliciter* on this view and not just relative to such a set. Correspondingly, though for relativism such "preferred set" doxastic coherence absolutism would be but relatively true²² or, perhaps, just possibly relatively true,²³ for the absolutist coherence theorist it would be absolutely true.

The difficulty with the present version is not so much the coherence of the thesis' relative truth but the coherence of its relative falsity, at least if one construes that falsity in the form of the above absolutism's truth. Such absolutism cannot be construed coherently as relatively true because of the thesis' inbuilt reflexive appraisal of itself as more really true than that. Perhaps such a thesis is false (absolutely or relatively) but, if true, it must be true absolutely and not just²⁴ true relative to some set or other. Nothing has been gained in resistance to reflexivity objections by the shift from (a) to (b).

¹⁹ Recall that we have not tied the relativist to any holist "package deal" view of her thesis(es) here. They may be able to have various truth value mixes across the constituent propositions of b).

²⁰ Say those destined for belief "in the long run" - Pierce-style, (see his 1931-1958, e.g., vol. 5, p. 407 or vol. 7, p. 319).

²¹ Putnam-style, (see his 1981b).

²² Relative to some actually believed W* if any such exist.

²³ Relative to the set preferred by absolutists but which is not at present (or perhaps ever) actually believed by anyone.

²⁴ There is nothing to stop it being relatively and absolutely true. The clash of relativism is not caused by clashing concepts but by clashing construals of the scope of the theses. It is the globalness of the theses that leads to their conflict.

Weak Relativism

It has been argued that no weak coherence truth relativistic theses are coherent. However the history of philosophy is, in part, the history of philosophers deluded about the power of their arguments. So, despite the previous arguments let me examine weak coherence relativism of a generic sort to see if it suffers the reflexivity concerns of stronger versions. Generic weak coherentism is the view that p , while expressible in terms of, and true relative to, one system or framework, is not even expressible in some other scheme. What if p is the weak relativistic thesis itself? This would mean that there are systems in which weak relativism is inexpressible. Indeed, as absolutism and relativism use the same conceptual repertoire, such systems would be ones in which absolutism, as well, would be inexpressible. There seems to be no particular problem here. It is coherent to say of weak relativism that it is only weakly true relative to some web or scheme of concepts.²⁵

To turn to the second half of the objection, though including itself in its scope is no source of incoherence in itself, is weak relativism thereby robbed of philosophical interest? In short, is it theoretically satisfactory for weak relativism to be "but relatively" true?

One thing that should be noted is that just because there are conceptual schemes/webs in terms of which relativism is not articulable does not, in itself, entail that such a relativistic thesis is about its own web's propositions alone. As seen in the first section,²⁶ a proposition that is part of one scheme/web is not thereby prevented from discussing propositions not part of that scheme/web. That remark was, of course, made within the context of a correspondence theory of truth with its relatively transparent conception of what a proposition is about. Does the point translate to a

²⁵ Or some sense setting set of propositions or beliefs, or whatever; such detail is beside present, generic, purposes.

²⁶ See Chapter 4.

coherence host theory? Can sense be made of the idea of a proposition in such a host theory? Earlier this seemed to be a matter of a relationship with other propositions, *p*'s sense was given by its relationship with other propositions forming *P*. Insofar as *p* is about anything then, what it is about are the propositions constituent of *P*.²⁷ On the face of it, then, there is a problem of scope; for if *P* is *p*'s focus then it cannot be linked with other schemes in the required way for coherence "aboutness". If this is right, then self-vitiation seems an applicable charge. The interest and challenge of global relativism is that it is an account of the truth of all propositions regardless of the scheme or framework with which they are associated. This promise can only be fulfilled if some other account of what a proposition is about is available. Otherwise, relativism seems unable to speak of any other schemes which are unable to express it. Yet that is just what weak coherentism attempts. It claims of some schemes that it itself is not expressible in them. Yet it tries also, *qua* global theory, to claim that the other schemes' propositions only have a truth value relative to it. The mix is incoherent. Coherence could be restored by the thesis restricting its scope so that is said something like: for all schemes able to express relativism, relativism is true relative to such a scheme. This has the merit of ruling out absolutism as ever being true (assuming it to only be expressible if relativism is) and that seems a thesis for relativists to be happy with, but it would not be the target global weak relativism. It is also silent concerning the truth status of schemes without the conceptual apparatus of the relativism/absolutism controversy.

A common move when wrestling with self-referential difficulties is to stratify languages and appeal to meta-languages within which to say various things.²⁸ It is not clear how much this can achieve within a coherentist/anti-realist host context however. For a start, one has to resist thinking of the object²⁹ -languages as having independent existence in their own right and the meta-linguistic propositions as capturing some truths about them in a correspondence way. One cannot have some

²⁷ Depending on the variety of weak relativism under discussion, it may not just be *P* but also be *W* and perhaps *W**. These specific differences are not germane to the point at hand.

²⁸ Cf. my 1991 and Sankey, 1990

²⁹ A most inapt label within anti-realist semantics.

meta-linguistic³⁰ proposition: 'some possible other scheme ACS, does not have the conceptual resources to express the weak relativist views that truth is relative to a scheme and that every proposition is inexpressible in some possible scheme' and view it as true *simpliciter*, as capturing the linguistic facts of the matter about various actual and possible schemes. This looks attractive because the talk of the other schemes to those of the relativist thesis takes place, not within the latter, but within the meta-linguistic scheme which is about relativist and other schemes. But such a meta-linguistic scheme will have its propositions understood in terms of internal coherence relations, and thus its propositions, as much as those of any other anti-realist coherence scheme, are unable to reach outside the set. So, for it to be able to discuss propositions of the relativistic set and the other set, those sets have to be part of the "meta"-linguistic scheme. One has to have a mixed level scheme with incommensurable parts (the relativistic scheme and its counterpart). Yet how can such a composite be coherent? Holistic weak relativism is thus unavailable as a meta-language variant. Turning to discretism, could one have coherent portions of the composite set which act as truth makers for various propositions appropriately linked to them? But how would this assist the relativist in responding to the present objection? All that it means is that the relativist thesis is more restricted in scope than before.

In summary, weak coherence relativism faces intractable difficulties when applied it to itself. Neither strong nor weak versions of coherence truth relativism have been able to withstand reflexivity objections. If the arguments here succeed, then an interesting result emerges. This work began with the commonplace observation that it seemed easy, even obligatory, to be a truth relativist within a host coherence theory and difficult, even impossible, to be one within a host correspondence theory. The reverse seems to be the result of the above investigations, at least for global theses. Strong relativism proved not to be possible within either host theory of truth. Nor

³⁰ Or meta-meta-linguistic; weak relativism is already talking of linguistic items.

could one be a weak coherentist, but one could advance weak relativism within a correspondence framework.

Let me consider how the coherence relativistic theses considered in this chapter fare in the face of other powerful objections. What are these objections? Preston presents a useful compendium (1992). Not all of them bear on my concerns in this work, but the one he considers fatal to the hopes of global relativism does, and it is to this that I now turn.

THE META-REGRESS OBJECTION³¹

Global relativism is a theory concerning the nature of the truth value of any proposition. As was the case when considering its self-application, it is the application of the relativistic thesis to meta-linguistic propositions which is the source of concern. Modified to mesh with the terms of earlier discussion, the problem may be explained as follows. Take some proposition *p*. The generic framework relativism under examination holds that *p*'s truth is to be analysed as its relationship of coherence with some truth making set *W*. Thus *p* being true relative to *W* is a matter of the appropriate coherence relation obtaining. But my target in this thesis is global³² relativism; thus the meta-proposition '*p* coheres with *W*' is itself a candidate for relative truth. The truth of any *p* relative to its *W* was held to rest on *p* and *W* being related by coherence or on the truth of '*p* coheres with *W*'. But, clearly, if relativism is to be global, the truth of that meta-proposition (*m-p*) cannot be absolute. Thus it must be relative. And relative truth is a matter of coherence³³ so the truth of *m-p* lies in its coherence with ...what? Call it *X*. But then the truth of *mm-p*: '*m-p* is coherent with *X*' is a matter of its coherence with *Y* and so on. This looks like a regress. Two

³¹ The version of the objection which Preston considers is Putnam's. (1981, p.121) Preston calls it 'the complexity objection'. (p.68) Kirkham discusses a similar issue as 'a regress problem' (1992, p.114.); a problem, incidentally, that Kirkham sees facing any global non-realist theory of truth. But I will call it 'the meta-regress objection'. It seems applicable to strong or weak relativism.

³² Or 'total' as Putnam and Preston term it.

³³ At least, I'm ignoring the complexities of doxastic variants for now. We will, however, return to these in due course.

questions immediately arise: first, is one forced to continue relativising, that is, does making any truth value claim commit one to an infinite series of them, or is it simply that if one chose to, one can keep considering each further meta-claim as to its truth value?³⁴ Second, even if the framework relativist is committed to a regress, would it matter, would it be a vicious regress?

As for the former, the series is forced. The truth of p rests on the truth of $m-p$ which rests on $mm-p$ and so on. As for viciousness, the doxastic variations seem at most risk. They certainly would be if the series of ascending coherence propositions have to be the beliefs of some agent or community of agents, for this would generate the impossible scenario of an infinite series of beliefs. But the doxastic theses examined did not insist that any truth vehicle be a belief. Rather, it was the truth maker, the W , that was to be a belief set. Thus what one has with p , $m-p$, $mm-p$ and so on, is not the entailment of an infinite series of beliefs but of propositions in the abstract.

However a commitment to such a series' truth is also a commitment to the truth of the truth making sets for member propositions of that series and truth making sets for our doxastic variants are sets of beliefs. Whether the problem of an impossible-to-believe series of belief sets re-appears depends on what the truth making sets for $m-p$, $mm-p$ and so forth turn out to be. Let me begin with the first in the series, p . Let its truth maker be W . And W makes p true by p cohering with W . That is, in virtue of the coherence criteria being satisfied. Now speaking in this way makes it sound like some sort of absolute fact about p and W that they cohere. But as all states of affairs are internal to webs, the satisfaction by p and W of coherence criteria is itself a relative matter. This is most easily seen by ascending a semantic level. Thus for p to be true relative to W is for ' p coheres with W ' ($m-p$) to be true and to be true relatively; but relative to what?

There are several possibilities. The first is that ' p coheres with W ' ($m-p$) coheres with the set comprised of the coherence criteria (call it CC), that it is true relative to those

³⁴ I take Preston to make such a point (following Putnam) on pp.69-70.

criteria that p and W cohere. And what of the claim ' $m-p$ coheres with CC ' ($mm-p$)? Would not its coherence claim be by reference to those same criteria? Will it not be by reference to those criteria that $mm-p$ is relatively true? And that seems to stop the regress in its tracks. The truth making sets for the whole series³⁵ are just two: W and CC ; maybe even one (W and CC) if one is holistically inclined.

Strong Relativism's Fate

The solution just considered is illusory if it is strong relativism of any sort under discussion. Take p and let its falsity making set be W^* . That p is false relative to W^* , is explicated as a contrary of p , pc , cohering with W^* . Now what makes $m-pc$: ' pc coheres with W^* ' true? Again, let me invoke CC , the set of coherence criteria; $m-pc$ coheres with CC , and further meta-ing will keep invoking CC . All of this seems coherent but appearances deceive. Take $m-pc$: ' pc coheres with W^* '. A contrary of $m-pc$ is $mc-pc$: ' pc does not cohere with W^* '. The demands of global strong relativism include that this be (at least possibly) true relative to some set, but which set? The temptation is to say ' CC '. If it is a proposition about coherence of two "things" then is the appropriate truth making set not that of the coherence criteria, CC , (as before, with $m-pc$)? But this means that, by reference to the same set CC , both $m-pc$ and a contrary $mc-pc$ are true. Strong relativism seeks to avoid ridiculousness by having a proposition true relative to one set and false relative to another, and not having it true and false relative to the same set. On deeper examination the hope of stopping the regress of belief sets to act as truth makers for increasingly meta-level propositions, by repeated appeal to CC after a certain point, fails. But if one does not appeal to CC as truth maker for $mc-pc$ then what else is there to appeal to?

One may think that other criteria of coherence ought be appealed to, but then it is not clear whether strong relativism's demand that it be the same proposition that is true relative to one truth making web and false relative to another is transgressed. This is

³⁵ I take it that "claims" like 'one should judge coherence and truth by reference to CC ' are either reflexively relativised or seen as non-cognitive stances, as "setting the scene" for cognitive activity.

because saying in *m-pc* '*pc* coheres with W^* ', 'coheres' is just a shorthand device. In full, it would unpack into a compendium of propositions articulating the criteria constitutive of coherence. To deny that *pc* coheres with W^* is to deny those CC-style claims, to deny that that sort of coherence obtains. That *pc* and W^* do not cohere according to some other standards of coherence is irrelevant.

Perhaps some other defence is available but it is obscure what that may be. I cannot see how one would not at least have the criteria constitutive of CC as part of any set that is appealed to as truth maker for coherence claims, even if other beliefs were present too; and that is enough to generate the above difficulties. Thus, it seems to me that strong coherence truth relativism of any sort succumbs to this objection.

Weak Relativism

It may seem that weak relativism will not succumb. Strong relativism's difficulties came, not so much from the series involving *p*'s truth, as from this conjoined with consideration of series to do with *p*'s falsity. How does weak relativism fare? Some of its elements are shared with strong relativism. For instance, a proposition *p*'s truth is a matter of its coherence (as construed by CC) with some truth making web, W . As before, it seems possible to halt the truth making regress with W and CC. And, being weak relativism, it is not held that *p* must be false relative to some set. Rather, *p* is to be simply inexpressible, semantically unavailable, in terms of some W^*/P^* .³⁶ So what of that claim itself, call it '*m-p**', that *p* is inexpressible in P^* . As it is global coherence relativism in question, if true, then *m-p** is true-relative-to some truth value determining set. But which set is it apt to appeal to? The sense of *p* is given by its coherence relationships with P . It is meaningful only in virtue of its place within that web. The meta-proposition about *p* (*m-p**) is, however, also a meta-proposition about P^* . To express *m-p**, one must draw upon the conceptual resources of both P

³⁶ Recall the conflation of the meaning making P and the truth making W from earlier discussion. Further, although it is generic weak relativism which is under investigation, I will, for simplicity of exposition's sake, speak in a holist way. It does not affect the argument's substance to substitute other weak relativistic species.

and P^* . That P and P^* are incommensurable is not a difficulty for, even if one were not able to be coherently committed to the simultaneous use of both semantic webs for one proposition, they are not being used, but just mentioned, in the meta-linguistic $m-p^*$. There is no reason, therefore, to consider $m-p^*$ incoherent; but more is wanted by the weak relativist. The weak relativist must hold $m-p^*$ to be true and I, as seeker after coherent weak coherentism, must, to escape the objection here, at least hold the truth of $m-p^*$ to be possible. And that in turn means identifying a potentially truth making set for $m-p^*$. The obvious candidate is CC. For what it is for p to be expressible by means of P 's repertoire is for it to cohere with the members of P and that it coheres is to be settled by appeal to CC. Similarly with $m-p^*$; that p is inexpressible in terms of P^* is for p and P^* to not cohere and that is to be settled by appeal to CC. That is, $m-p^*$ will, if true, cohere with CC. And what of that claim, $mm-p^*$, call it; what would make it true? As before, the set of coherence criteria CC, form the appropriate relativiser. The regress is stopped.

In summary, whatever its other failings may be, weak coherence relativism is not open to the meta-regress argument objection.

WALKER'S OBJECTION

Walker finds the usual run of objections against a coherence theory of truth unconvincing;³⁷ but considers one to be devastating against even what he takes to be the best version of the theory. That version is global and doxastic, and thus it is only a doxastic thesis that is targeted by Walker.

In doxastic theses, although a necessary condition upon a set of propositions aspiring to be a truth maker is that it be coherent, another necessary condition is that the set be

³⁷ It should be noted that the variety of coherence truth theory that Walker sees resisting these objections is not examined by me as it is a quite unsuitable host for relativism.

the actual beliefs³⁸ of some cognitive community. In Walker's view, that latter requirement is fatal. In a succinct statement of the point, Walker objects that:

The [global] coherence theory of truth [cannot] say what [makes] it true that a certain proposition [is] believed. (1990, p. 178)

In Walker's view, such belief attributions have to have a correspondence account of their truth. Walker's target coherence theory is absolutist and so he does not have cause to raise the following, but it may also be raised as a concern that such belief attributions would also have to be viewed as absolutely true.

First, let me consider Walker's objection. For a doxastic theory to be able to distinguish itself from theories which have mere propositions in the abstract as forming truth making webs, it has to be able to distinguish a believed from an unbelieved proposition. What makes it true that some community C believes some proposition *p*? Let me eliminate a complication and ask this as a community member.³⁹ The truth of *pb*: 'C believes *p*' is a matter of it cohering with the set of C's beliefs. But for this to be possible assumes that a set of propositions is comprised of beliefs of C. Suppose that one such proposition is *q*. What makes *q* a belief of community C? One cannot appeal to the contents of people's minds, or to their behavioural dispositions in any commonsense realist way which assumes that there is some objective fact of the matter about what some community believes. 'C believes that *p*' cannot be taken to be saying something about C in the sense of picking out some property possessed by C as a matter of objective fact. For, if so, then *pb* would be correspondence-true if it captured that fact.

In the earlier explication of the notion of what a proposition was about in a coherence context, I took the focus to be other propositions. And, within doxasticism, their

³⁸ I will ignore for the moment the complexities which emerged in our discussion of Young's ideas in Chapter Nine. Such complications are beside the present point.

³⁹ See Putnam, 1983, p.237 and Preston's discussion of Putnam's thoughts - Preston, 1992, pp.65-67 for some of the complexities of cross-community interpretation.

truth is a joint matter of their links with those other propositions satisfying various coherence criteria and those other⁴⁰ propositions being believed. In short, the truth making set of propositions has no different status than p ; that q and its colleagues are beliefs is to be no more than some story of coherence, not one of objective realist fact. One could, of course, deny this and have a limited coherence theory in which the beliefs that believers had were some sort of objective qualities and then the relationships among them (about which one had correspondence-truth true claims) would be what governed all other truths. But no matter how the detail of this may go and no matter how satisfactory a dual theory of truth may turn out to be, it is global coherentism under investigation here; and it is to its fate that I now return.

The difficulty seems to be another vicious regress. If p 's status as a belief rests on q 's successful status as a belief, then how is it that q has that status? If one appeals to its coherence with r and so on then a vicious infinite chain looms - vicious, if nothing else, because the believers only have a finite cognitive capacity. We have already discussed one other option, that of giving some propositions (that C believes q and so forth) the status of truth gained in some way other than coherence. It was rejected as rejecting global coherentism. Would the last of the usual alternatives, a circle, do? Why could p 's status as believed not depend on, among other things, q having that status and q having that status depend on, among other things, p having that status? If the picture here is that one has transmission of a status, that of being a belief of C , from q to p in virtue of some sort of relationship that p has to q , then the obvious awkwardness is that if q itself gets that status from p then it has nothing to transmit to p unless p already had it. The point can be put with a nice metaphor, a bucket chain has to get its water from outside the chain, a circular bucket chain would have no water to use.

⁴⁰ Or some other; I'm ignoring detail as to whether the doxasticism is holist or discretist.

In considering justification relationships earlier,⁴¹ and facing the above unpalatable alternatives, I accepted a promising suggestion by Day as sound.⁴² This was that one take the set or web as the primary locus of justifiedness/truth and have truth derive from web membership. So *p* would not have the status 'believed by C' in its own right but only in virtue of set membership. Being a belief of C would be a status parasitic on that of the set being believed. But how does the set get that status? After all, this is supposed to be a status above and beyond that of being merely a coherent set of abstract propositions.

The problem apparently looms again at this level. We cannot look outside the set at, say, some minds and observe that those minds, as a matter of objective fact, stand in the appropriate propositional attitude to the set of C's beliefs, call it 'W'. The same goes for reproducing the two vicious series at another level (set W, to a yet further, new, set, X). It needs to be something internal to W that constitutes W as a truth making belief set. Moreover, it cannot be just the same network of internal coherence relationships that mere sets of abstract propositions may have. The truth making set has to be coherent and believed.

The only answer that I can see for a global coherentist is to suggest that some set of propositions may be internally related in two ways. They would be, first, those relationships constitutive of it being a coherent set, and second, those relationships constitutive of it being a set of beliefs of some cognitive community. Perhaps this is possible, but if it is another set of belief making relationships then a set will either have them or not. But what would be going on when a set of mere propositions in the abstract becomes believed? New internal relationships would have to arise.

The oddities emerging here warrant a rethink. On the commonsense view, the set would acquire its status as believed in virtue of it entering into a new relationship with

⁴¹ See Chapter 8.

⁴² After all, this thesis is not defending coherentism but trying to see if, assuming it, relativism is articulable within it. Given this the thesis will, like any such exercise, rest on assumptions that it will not defend.

something external to itself, to wit, a believer. Now one cannot give a realist/objective-existence-of-believers construal of this on pain of ceasing to be globally coherentist. But perhaps this was rejected too quickly. One could parse this in a way more congenial to coherentism. That a community C exists, that it has a number of minds or propensities to behaviour, that this is all true, would be a matter of these just written propositions forming a part of a set Y that is internally coherent at least. But, on the doxastic account, that would not be enough. For it to be true that there is that community, ready to grant W the status of believed in virtue of some belief making relationship of C to W, demands that Y be itself a set of beliefs. And how does it get that status? The discussion gets repeated and the problems remain.

Another problem is to find some relationship among a set of propositions that will elevate them to "believed by" status. And even if this is manageable, would this not remain an internal feature of a set of propositions in the abstract? Yet that is what doxasticism is trying to avoid. But to have believers play a central semantic role requires a more robust sense of their objective existence than coherentism of the globally anti-realist sort can allow.

In summary, Walker is right that global, or pure, doxastic coherentism is in grave difficulty concerning the origin of the status as "believed" of truth making sets. It should be noted, however, that Walker's objection is a general problem for doxastic coherentism as a host theory and not for relativism as such. Do extra difficulties ensue if relativistic doxasticism is under examination? Or does it equally threaten absolutism⁴³ and relativism? Certainly, if belief making is just another internal relational feature of a propositional web, extra to its coherence, then it is hard to see how one can have strong relativism. The set would need not just the extra relationships constitutive of it being believed by C but also a third set of relationships constitutive of it being not-believed by community D. This adds no new qualitative difficulty to what has gone before, it simply adds complexity.

⁴³ Indeed, in Walker's hands it is raised against absolutist coherentism in particular.

What would cause difficulties, similar to those worked through earlier, would be if community D had beliefs about the beliefs of community C. In particular, beliefs to the effect that C's beliefs did not include W. Here one would have some set of propositions that were not just coherent and had a second relationship set constitutive of them being C-beliefs but also a third relationship constitutive of them being D-beliefs that they are not C-beliefs. At this point, the suggestion seems incomprehensible.

What of the other suggestion that W being a set of beliefs of C was a matter of it standing in some sort of relationship with a further set Y of propositions which proposed the existence of C. That relationship could fail to hold with some other set of propositions Z, proposing the existence of another community D. So, in virtue of Y and W standing in that relationship, W would be believed by C; and in virtue of Z and W not standing in that relationship W would not be believed by D. Moreover some contrary set to W, one may be believed by D. So we would have *p* true relative to W and false relative to Wc. This yields no special problem for the relativist. Except that one will get "beliefs about beliefs" problems when one community's beliefs are the focus of another's.

Basically, the result is that Walker's objection should be discounted as an objection to relativism as such. It is more an objection to the host theory, global doxastic coherentism, and if it succeeds, it succeeds against absolutism as well as relativism. Thus, in the context of this thesis, it fails.

SUMMARY

The result of the above is that, although Walker's objection fails to establish any particular problems for coherence relativism, and the meta-regress argument only succeeds against strong relativism, the problems about reflexiveness and relativistic

theses succeed against both strong and weak variations of coherence relativism. Of the two host theories of truth within which the explication of global truth relativism was sought, only the correspondence theory is, surprisingly, able to support a global framework truth relativism, albeit only of the weak variety.

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