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The Self and Social Relations

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Abstract

The central subject of this thesis is the nature of the self. I argue against an atomistic conception which takes the human self to exist self-sufficiently and prior to social relations, and in favour of a holistic conception which takes the self to be constitutively dependent on social relations. I defend this view against criticisms that a holistic account undermines the need for what I call 'critical distance' between subjects and their communities. This involves answering the charges that such constitutive dependence: 1) removes the possibility for individuals to determine themselves freely apart from the communities in which they engage; and 2) deprives us of an external standard with which to engage critically with those constitutive communities.

I argue that the above criticisms are encouraged by reliance on a certain epistemological picture. This picture involves a foundationalist construal of knowledge that ultimately depends on a notion of an immediately given epistemic content that can serve to give us an absolute conception of an objective reality with which we can do away with partial or relative conceptions of ourselves and the world we inhabit. It is this that leads the critic to demand a standard external to communities, which in turn encourages a notion of the self and freedom that can ultimately be grounded apart from the "distortions" of social practice.

I directly attack the notion of an immediately given epistemic content through a series of transcendental arguments, showing that the condition of possibility for our forming any conception of ourselves or the world is participation in social forms of life. I further argue that properly human identities are essentially shaped by the self-conceptions these forms of life make available to us. Since freedom can no longer depend on radical detachment, I offer a new account of freedom as a social achievement, based on a notion of rational progress which allows us to develop ourselves and our social world critically, drawing only on those standards available within our practices.

With the notion of an immediately given epistemic content undermined, I have shown not only that freedom and rational progress are consistent with a holistic account, but that in fact they depend on such a holistic account.

No man is an island,

Entire of itself,

Every man is a piece of the continent,

A part of the main.

- John Donne

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Introduction

In this thesis I argue against an atomist conception of the individual and in favour of a holistic conception. The former position takes the human individual to exist self-sufficiently and prior to any involvement in social relations, and the latter takes social relations to be constitutive of the properly human individual. The atomist view does not necessarily deny that social relations can and do enhance the lives of individuals, or that social relations can and do play a causal role in the individual's own personal development. Their claim is that the properly human individual can be abstracted away from social relations without ceasing to be what he or she essentially is. The holistic view, by contrast, holds that social relations are constitutive of the essence of properly human individuals, and abstracted away from those relations the individual could no longer exist.

Resistance to the holistic view often comes from the erroneous perception that it is perilous to our ordinary conceptions of freedom and critical enquiry. It is thought that freedom depends on the individual's ability to define themselves and to act apart from social relations, and social relations can only ever be, in the form of a necessary evil, a limitation on the individual's freedom. However, if we can only be properly human by acting as a participant in a larger structured practice, then there seems to be little room left for the idea that I can define myself and make choices apart from those practices. Similarly, it is thought that rational criticism depends on our ability to find standards or principles of reason apart from our social communities with which we can critically engage with those communities. However, if reason and knowledge are things we acquire through membership in a social community then this notion of critical enquiry is also put under pressure. The assumption that freedom and critical enquiry cannot be made sense of on the holistic view, in combination with the great value placed in each of these, gives cause to doubt the value of a holistic conception of the individual.

Both the atomist conception of the individual, and the negative perception held towards holistic accounts, are encouraged by any foundationalist epistemology which maintains that it is possible to form an objective conception of an independent reality. Epistemologies such as this tend to form a notion of the individual as ideally disengaged, as capable of understanding themselves and the world through a self-reflexive act of withdrawal away from the world within which they live, and from all partial or relative beliefs. It is through this self-reflexive withdrawal that they aim to get in touch with a kind of knowledge which is immediate and indubitable. An agent who can disengage from the world entirely and still

remain an individual, is exactly the atomist conception I oppose. Furthermore, any picture of knowledge which requires a universal standard or foundation, is going to see the holistic understanding of reason as relative to social practices, to be dogmatic and uncritical. Foundationalist thinking tends to see the ideally disengaged agent, and the ability to find universal critical standards apart from our social communities, as forming the basis of freedom and autonomy, of being able to think and make choices for oneself. It is because I take this epistemological picture both to support atomist conceptions of the individual and to encourage the perception that holism is inconsistent with freedom and critical enquiry, that I will spend much of this thesis working against the foundationalist project.

In chapter 1 I give an introduction to atomist and holistic conceptions of the individual. I use Mill as a representative of atomism and Bradley as a representative of holism. I argue that there are irreconcilable tensions in Mill's account of human nature and the human individual which holism can resolve. I argue against Mill that our ultimate end cannot be pleasure, but must be self-realisation within a social whole. I also argue that human freedom cannot be secured on the basis of maximal negative liberty, but must be secured on the basis of participation within concrete social practices. Freedom is achieved by realising ourselves as part of a social whole.

In chapter 2 I give my response to the claim that holism cannot accommodate critical enquiry, or that it leaves no room for the notion of 'thinking for oneself'. I claim that this criticism achieves its force on the basis of an undue identification of rational criticism with a foundationalist epistemology. I spend the rest of the chapter arguing that there are patterns of reasoning which can justify our moving from one position to a rival incompatible position, without drawing on any standard external to either of those positions. In this way standards for criticising our social practices are shown to exist within those very practices. I follow Kuhn's account of scientific development, and Taylor's notion of a transitional argument to make this point, and I end by giving an argument for what 'thinking for oneself' consists in.

In chapter 3 I outline foundationalism and its reliance on an immediately given epistemic content. I develop the foundationalist account as related to a particular picture of the human condition, and highlight its connection to atomist conceptions of the individual. I give arguments for, and examples of, both rationalist and empiricist forms of immediacy. I end the chapter by highlighting what I take to be incoherent in the notion of an immediately given epistemic content, and outline the transcendental form of argument I

will use to draw out this incoherency. In giving these transcendental arguments over the following two chapters, I will be putting pressure on the atomist conception of the individual which is so connected with the foundationalist enterprise.

Chapter 4 gives the first transcendental argument against immediacy. In this chapter the notion of immediacy being argued against is the empiricist notion of a bare sensory particular. Before offering these arguments I spend a few sections on methodology, outlining an approach to epistemology which can criticise foundationalism from within without itself relying on any foundational standard. I follow Taylor in giving a transcendental interpretation of Hegel's arguments against sense-certainty which at the same time preserves the dialectical nature of his arguments. Against Taylor I argue that transcendental arguments cannot be entirely free of presuppositions. I end the chapter by arguing that awareness of bare sensory particulars depends on their being mediated first of all through universals or concepts.

Chapter 5 gives the second transcendental argument against immediacy. In this chapter the notion of immediacy being argued against is the rationalist notion of the conceptually given. I outline what a notion of the conceptually given might look like, and show that it depends on what Wittgenstein called a 'private language'. I then give an account of Wittgenstein's arguments against the possibility of a private language, and in favour of social practice as the only thing that can ground what counts as applying a concept appropriately or inappropriately. I end the chapter by answering some of Ayer's criticisms of these arguments.

Chapter 6 builds on the conclusions of chapter 5, that our grasp of concepts depends on our mastery of a social practice, and develops them more fully to argue that reason and knowledge are grounded in social practice. I argue that any notion of reason seen to involve an appeal to, or to depend on the consultation of a 'real rule' or a 'rule itself' leads to an infinite regress. This regress can only be stopped by seeing the consulting of rules to bottom out in the tacit grasp of how to perform appropriately in social space. I also argue that knowledge more broadly is a social practice, it is something that we do. As such, the sceptic's attempt to detach themselves from the world of practice, and to bring everything he believes and everything that he does before himself as a theoretical object requiring justification, is in principle incoherent. By this point I take the account of rational progress discussed in chapter 2 to be more fully justified, and I take the notion of a disengaged rational agent to be shown false.

Chapter 7 brings together the epistemological conclusions I have reached with my earlier concerns about the individual's ability to freely develop him or herself. This chapter is the culmination of everything argued so far, and offers an account of the individual as being partially constituted by the self-descriptions he or she forms of him or herself, where those descriptions are subject to socially grounded objective standards, while also allowing the subject to have a degree of creativity in choosing which descriptions to endorse. I also briefly discuss the possibility of critically developing those social frameworks within which we are participants as a way of opening up to ourselves new possibilities of self-description. In this way the development of both the individual and the social world can still be understood on the basis of a critical interaction between the two, where each contains conflicts and tensions that can only be resolved by the mutual development of each. A second important strand of argument in this chapter aims to show that certain essential features of the human identity depend on the world of meanings opened up to us by social practice.

I end in chapter 8 with a brief argument to show the connection of the holistic conception of the individual with an account of mental crisis and schizophrenia. This chapter is included to show that our attempts at forming coherent self-descriptions, as part of an ongoing project of self-realization, do not always proceed smoothly. On the contrary, these attempts often result not in autonomy, but in alienation and mental crisis.

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Chapter 1: Mill and Bradley on the Individual

I - Introduction

In this chapter I explore atomist and holistic conceptions of the individual, while ultimately arguing for the superiority of the holistic position. In general terms an atomist conception holds that the individual is logically prior to and independent of the communities of which they are members. The independence here referred to means that whatever relations the individual has to a community, those relations are accidental rather than essential to the individual being the individual he or she is; there may be a causal interaction through which the individual may grow and develop in relation to their community, but that community is in no way constitutive of the individual.

By contrast, the holistic position holds that the community is logically prior to the individual and the individual is dependent on that community for being the individual he or she is, or at least that the individual and the community must arise together.[1] Conversely, the dependence here referred to is not one of accidental but rather of essential relations holding between individual and community; it is not simply that the individual grows and develops through their causal interactions with their community, rather, the community is constitutive of the individual being what they are, and apart from that community the individual could never be.[2] To avoid a simple confusion, the holistic position does not claim that we cease to exist as biologically human beings apart from communities, only that those features of what we consider properly human subjects cease to be possible apart from communities.[3]

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[1] Logically speaking one should say that individual and community come together, that there can be no community without the particular individuals of which it is composed, but also that there can be no individuals without the community of which they are members, and 'individual' means here more than simply a biological being, it means a properly human subject of a particular sort. Whole and part come together in an internally related way, making the other what it is. Historically speaking however, people are born into communities which are already established, and it is through acculturation into that community that they become fully realised individuals.

[2] A good overview of what is meant by a holistic account of the individual can be found in Richard T. De George, "Social Reality and Social Relations," *The Review of Metaphysics* 37, no. 1 (1983): 3-20.

[3] It should be noted that the terms 'atomist' and 'holist' apply more broadly than to theories of individual human beings and the communities they are members of. More generally the terms refer to types of metaphysical theory. An atomist metaphysic holds that the only real things are individuals or particulars entering into external relations, i.e. relations that do not alter the particulars entering into those relations, and as such any given whole or universal is nothing other than the totality of particulars that make it up - wholes or universals are not themselves real. A holistic metaphysic holds that individuals or particulars relate to one another internally, i.e. A and B are only what they are in virtue of the relation they hold to one another, and outside that relation A is no longer A and B is no

Within the dichotomy of atomist and holistic accounts of the self certain tensions tend to arise which revolve around the relationship between the individual and society. If one focuses on the holistic account of individuals, one tends to worry that the individual as we commonly think of him[4] gets lost somewhere, that community is entitled to encroach more and more on each individual, demanding conformity to the whole and the diminishing of genuine difference, uniqueness, spontaneity, in short: individuality. One also tends to worry that this is a recipe for political despotism, that the individual can rightfully be subordinated to social ends without limit, since the individual's ends are the community's ends.[5] Furthermore, this might be thought to stifle progress: if individuals in all their reason and value are constitutively determined by the communities they are a part of, then by what standard do we critically develop those communities?

Conversely, if one focuses on the atomist account, different tensions seem to arise, though they are harder to express concisely and lack the same *prima facie* force as those faced by the holistic account. Consequently more effort needs to be put in to showing that these tensions are real and problematic - and as I contend these tensions are in fact the more problematic ones. These tensions will come out more fully throughout this chapter and those to follow, but I will indicate them here in a preliminary way. To put the point very generally, atomist thinkers are faced with the need to explain what might be called the 'higher' aspects of human life on the basis of prior individuals coming together in a mere collection. If we are individuals with beliefs, values and ends apart from social relations, from where derives our sense of obligation to something greater than our immediate selves, to our social environment or humanity at large? If there is nothing apart from me

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longer B, such that things are only real in their relations. As such it is the whole or the universal which is properly real. The application of these terms that I make in this paragraph is clearly a particular case of their more general use, though in places I also use the terms in their more general metaphysical application. When, for instance, I accuse Mill of being an atomist thinker, this accusation applies in the broadest metaphysical sense as well in the social sense.

[4] Due to the limitations of the English language, and for reasons of style, I will sometimes use the terms 'he' and 'him' where one might also have used 'she' and 'her'.

[5] Isaiah Berlin offers us a good example of someone who reacts to the holistic conception by expounding this particular tension, and the dangers that are therefore supposedly inherent in the holistic theory of individuals. Berlin's own discussion involves a particular historical conception of positive freedom as the identification of individual wills with the social will, so that there is no longer any difference between what I want and what the social whole wants. According to Berlin this account would seem to justify reconciling or even identifying the achievement of freedom with the despotic subordination of individuals. See Isaiah Berlin, "Two Concepts of Liberty," in *Liberty*, ed. Henry Hardy (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 191 - 200. Our case has not been helped by Rousseau's use of the ominous phrase 'forced to be free' when discussing similar ideas. See Book I, chapter 7 of Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. Maurice Cranston (London: Penguin Books, 1968).

which can at the same time place obligations on me, how do I ever recognise the need to develop my character, including my faculties, my range and quality of desire, my virtues? What about the sense we might have that the social world opens up possibilities of existence for us which are essential to our fully realising ourselves? There seems to be something right to the idea that we are, in a strong sense, social beings.

I think those tensions which seem to arise on the atomist account cannot be resolved by that account, whereas those tensions which seem to arise on the holistic account can be resolved by that account. I will use Mill as a representative figure of atomism, and Bradley as a representative figure of holism. Though a caveat I wish to make is that while I draw quite heavily on the works of Mill - *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism* in particular - my aim here is not to offer up or to *justify* an interpretation of Mill (nor for that matter of Bradley, who offers a much larger system of ideas than I wish to commit myself to here). I want rather to use my interpretation of Mill as a representation of the atomist outlook, and it is the atomist outlook itself which primarily interests me.

In discussing Mill's defence of liberty Richard Norman says:

> Mill, in all his works, was nothing if not an honest writer, sensitive to the complexities and difficulties of his subject-matter, and *On Liberty,* by its very inconsistencies and contradictions, vividly expresses the tensions within the concept of 'freedom' and the conflicting traditions of philosophical thought dealing with the concept.[6]

While Norman is here focusing on Mill's treatment of the concept of 'freedom', this serves as an excellent assessment of much of Mill's philosophy. To Mill's credit he was well aware of those features of human nature for which atomists might be accused of failing to find room, and the subsequent tensions which his position might be held to contain. He was also concerned to resolve those tensions. He was committed both to Bentham's atomistic utilitarianism as an ethical framework and also acutely aware of certain features of human nature that Bentham was blind to, and as such he saw Bentham's philosophy as fundamentally correct but incomplete, and was eager to show how that framework could accommodate those features of human nature.[7] Writing on Bentham, Mill says:

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[6] Richard Norman, *Free and Equal* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 9.

[7] Mill's discussions of Bentham and Coleridge are self-consciously an attempt to show what is great and what is lacking in each of these philosophers, and to highlight the task of reconciling what is great in each. This is consistent with the arguments Mill puts forward in On Liberty about the importance

He was a man both of remarkable endowments for philosophy, and of remarkable deficiencies for it: fitted, beyond almost any man, for drawing from his premises, conclusions not only correct, but sufficiently precise and specific to be practical: but whose general conception of human nature and life, furnished him with an unusually slender stock of premises.[8]

The truths which are not Bentham's, which his philosophy takes no account of, are many and important; but his non-recognition of them does not put them out of existence; they are still with us, and it is a comparatively easy task that is reserved for us, to harmonize those truths with his.[9]

Thus, in being committed to the atomist philosophy of utilitarianism and in recognising those facts of human nature discussed above, Mill is aware of the tensions which concern me. In trying to resolve those tensions by reconciling those facts of human nature with his utilitarianism, he is useful in showing how difficult it is for atomists to accomplish this task, for he ends up in inconsistencies that he cannot escape. In short, despite Mill's claim that it is a 'comparatively easy task' to perform this reconciliation, I wish to argue that it is in fact impossible. The only way to make sense of those facts of human nature - which Mill so rightly elaborates - without inconsistency, is to adopt a holistic understanding of the individual, by seeing the individual as essentially related to social communities, as trying to realise themselves as part of a wider social whole.

While this chapter offers its own independent arguments, drawn out of the opposition between Mill and Bradley's conflicting ideas about the nature of the individual and the individual's relation to society, it is also partly serving as a first glance at the general issues which concern me. The notion of the human individual as an essentially social being, and the failure of atomist metaphysics or individualist social theories to account for the full range of what we consider properly human features of individuals, both receive fuller and

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of bringing competing ideas into open conflict, so as to reconcile the half truths in each. As such, Mill's essays on Bentham and Coleridge are a worthwhile place to turn to understand Mill's project as I have tried to outline it here. See J. S. Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, ed. F. R. Leavis (London: Chatto & Windus, 1950). Mill's autobiography is also an informative place to turn in order to see how Mill came to be so wedded to the utilitarian framework, while hoping to extend its explanatory reach to wider features of human nature. See J. S. Mill, *Autobiography* (London: Penguin Books, 1989).

[8] Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, 63.

[9] Ibid., 64

more sustained argument in later chapters. In particular, I say more about the tensions faced by holistic accounts in later chapters.[10]

I will first of all deal with Mill's notion of 'higher pleasures' and the inconsistencies involved in his account. I will then deal with Mill's notion of the flourishing individual being made possible simply through a maximisation of negative freedom and the inconsistencies this account faces . Finally, I will develop Bradley's notion that our end is self-realisation within a social whole, and suggest that this avoids the inconsistencies Mill gets caught up in while also managing to make sense of those aspects of human nature which rightly concern him.

II - Utilitarianism and the higher pleasures

In this section I will give a brief overview of Mill's utilitarianism and show how it can be seen as a form of atomism. I will also give an account of Mill's attempt to reconcile his utilitarianism with one of those facts of human nature which I discussed above, the so-called 'higher pleasures'.

In *Utilitarianism* Mill is concerned to uncover the first principle or foundation of the study of ethics. He wants to uncover the basic criterion by which we can judge right from wrong. Despite the places Mill wishes to go with his theory, in its fundamentals it is a form of hedonism, and so the criterion for right and wrong which he ultimately accepts is pleasure.

> The creed which accepts as the foundation of morals, Utility, or the Greatest Happiness Principle, holds that actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness, wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure, and the absence of pain; by unhappiness, pain, and the privation of pleasure.[11]

It is important to see that this is not just a theory of ethics but also a theory about human nature. It claims that the only thing of intrinsic value to us is a feeling of pleasure, and the ultimate end of all our actions the accumulation of pleasures. Thus, Mill argues that 'questions about ends are, in other words, questions about what things are desirable. The utilitarian doctrine is that happiness (equated with pleasure) is desirable, and the only

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[10] The issue concerning the supposed diminution of the individual as society encroaches is dealt with in this chapter (though it is also connected to the issue of freedom which is discussed elsewhere). The issue of rationally criticising one's community is dealt with in chapter 2. The issue concerning freedom is dealt with partly in this chapter, but also in chapter 2, chapter 7 and chapter 8.

[11] J. S. Mill, "Utilitarianism," in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 137.

thing desirable, as an end; all other things being only desirable as means to that end.'[12] Note that as a consequence of this, any discussion of a thing's value, or any question regarding the ends of an individual, are ultimately reducible to the feelings of pleasure we expect it to give us either directly or indirectly. For Mill, a feeling such as dignity is not valuable in itself, and nor is the life of dignity which we seek an end in itself, rather, we seek dignity because we value pleasure, and dignity is a means of our achieving that pleasure.[13]

It should be clear here that Mill is offering a form of psychologism, as is unsurprising given his empiricist commitments. The ultimate end for humans, the nature of value and ethical obligation are all being explained and justified through a description of the inner workings of human thought. Consider that his proof of the Happiness Principle consists in our attending to our own faculties or internal consciousness and noticing that the desiring of some end always consists in the expectation of pleasure.[14] Consider the role pleasure - a supposedly concrete and easily identifiable psychological state - plays in grounding all of the above: 'The internal sanction of duty, whatever our standard of duty may be, is one and the same - a feeling in our own mind - a pain, more or less intense, attendant on violation of duty.'[15] Psychologism and empiricism tend to involve an atomist metaphysic insofar as they both attempt to reduce complex wholes to particulars, those particulars ordinarily being privately identifiable psychological or experiential states. 'Dignity' and 'duty' are made amenable to explanation through some sort of reduction; pleasure is a much easier thing to grasp, so the empiricist would have it, than either of these.[16]

A further form of atomism that should be noted here is the social atomism that comes together with this account. We are fundamentally pleasure seeking creatures, and given

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[12] Ibid., 168

[13] Mill is more nuanced than this but I do not want to get side tracked on the issue. Mill claims that certain means become in our minds so associated with the end of pleasure that the distinction between means and end breaks down, and the means itself becomes a part of happiness, or an 'ingredient of happiness itself'. Mill's hope here is to say that we value certain things - such as virtue - in themselves and not just as a means to happiness, while still making pleasure the locus of value. While I do not think this is a particularly coherent argument, note that the essential role of pleasure in determining our values and ends has not dropped out of the picture. Were virtue not connected with pleasure - in whatever manner Mill thinks is implied by the phrase 'ingredient of happiness' - it would not be valued. See Ibid., 170

[14] Ibid., 168

[15] Ibid., 161

[16] I spend chapters 3, 4 and 5 largely arguing against the sort of atomism which is present in empiricist epistemology.

that our end is simply the accumulation of pleasure, this is something we can achieve in principle independently of social relations. It might be that, contingently speaking, social relations help us achieve happiness, but such social relations are not essentially a part of the end of human life. Given that this atomism is an implicit element of the account Mill outlines, it is a hardly surprising feature of Mill's arguments that he takes an instrumental attitude towards social relations. Indeed, it is a noticeable feature of his two works, *On Liberty* and *Utilitarianism*, that he has a utopian optimism concerning the increase of pleasure for individuals as a consequence of an increased concern for the general welfare of others. He also argues for a need to cultivate in people their 'social feelings'[17] so as to help bind within us a feeling of pleasure with the doing of duty, because ultimately the solidarity and social cooperation which results will increase the pleasure of all. Insofar as we are social beings for Mill, it is not because the social relations we form or the ends made available to us through those relations are in any way constitutive of us, it is only insofar as we tend to have 'social feelings'. The social relations we form, and social ends such as duty, are secondary to our nature as pleasure seeking creatures.

I now want to deal with Mill's attempt to reconcile the 'higher pleasures' with his hedonism. Mill views 'higher pleasures' as those 'pleasures of the intellect, of the feelings and imagination, and of the moral sentiments'.[18] Included here might be the painful but rewarding process of solving an intellectual puzzle, the sense of authenticity upon realising and correcting one's disingenuous manner, the mixture of exhaustion and fulfilment upon writing a novel, magnanimity towards someone who has done you great wrong and so on. Importantly, we often think of these activities as potentially painful or arduous, but nevertheless important. The concern here is that the properly fulfilled human life involves a form of flourishing by aiming for these higher activities rather than, for want of a better phrase, the more animalistic ones. Mill wishes to avoid the interpretation of his position

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[17] It is a commonly recognised problem in Mill's position that he needs to move from merely psychological claims about human ends and motivations to normative claims concerning our obligations to others. The psychological claim is that the only thing of intrinsic value is the mental state of pleasure, and everything we do is motivated by a desire for that state. His normative claims demand that we maximise pleasure not just for ourselves but for the greatest number. The issue here is that his normative claims seem to take us beyond the psychological claims which he originally used to try and ground his ethic. Remember, this is one of the tensions which atomism faces. The introduction of 'social feeling' is in part an attempt to resolve this issue. The introduction of this feeling is an attempt to safeguard the otherwise contingent connection between our doing of duty and the feeling of pleasure. We are naturally social creatures who come with social sentiments, and those sentiments need to be cultivated to guarantee greater happiness for all. See Ibid., 164

[18] Ibid., 138

which holds it to have a base view of human nature by failing to account for the higher elements of human life. Speaking of his own position, Mill says:

> Such a theory of life excites in many minds, and among them in some of the most estimable in feeling the purpose, inveterate dislike. To suppose that life has (as they express it) no higher end than pleasure - no better and nobler object of desire and pursuit - they designate as utterly mean and grovelling; as a doctrine worthy only of swine.[19]

However, while eager to deny this interpretation of his own stance, it is one which can be quite easily applied to the merely quantitative utilitarianism of Bentham, who argued that there was no choosing between different activities except for the *quantity* of pleasure they afforded. Thus, for two very different kinds of activity which we ordinarily consider to be of a very different order, such as smoking a cigarette and composing music, one a trifling source of fleeting pleasure, the other a more fulfilling and important activity, there really is no telling them apart in terms of value except for the quantity of pleasure they give us. If one person gets immense pleasure from smoking a cigarette but very little from composing music, then for him, smoking is the more valuable, higher end of life. The idea that in being human there are characteristically higher activities towards which we should strive, loses its sense. If I can smoke enough then I need not worry about composing music.

Mill tries to circumvent the accusation as it is applicable to Bentham by adding a qualitative as well as quantitative dimension to the pleasures any given activity may afford us.

> It is quite compatible with the principle of utility to recognize the fact, that some kinds of pleasure are more desirable and more valuable than others. It would be absurd that while, in estimating all other things, quality is considered as well as quantity, the estimation of pleasures should be supposed to depend on quantity alone.[20]

Mill's response, therefore, is that there is every sense to the notion of a higher form of human life, the achievement of which is a good for people to strive for, it is just that what distinguishes the higher life from the lower life is nothing other than *kinds* of pleasure, such that one would never pick the lower kind over the higher kind if they had knowledge of each. Lounging on a beach might give me large quantities of pleasure with very little

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[19]Ibid., 137

[20]Ibid., 138

attendant discomfort, and learning a difficult subject so that I can perform charity mentoring might cause me great discomfort and a fairly small amount of pleasure. However, the *kind* of pleasure afforded me by learning and giving my time to a charity is of a greater *quality,* and so a life involving the achievement of this sort of end is better than a life involving the other sort of end. This constitutes the justification of Mill's claim that 'it is better to be a human being dissatisfied than a pig satisfied; better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied.'[21]

This attempt at reconciliation is famously incoherent.[22] Bradley makes its incoherence clear by simply clarifying the language being used in Mill's discussion.[23] He points out first of all that the phrases 'higher' and 'lower' are relative judgements, they are made comparatively in relation to some 'top' or 'bottom'. A work of art might be higher than another if the top and bottom are beauty and ugliness respectively. However, that same work of art might be lower than the other if the top and bottom are expensive and cheap respectively. Thus the 'top' and 'bottom' required for the comparative judgement of 'higher' and 'lower' are themselves relative; by changing the end in question we change the standards by which things are comparatively measured as higher or lower.

> Again, higher and lower, as comparative terms, refer to degree. What is higher has a greater degree (or it has a greater number of degrees) of something definite; what is lower has a less degree or number of degrees. Their quality, as higher and lower, is referable to quantity. So that apart from quantity, apart from degree, there is no comparison, no estimation, no higher and lower at all.[24]

The result is that 'higher pleasure' either just means greater quantity of pleasure, or it means higher in reference to some other standard, or it means nothing at all. The first

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[21]Ibid., 140

[22] For further criticisms see the following: T. H. Green, *Prolegomena to Ethics*, Fifth ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1906). H. Sidgwick, *The Methods of Ethics*, Seventh ed. (London: Macmillan, 1907). G. E. Moore, *Principia Ethica* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1903). For an excellent but more general criticism of the attempt to reduce ethics to a hedonist calculus, which also has some affinity with my own account of the importance of self-realisation, see J. C. C. Smart and Bernard Williams, *Utilitarianism: For and Against* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1973), 96 - 117.

[23] His whole discussion extends across seven pages of *Ethical Studies*, and in this space he takes the arguments a little further than I can here. In particular he tackles Mill's attempt to measure higher and lower pleasures on the basis of competent judges. Bradley's arguments here are also extremely cogent and worth reading. See F. H. Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, Second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1927), 116 - 122.

[24]Ibid., 118

option should be excluded right away because it collapses Mill's claims into the Benthamite form of quantitative utilitarianism. But then given the qualities of higher and lower have to be referred to some quantity we are left asking what standard Mill's higher and lower pleasures are to be referred to. If we refer them to a standard other than pleasure - as indeed we must - then we have gone beyond pleasure as the sole standard of value. I might, for instance, have less quantity of a given pleasure, but I might speak of that pleasure as higher because it is more dignified, and I have then turned to a standard of assessment other than pleasure. There is thus no comparison between different kinds without reference to some further standard.

> If you are to prefer a higher pleasure to a lower without reference to quantity - then there is an end altogether of the principle which puts the measure in the surplus of pleasure... To work the sum you must reduce the data to the same denomination. You must go to quantity or nothing: you decline to go to quantity and hence you can not get any result. But if you refuse to work the sum, you abandon the greatest amount of pleasure principle.[25]

I think such a standard is available to us for assessing certain kinds of pleasure as higher than others independently of their respective quantities, but that standard takes us beyond pleasures themselves as the sole locus of value, and hedonism would in this way be breached as a theory of ultimate ends. The interesting question is what can provide us with a standard for assessing some desires as higher and lower, and to therefore save the insights of Mill's distinction while offering a different account of the ends of human action. As I develop my own account against Mill towards the end of this chapter I will show how we can make sense of such a standard within a holistic account which takes self-realisation as our end.[26]

Despite these criticisms it is important to see, as was suggested in my introduction, that Mill is trying to make sense of genuine and important facts about human nature, and to reconcile them with his atomism. As Sayers argues: 'Critics have concentrated almost exclusively on the formal point that Mill is inconsistent... the result is that minimal

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[25]Ibid., 119

[26] I pick up the same theme in chapter 8 where I discuss Taylor's notion of higher order evaluation, the evaluation of particular desires as higher or lower, more or less worthy. On this account, contra Mill, things are not valued simply because they are desired, rather desires themselves are assessable according to some other standard. By this point in the thesis I have developed a far more robust framework with which to make sense of this higher standard, this wider end of human activity, as grounded in the conceptions afforded us by social practice for our own self-realisation.

attention has been given to the content of Mill's distinction and to the points which Mill is trying to make with it. This is unfortunate, because Mill's discussion involves fundamental moral and social issues of great interest and importance.'[27] It is important to see that his failure to make sense of these facts should not lead us to dismiss them. Rather, we should pay closer attention to them in trying to figure out what theory *can* make sense of or further illuminate them. With this aim in mind I will turn to Mill's writings on the individual to be found in his work *On Liberty*, where he elaborates similar ideas in a different context. We will find in this argument a further contradiction between his account of the individual and the framework within which he works, but we will also start to see what *is* required to make sense of these features of the individual.

III - Individual flourishing: demarcating the individual from the social

In *Utilitarianism* Mill introduces the notion of 'higher pleasures' as part of an effort to make sense of the greater potential human beings have for a richer and more varied experience of the world than lower animals, and the greater satisfaction human beings can take in exercising and developing those potentialities. In chapter 3 of *On Liberty*, 'Of Individuality, as One of the Elements of Well Being', Mill puts forward a more developed account of these ideas in connection with the importance of individuality, and of protecting the individual against the restrictive influences of state intervention and the coercive effects of public opinion. Mill's concern is that while the development of individuality is conducive to the development of our powers and capacities, and so our ability to feel greater quantities and kinds of pleasure, the encroachment of government control or social coercion puts that individuality at risk.

> The human faculties of perception, judgement, discriminative feeling, mental
> activity, and even moral preference, are exercised only in making a choice. He who
> does anything because it is the custom, makes no choice. He gains no practice either
> in discerning or in desiring what is best. The mental and moral, like the muscular
> powers, are improved by being used. The faculties are called into no exercise by
> doing a thing merely because others do it.[28]

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[27]Sean Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature* (London: Routledge, 1998), 16.

[28]J. S. Mill, "On Liberty," in *On Liberty and Other Essays*, ed. John Gray (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 65.

Here we have a clear statement concerning the importance of developing our potentialities as humans, of making sure that we exercise all of our faculties and capacities, and that we do so by making choices, by embracing our individuality. The ways in which Mill thinks we can develop our individuality, and the ways in which these are valuable, are varied and not always clearly expressed. I shall try to articulate a few of them here.

The first way acknowledges that we must follow custom to some degree, that is we must adopt good and useful practices in order to live well. However, according to Mill, we should ensure that we are all the time engaging our own faculties in thinking through such customs and choosing whether or not to endorse them, rather than following them simply because they are custom. Mill is worried that by surrendering our faculties to custom they will degrade through lack of use - we will become 'withered and starved'[29] -and so we will become limited as persons. As custom does all the work for us, our range and depth as persons shrinks. A similar point is made when he asks us to give room to people with 'strong desires and impulses' which 'are their own', because it is people with such strength of character who have the strongest chance of offering benefits to society, they have 'more of the raw materials of human nature, and [are] therefore capable, perhaps of more evil, but certainly of more good.'[30]

The second way requires that people be given the freedom to pursue a wide range of modes or patterns of life. On the one hand, such 'experiments in living' will, much like any other kind of experiment, potentially result in originality, in the discovery of new ways of living which can be of benefit to all. More than this, however, offering room for a wide range of modes or patterns of life is also good for each individual who is granted such freedom. This is because 'different persons also require different conditions for their spiritual development; and can no more exist healthily in the same moral, than all the variety of plants can in the same physical, atmosphere and climate.'[31] By giving people the chance to choose a mode of life suitable to themselves, we increase their chance at living a life of pleasure.

As should be noticed, while the ways in which these developments are valuable ultimately come down to their ability to generate pleasure, they do this in two different ways. The

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[29]Ibid., 68

[30]Ibid., 66

[31]Ibid., 75

development of individuality is immediately beneficial to that individual, but through them the rest of society also potentially benefits.

> It is not by wearing down into uniformity all that is individual in themselves, but by cultivating it and calling it forth... that human beings become a noble and beautiful object of contemplation; and as the works partake the character of those who do them, by the same process human life also becomes rich, diversified, and animating, furnishing more abundant aliment to high thoughts and elevating feelings, and strengthening the tie which binds every individual to the race, by making the race infinitely better worth belonging to... In proportion to the development of his own individuality, each person becomes more valuable to himself, and is therefore capable of being more valuable to others.[32]

Thus, we have a wonderful picture of human development as human flourishing: we develop our faculties and capacities, we diversify and deepen our range of experience, we produce, cultivate and explore wide ranges of modes or patterns of life, and in doing so the social world as a whole develops and strengthens to the benefit of all, increasing the potential for pleasurable experiences. All of this comes hand in hand with, and as a result of, giving the requisite freedom of choice (from direct intervention and social coercion) to individuality. Any encroachment on this individuality from external legislation or social coercion threatens our ability to flourish as human beings.

I am largely in agreement with Mill's picture of the importance of individuality and human flourishing, though I would obviously avoid the underlying justification of maximal pleasure, especially insofar as it is understood to be our ultimate end. I want, however, to draw attention to some more contentious comments Mill offers us.

> Human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing.[33]

Further on in the text Mill makes similarly disparaging analogies about the relationship between individuals and society, concerning the clipping of trees into pollards or animals rather than letting them be 'as nature made them'.[34] While one might think these to be

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[32]Ibid., 70

[33]Ibid., 66

[34]Ibid., 69

mere rhetorical flourishes, it should be noticed that the contrast between my being an individual according to an 'inward force' or 'as nature made me', as opposed to the damaging effects of custom clipping and shaping me otherwise, are ways of talking which, while containing truth, do not do service to the role the social world plays in giving me my nature as an individual, nor how this is achieved through a lifelong process of education and acculturation. I spend all of chapters 3, 4 and 5 arguing against the idea that we can even form a conception of ourselves, a subjective sense of who we are, apart from the shared normative practices maintained by a social community. I do not want, however, to put too much weight on these passages or this issue when it comes to offering my critique in this chapter.

Mill really goes astray when he begins to discuss the necessary conditions for the human flourishing which he rightly places so much value in. Mill's arguments in *On Liberty* take it for granted that limitations must be placed on people's freedoms to maintain a social environment suitable for the attainment of happiness, and he welcomes democracy as a progressive movement, however, he also fears what he calls the 'tyranny of the majority' over the individual, and so he seeks to secure certain basic liberties against such encroachment. To this end he formulates the liberty principle:

> The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people. But if he refrains from molesting others in what concerns them, and merely acts according to his own inclination and judgement in things which concern himself, [then] he should be allowed, without molestation, to carry his opinions into practice at his own cost. [35]

It is the application of this principle which will, according to Mill, gives us the appropriate conditions for the human individual to flourish. Norman notes two important features of this principle.[36] First of all, the idea of freedom being introduced here seems to be primarily a negative notion as opposed to a positive notion.[37] By positive freedom is meant the active power to do or achieve something, and by negative freedom is meant freedom from external coercion or restriction when making a choice. Mill's notion of human flourishing as

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[35]Ibid., 62

[36]Norman, *Free and Equal*, 12.

[37] Though I do not have space here to further justify the claim that Mill emphasises negative freedom as the condition for human flourishing, Norman offers us an extended investigation into both Mill and T.H. Green's differing views of the Factory Acts, and he uses this to make clear the importance of negative freedom for Mill.

an increase in one's capacities essentially involves a positive notion of freedom. However, he seems to think that the conditions which make this positive freedom possible are simply a maximisation of negative freedom, a leaving be of the individual in matters which affect only himself. Second of all, the principle is 'framed in terms of a fundamental opposition between "society" and "the individual"',[38] insofar as Mill thinks it possible to draw a sphere around what concerns the individual and what concerns others, and to use this as the basis for demarcating rightful and wrongful intervention. In fact, it is only by presupposing this split that the liberty principle is made to look so plausible, as Norman argues, 'it appears obvious only because the problem has already been posed in terms of the opposition between the individual and society.'[39]

It is characteristically atomist to think that positive freedom can be secured through the maximisation of negative freedom, because it is thought that the individual has this freedom prior to their entering into social relations, and the limitations of those relations are tolerated for instrumental reasons, i.e. by giving up a bit of freedom I can live more securely, or achieve a greater amount of pleasure.[40] I argue that positive freedom, or at least those positive possibilities of free choice required to realise ourselves in a fully human way, to flourish as individuals in the sense Mill so highly values, actually requires particular social structures within which we are participants. Because my realising myself depends on having positive possibilities of choice made open to me through membership in a social practice, this also amounts to a denial of the underlying split between individual and society. I can only flourish as a human being in the sense Mill argues for through an engagement in particular social forms of life. This is the second incoherency I want to accuse Mill of committing in his project of reconciliation.

Norman argues that positive freedom cannot be secured on the basis of mere negative freedom because it is in fact negative freedom which is parasitic on positive freedom: 'only when the idea of making choices is already presupposed can certain kinds of circumstances count as the absence of coercion... the removal of certain physical states of affairs counts as the removal of coercion only if there are choices which that person wants to make and

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[38]Ibid., 12

[39]Ibid., 13

[40]The classic statement of this idea can be found in Hobbes. See Thomas Hobbes, "Of the Liberty of Subjects," in *Leviathan* (London: Penguin Books, 1985). See also C. B. MacPherson, *The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

which are affected by the presence or absence of those states of affairs.'[41] If I have no desire to leave the house, then someone's barring the doors and windows does not count as an act of coercion. We only care about being left alone insofar as interference actually gets in the way of our making choices. Furthermore, when it comes to having those choices, the degree of freedom we have is not just a matter of range, but also of quality, of those options being meaningful to us. Having a wide range of wines available to me does not count as a freedom in the same way that it would for a wine connoisseur, because I could not tell so many wines apart. Note the interesting consequence of this: my learning how to appreciate wines counts as a genuine increase in my freedom, and the issue of coercion simply doesn't enter the picture here.

The next thing to notice is that the positive possibility of making a choice, upon which the notion of negative liberty rests, requires certain subjective and objective conditions, 'it will be a matter both of what options are as a matter of fact available and of one's ability to envisage and assess alternatives.'[42] Norman characterises these conditions as political, material and cultural. The greater my powers of political participation, the greater control over the institutions which shape my life, and so the greater the range of meaningful choice. If I have economic wealth to purchase a wider range of things, if I have access to useful materials for particular purposes, such as access to medical facilities or the ownership of a company and its assets, then more options are available to me. Finally, if I have a good education I can conceive a wider range of possibilities as well as means of achieving those possibilities.

The final step to seeing why positive freedom cannot be obtained simply through a maximisation of negative liberty, is to notice that the above subjective and objective conditions could never be achieved outside of society.[43] It is only through social relations

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[41]Norman, *Free and Equal*, 36.

[42]Ibid., 41

[43] I have focused on the fact that certain social conditions must be maintained in order for us to have the positive freedom required for properly human flourishing. I have side stepped a related issue which is in many ways the obverse of the above discussion. The related issue involves an argument to the effect that actions which seem private are in fact capable of affecting others, if only by causing indirect harm such as - through reckless actions in one's private time - costing the public money in medical bills. But it might also be a result of harming the moral spirit of a community through which other individuals realise themselves. Norman brings out this issue in his discussion of Mill and Green's respective views on the Factory Act. See Ibid., 22-34 Norman draws on T. H. Green, "Lecture on Liberal Legislations and Freedom of Contract," in *Lectures on the Principles of Political Obligation and Other Writings*, eds. Paul Haris and John Morrow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).; J. S. Mill, *Principles of Political Economy*, ed. Donald Winch (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1970).

that the notion of political power becomes an issue, let alone an issue with institutional solutions. The development and diffusion of material goods likewise requires social organisation to propel the scientific and technical developments that underpin them, and what is passed on through education is effectively cultural, i.e. social knowledge.[44]

However, Norman's characterisation runs dangerously close to making the social world sound like a necessary *causal* condition for the development of individuals, rather than a constitutive condition of our choosing and maintaining our fully human identities. It is not the case simply that the social world provides us with the possession of knowledge and material goods, which we can then take away with us and use to make our choices. What needs emphasising more in his account, is that most of those fully human choices we make are *social* choices, and our ends are *social* ends.[45] I will explain what I mean by this.

Aristotle offers us an early formulation of the internal relationship between individual and society required for the individual to have those ends, and to make those choices, which are characteristic of the fully human life.

> The state is by nature clearly prior to the family and to the individual, since the whole is of necessity prior to the part; for example, if the whole body be destroyed, there will be no foot or hand, except in an equivocal sense, as we might speak of a stone hand; for when destroyed the hand will be no better than that. But things are defined by their working and their power; and we ought not to say that they are the same when they no longer have their proper quality, but only that they have the same name.[46]

It is not simply that the body provides the necessary causal conditions for a hand being what it is (though that is also true), it is that the body provides the function through which a hand achieves its essence as a hand. A similarly illuminating comment of Aristotle's is that a human being taken in isolation from a social world 'may be compared to an isolated piece

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[44]In arguing against the priority of the right over the good, or the notion of abstract rights, Taylor argues that one cannot value those rights without valuing the forms and patterns of life they are intended to secure. As such, we cannot value the right to freedom, or indeed, freedom, without also valuing specific sorts of social conditions. See Charles Taylor, "Atomism," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, eds. Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[45]For the notion of social ends as constitutive ends, see Michael Sandel, "The Procedural Republic and the Unencumbered Self," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, eds. Shlomo Avineri and Avner de-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992).

[46] Aristotle, "Politics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Modern Library, 2001), 1129.

at draughts.'[47] The other materials required for draughts, the rules of the game embodied in a social activity, the two players, are similarly not just causal conditions of the lone piece being what it is, they are constitutive conditions in the sense that they supply the whole within which the draught piece has its function, and so the draught piece could not be without them.

To put the point in the simplest possible terms: I cannot be a school teacher, a fireman, a poker player, a supporter of Liverpool, a Christian, and so on, outside of the socially maintained activities which gives each of these their point. As Taylor argues: 'Many of our most important experiences would be impossible outside of society, for they relate to objects which are social. Such are, for instance, the experience of participating in a rite, or of taking part in the political life of our society, or of rejoicing at the victory of the home team, or of national mourning for a dead hero; and so on.'[48] In being a poker player I must aim at ends which cannot exist apart from the community of poker players. All the choices involved in realising myself as these and untold other sorts of person, involve social ends of these sorts, and so are themselves social choices. One cannot fully develop one's capacities or flourish as a properly human being, on the presumption of mere negative liberty; one also has to allow for the right positive conditions provided by shared social relations.

In drawing out the incoherency in Mill's account of the individual in relation to society, I have shown that we in fact require social relationships to play a constitutive role in our being able to flourish as properly human beings. The picture I am trying to develop is one of self-realisation where the self to be realised is a social self. One version of this is the holistic picture offered us by Bradley. The notion that we develop ourselves as social selves also provides us with - what Mill was so keen to avoid - the necessary standard outside of pleasure itself for assessing pleasures as higher or lower, or of evaluating our desires as higher or lower. For if we have ends other than pleasure, those ends can be used as a standard for ranking pleasures themselves, and so for criticising certain of our desires as unworthy or immoral.

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[47] Ibid., 1129

[48] Charles Taylor, "Hegel: History and Politics," in *Liberalism and its Critics*, ed. Michael Sandel (New York: New York University Press, 1984), 183.

IV - Self-realisation within a social whole

I now want to offer a relatively close reading of Bradley's theory of self-realisation in order to reach the same conclusion as above through positive rather than critical arguments, and in doing so to provide a more detailed account. The first point to be shown is that self-realisation is our end. The second point to be shown is that the self we aim at realising is a whole, and an 'infinite' whole. The third point to be shown is that atomist theories of the self cannot accommodate the notion of our end as an infinite whole, only holistic theories of the self can do so.[49]

Bradley argues in opposition to Mill that, rather than pleasure, it is self-realisation that is our ultimate end. Indeed, his argument is that it is impossible for us to realise in our actions anything (accident apart, as Bradley notes) other than self.

> There being an end, that end is realization, at all events, it is something to be reached, otherwise not an end. And it implies self-realization, because it is to be reached by me. By my action I am to carry it out; in making it real my will is realized, and my will is myself. Hence there is self-realization in all action.[50]

Bradley does not want to imply that everything I do, prior to being chosen, is first of all a thought in my head and so a part of myself. This would have the unfortunate consequence of meaning that any event in the world which happens in accordance with my thoughts would count as self-realisation - 'All my ends are my thoughts, but all my thoughts are not my ends'.[51] Nor does he mean to imply that every act I perform involves the perfect or whole realisation of myself, only that they are moments of self-realisation or parts of the process of self-realisation.

Those of my thoughts which are part of the process of self-realisation are distinguished from the rest insofar as they are the ones which I desire and so the ones which I act upon. Bradley characterises desire in terms of a feeling of difference or tension between what I feel I should be and the way the world actually is: 'the essence of desire for an object would thus be the feeling of affirmation in the idea of something not ourself, felt against the feeling of ourself as, without the object, void and negated; and it is the tension of this

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[49] For an account of Bradley's ethics which does a good job of avoiding the jargon, see chapter 6 of Richard Wollheim, *F.H. Bradley* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1959). See also

[50] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 84.

[51] Ibid., 67

relation which produces motion.'[52] When I paint a picture or teach a lesson at school it is because I feel myself affirmed in the idea of this, and so feel myself to be lacking something insofar as the world does not conform to that idea; as such, I desire that object and in acting on that desire I realise that idea, feeling myself affirmed in the process.[53]

Bradley offers two different arguments for why the self to be realised is a whole, in the sense of something complex, organic, and consisting of many parts, and not some 'mere one'. The first argument involves an appeal to practical experience, a glance at the actual ends of human action. If we do this, we will notice that 'each situation is seen (consciously or unconsciously) as part of a broader situation, and in this or that act he is aiming at and realizing some larger whole, which is not realized in any particular act as such, and yet is realized in the body of acts which carry it out.'[54] In short, the lives we live are systems, and the acts we perform on a moment to moment basis are parts of that system. My goal to write a book is nothing without a very large collection of smaller acts (themselves wholes of action consisting of smaller acts), and is itself subservient to a larger project of life - and gets its purpose from that project - which I am trying to bring about. Note that the claim is not that there are no disparate or loose ends of human action, nor that we have a perfect vision of our perfect self, a clear overview of the whole project that gives our life meaning. Rather, the claim is that we *aim* at a whole of ends, and the closer we get the happier we tend to be.

If the first argument above involves an appeal to the content of our will, and a claim that this content is a whole, then the second, and in some ways more important argument, involves an appeal to the form of the will and to the fact that this too is a whole. Bradley claims that the form of the will involves a universal and a particular aspect; or a distinction between will in general and the particular thing willed. The universal aspect is our ability to reflect on, say, two objects of desire, and to see ourselves as something 'practically above them, as a concentration which is not one or the other, but which is the possibility of either; which is the inner side indifferently of an act which should realize A, or one which should realize B; and hence which is neither, and yet is superior to both.'[55] However, to be

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[52] Ibid., 68

[53] Note that at this stage in the argument the claims might still be consistent with that of atomistic hedonism. The consistency would involve saying that the self to be realised is just the feeling self of this or that moment.

[54] Ibid., 69

[55] Ibid., 72

Will the universal side must make a choice, it must will *something* or be nothing at all; and this is the particular side of will. The two come together in an act of volition, or a moment of realisation which brings the universal and particular together and posits them in the world. Hence this particular act is *my* free act.[56]

Just as the form of the will has a universal and a particular aspect which exist in unity, so must the content of the will have a universal and a particular aspect existing in unity, since form and content cannot be separated. Furthermore, our life struggle to realise ourselves is the struggle to make the content of our will, the ends of our action, conform to the form of the will. As Bradley argues: 'The self is realised in a whole of ends because it is a whole, and because it is not satisfied till it has found itself, till content be adequate to form, and that content be realized; and this is what we mean by practical self-realization.'[57] Though this is an obscure and difficult argument I think there is truth in it and it is worth paying attention to. The best way to understand this is by saying that the will is formally free and cannot adequately realise itself *as free* until its content is similarly free. What makes the will formally free is that it has the universal moment of reflection, realised through a particular choice. If there was just the moment of particularity, we could not be said to be enacting a choice; for to be limited by particularities is to be so far not free. As such, the content of our will cannot be free until it similarly has a universal and a particular moment, i.e. when the ends of our actions are not isolated, disparate, discontinuous, or in conflict with one another, but are instead subservient to a larger whole, finding their purpose within that whole rather than being limited by one another, or indeed, limited by that whole.[58] To get ahead of ourselves a little, and to use language that I explain in the following paragraph, we might say that the moment of universality in the form of the will is abstractly infinite in the sense of not being limited by anything outside itself because it has no particular content, but since it is will it must choose some content, and to retain the freedom of the abstractly infinite, that content must be concretely infinite. To be infinite, i.e. not limited by anything outside oneself, is to be free, and so we move from being abstractly free to being concretely, or actually free.

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[56] Hegel also discusses these issues. See G. W. F. Hegel, ed., *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, trans. H. B. Nisbet (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 37-39.

[57] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 73.

[58] I return to theses argument concerning the form of the will in Chapter 8, when discussing schizophrenia.

In the final comment in the above paragraph, and in talking of realising ourselves as a whole, in using the words 'organic' and 'system', I have been presupposing that the whole to be realised is an infinite whole, or in the language of Hegel, a concrete universal. This needs explaining.[59] The finite means 'to be some one among others, some one which is *not* others. One finite ends where the other finite begins; it is bounded from the outside, and can not go beyond itself without becoming something else, and thereby perishing.'[60] The infinite must in some way contrast with this, but there are two erroneous conceptions which we need to be aware of. The first mistaken conception is a familiar one: 'it means a positive quantity which has no end. Any given number of units is finite; but a series of units, which is produced indefinitely, is infinite.'[61] However, in trying to make this notion anything other than an abstract idea we run into problems. For any real quantity has an end, and to say that a quantity is endless is only to take that definite quantity and put off the end, but to put off the end is to always have an end, and so to have something finite. The second notion, which concerns me less here, is to say the infinite is something else alongside and outside the finite, different in quality, and so is in this sense the not-finite. However the infinite is here limited by what it is not, i.e. the finite, and so is still itself finite.

The truly infinite then, is the concrete universal, and as Hegel says, is best expressed by the image of a circle, as opposed to an endless line. A concrete universal is supposed to share in common with the more usual understanding of a 'universal' in that it has a unity in difference; however it is not an abstraction from particulars and nor is it standing over particulars, it rather lives in and through all the particulars, which in turn are embraced within the universal whole. This is why the organic metaphor is appropriate, where we understand the whole body to only exist through all its particular organs, yet all the organs are embraced within the whole body – each component relies on its relation to other things within the whole, and the whole relies on all the relations between its particulars. Thus, while finite things are characterised by external limits, by being 'not-this', the concrete universal is entirely self-related: the whole is what it is only in and through its parts, and the parts are what they are only in and through their relationships to other parts within the whole.

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[59] These notions of the finite and infinite are derived from the works of Hegel. A detailed and illuminating discussion of these can be found in G. W. F. Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, trans. T. F. Geraets, W. A. Suchting and H. S. Harris, Third ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1991), 148 - 152.

[60] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 75.

[61] Ibid., 76

In the infinite you can distinguish without dividing; for this is a unity holding within itself subordinate factors which are negative of, and so distinguishable from, each other; while at the same time the whole is so present in each, that each has its own being in its opposite, and depends on that relation for its own life. The negative is also its affirmation. Thus the infinite has a distinction, and so a negation, in itself, but is distinct from and negated by nothing but itself. Far from being one something which is *not* another something, it is a whole in which both one and the other are mere elements.[62]

But why should we think of the self to be realised as infinite in this sense? Because to claim we know our minds to be finite is a contradiction.

Finite [mind] means limited from the outside and by the outside. The finite is to know itself as this, or not as finite. If its knowledge ceases to fall wholly within itself, then so far it is not finite. It knows that it is limited from the outside and by the outside, and that means it knows the outside. But if so, then it is so far not finite. If its whole being fell within itself, then, in knowing itself, it could not know that there was anything outside itself. It does do the latter; hence the former supposition is false.[63]

Thus, the mind is unable to accept any limit on itself. Any seeming boundary must be either taken within itself and understood, or shaped according to its will, until there is no sense to the idea of an 'outside' any more. It is for this reason that, as Bradley argues, we cannot chase mere consistency by narrowing our world, and nor can we chase mere diversity without bringing this in to any kind of coherently united whole. So long as there is limit or lack of unity, my will, my formal freedom, will not be fully realised in the world, and I will feel the world in some respects to be other than myself, and the structure of desire outlined above will therefore propel me into motion.[64]

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[62] Ibid., 77

[63] Ibid., 75

[64] These notions are key in the debates between atomistic and holistic metaphysics. For more on this important but seemingly forgotten debate, see the following. Harold Joachim, *The Nature of Truth* (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1906).; Bertrand Russell, "The Nature of Truth," *Mind* XV, no. 60 (1906): 528-33.; G. E. Moore, "Mr. Joachim's Nature of Truth," *Mind* XVI, no. 62 (1907): 229-35.; Harold Joachim, "A Reply to Mr. Moore," *Mind* XVI, no. 63 (1907): 410-15.; Bertrand Russell, "On the Nature of Truth," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 7 (1906): 28-49.; G. E. Moore, "External and Internal Relations," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 20 (1919-1920): 40-62.; F. H. Bradley, "Chapter III," in *Appearance and Reality*, Second ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).; Brand Blanshard, "Internal Relations and their Importance in Philosophy," *Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 2 (1967): 227-36.; Bruce Aune, "Blanshard and Internal Relations," *Review of*

The account of self-realisation put forward here amounts to a philosophical framework with which to understand the ideas of human flourishing discussed in the last section, as well as the incoherencies Mill ran into. The problem is that our end is self-realisation within an infinite whole, and yet the end Mill offers to fill this role is the maximisation of a series of particular pleasures. The series of pleasures understood as discrete feelings do not form moments in a system, they are mere perishing particulars. We might try to understand the achievement of them as a whole insofar as we achieve the maximisation of their number, but in what sense? How do we ever achieve the maximum amount of pleasure? We certainly cannot feel all the pleasures at once. The only other alternative is the ceaseless seeking after pleasure, but this process is a form of the false infinite as a forever putting off of the end; for any stage we reach along the way, more pleasure can be had, and so we never can *in principle* reach the end proposed.[65]

Quite apart from the persuasiveness of the above arguments, Mill's incoherencies are the result of trying to reconcile the notion that our end is pleasure with the notion of human beings as developing and flourishing, as realising themselves as a whole. As Sayers argues: "Happiness - human well-being and fulfilment - is, for Mill, a much wider and more inclusive notion than that of the greatest sum of pleasures. Quite simply, Mill's higher pleasures are not mere pleasures at all. The notion Mill has is more akin to the non-hedonist notion of 'self-realization'; it involves the full development and active exercise of our highest faculties and powers."[66] Mill is facing the atomist problem of making sense of the universal as the mere collection of its particulars, of the realisation of the individual as a whole on the basis of the individual understood to be just this isolated feeling self. As Bradley puts it, 'he has taken the universal in the sense of all the particulars, and in this sense, here as everywhere, since the particulars are arising and perishing, the universal has no truth nor reality',[67] and something that can have no reality can hardly be our end. What we need as an end is a concrete universal, and Bradley thinks that the social world satisfies this need, it is a whole within which we can realise ourselves. Talking of the social world, Bradley says:

Metaphysics 21, no. 2 (1967): 237-43.; Brand Blanshard, "Rejoinder to My Critics," *Review of Metaphysics* 21, no. 2 (1967): 262-72.; F. H. Bradley, "Relation and Quality," in *Appearance and Reality*, Second ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

[65] Bradley has a much longer, very illuminating, and more involved discussion of the basic form of argument as it is offered here. See Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 93 - 103.

[66] Sayers, *Marxism and Human Nature*, 20.

[67] Bradley, *Ethical Studies*, 98.

It is an organism and a moral organism; and it is conscious self-realization, because only by the will of its self-conscious members can the moral organism give itself reality. It is the self-realization of the whole body, because it is one and the same will which lives and acts in the life and action of each. It is the self-realization of each member, because each member can not find the function, which makes him himself, apart from the whole to which he belongs; to be himself he must go beyond himself, to live his life he must live a life which is not merely his own, but which none the less, but on the contrary all the more, is intensely and emphatically his own individuality.[68]

And with this we have returned, via a different route, to the conclusion of the last section. We are once again talking about the Aristotelian notion of the human being as finding his or her function - in short: their essence - within the social whole, where that social whole provides the condition or ground for that function, for supplying those constitutive ends that make the individual what he or she is. Along the way we have also diagnosed why Mill fell into the incoherencies that he did.

V - Final remarks

A few important loose ends must be dealt with to make my arguments complete. First of all, I want to say of Mill's higher and lower pleasure distinction that there is truth in this, but that he could not make sense of it within his framework. However, if we understand our end to be self-realisation within a social whole, then those ends are social ends and they are various. With this picture we have a whole battery of standards with which to say whether or not a consummated pleasure is higher or lower. This amounts to the raising of our particular pleasures as an end into a system of ends, making them part of a universal, and so realising us as a whole; by embracing this pleasure or denying this pleasure, I contribute those acts as moments of my realisation as a virtuous person and at the same time help maintain the social life of virtue which I aspire to be a member of. Furthermore, Mill's general notion of human flourishing finds expression within the account of self-realisation while avoiding Mill's inconsistencies. We want to develop ourselves insofar as the mind is infinite, and must see nothing in the world but itself; as such we are driven to develop ourselves into coherent and all embracing wholes, and as Bradley argues, this is the same as human happiness - though Bradley rightly distinguishes happiness from pleasure, so the two are not, as Mill argues, equivocal.

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[68] Ibid., 162

I can also say a little about the value Mill placed in the individual, and I can argue that the theory I have outlined here concerning the important relationship between individual and society, does not obviously play in to Mill's fears. We can accept with him the values he argues for on the basis of the holistic theory of self-realisation.

In the first place Mill worried that people would not exercise their faculties and capacities, and so would wither as persons; we would lose people of 'strong character'. In short response, while the theory of self-realisation stresses that we cannot have individuals without a social whole of which they are members, nor can we have a social whole without individuals who will it into existence. As such, the quality of the whole is a function of the quality of its members, and we have every reason to encourage the exercise of independent thought, and the development of vitality in individuals for the sake of the whole as well as for the sake of the individuals that compose it. As Bradley says: 'We must never let this out of our sight, that, where the moral world exists, you have and you must have these two sides; neither will stand apart from the other; moral institutions are carcasses without personal morality, and personal morality apart from moral institutions is an unreality, a soul without a body.'[69] In the second place, Mill argued for a need to have diversity of modes or patterns of life to accommodate the diversity of individuals and their own idiosyncrasies. This is harder to do justice to in a short space, but if nothing else the view I have developed is not obviously conducive to narrowing down the range of possible modes or patterns of living. As was argued before, the self is after the unity of a whole, it seeks consistency, but it also seeks to expand its horizons and to leave nothing outside of itself. Furthermore, the whole which we are to become members of is the product of no single person, but of many persons, and must form a whole out of the united will of all.

Finally, I would like to say something about the original tensions atomists faced. One of those tensions was the need to improve and develop ourselves, and this I have discussed above. The other tension was concerning our obligation to others. Atomists such as Mill have to make sense of our obligation to others as instrumentally dependent on our desiring pleasure. However, for the view I have developed here, there is no sharp distinction between the social world I am a part of and the person I am, in short the difference between myself and others blurs. The social world and the members who make it up, are the substance of my being, and insofar as I am obligated to myself, I am obligated to

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[69] Ibid., 178

others. A harm to the social whole is a harm to myself, and a harm to myself is a harm to the social whole.[70]

I do not wish to pretend that these short remarks are anything close to a sufficient statement or solution of these problems. However, I think enough has been said to show that holism has room to deal with these issues, while the atomism Mill can be seen as adopting, faces serious difficulties.

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[70] See My Station and its Duties in Ibid.

Chapter 2: Reconciling Communal Identity and Social Criticism

I - Introduction

In the last chapter I spoke of some tensions that a holistic account of the individual might be thought to face. One of those tensions which I mentioned but said nothing of in the way of resolution, concerned the worry that such constitutive dependence on one's community might leave out room for a notion of progress, since any potential standards of criticism would be derived from the very community to be criticised. I now want to offer arguments that will go some way to defusing this worry. I will start by outlining the tension in more detail and suggesting that one of the reasons why it seems so problematic is down to an undue identification of rational criticism with foundationalist reasoning.[1] I will outline Kuhn's account of scientific investigation as grounded in the shared activities of particular historical scientific communities, as opposed to being grounded on any universal scientific methodology. Kuhn outlines a notion of scientific progress compatible with this account of scientific practice, which does not rely on any kind of external, or foundational standard, but is instead dialectical.[2] However, he has - not without reason - often been taken to have a more sceptical, strongly relativist position. Without getting into issues of Kuhn scholarship, I shall simply present these two interpretations and suggest that we not read Kuhn in such a sceptical light. After drawing attention to the non-sceptical reading of Kuhn, I shall develop the dialectical account drawn from this reading by outlining Taylor's three forms of 'transitional argument'. In making plausible a notion of rationality that does not require external or foundational standards, I will have made room for rational and critical progress within the holistic account of individuals.

II - The tension between communal identity and critical distance

I argued in the last chapter that the ends of action which form the basis of our being properly human individuals, depend on our being acculturated members of a wider social

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[1] I outline the connections between foundationalist reasoning, or the notion of The Given which it normally entails, and atomist conceptions of the individual in chapter 3. I argue against this foundationalist picture across chapters 4 and 5.

[2] It should be noted that Kuhn does not use this phrase, though I think the term is broadly applicable to his account. I use the term 'dialectical' here as a convenient shorthand to capture the kind of rational development that does not depend on a foundationalist standard, but can instead develop immanently according to its own internal standards. The phrase is obviously taken from Hegel who has his own technical specification, involving the movement of sublation from immediacy, to diversity and then to a higher unity incorporating the prior stages. This movement is propelled by the inadequacy of each stage on its own, requiring the specific move to the next stage. It is the sense of internally rather than externally generated movement that I want to imply with this term.

practice. This amounts to my first presentation of, and the early arguments for, a more general holistic picture of the individual. This holistic picture holds that for me to be a school teacher and have all the particular ends, obligations, standards of behaviour, short-term and long-term tasks that I value and aspire to meet, requires a shared communal practice that is more than just my own individual activity and is instead the ongoing shared activity of a large number of people and institutions. Though I develop and argue for these aspects of the holistic picture in later chapters, we should also see this constitutive community as grounding our whole horizon of understanding: the ordering of what we consider more or less important or valuable, as well as what counts as rational or irrational.

If all of my properly human ends are embedded in particular forms of social interaction, and these forms of social interaction also ground my values and my notions of rationality, then from where can I draw standards with which to criticise those forms of social interaction, or to criticise the particular actions, values and thoughts of individuals which find their place within that social whole? I will call this the issue of 'critical distance'[3] and break it down into two related aspects.

The first aspect concerns the need for some kind of external standard with which to criticise those communities of which we are members. The second aspect concerns the need for people to be able to critically develop themselves apart from the communities of which they are members. This latter aspect often manifests in the demand that people 'think for oneself' in the sense of not making the thought of others or of social groups as a whole the basis of what we think. Part of the value placed in this latter aspect comes from the recognition that thinking for ourselves is an important prerequisite for criticising and developing the forms of social organisation of which we are members. It is by thinking for myself that I find the requisite standard with which to criticise my community. I call this 'critical distance' because these two related ideas suggest that the critical capacities required to develop ourselves and the social world depend on a certain distance between individuals and communities: we must not over identify with the social world of which we are a part.

Consider the motto Kant offers us in his attempt to characterise the enlightenment:

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[3] I take this phrase from Michael Walzer. See Michael Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987).

> *Enlightenment is man's emergence from his self-incurred immaturity. Immaturity* is the inability to use one's own understanding without the guidance of another. This immaturity is self-incurred if its cause is not lack of understanding, but lack of resolution and courage to use it without the guidance of another. The motto of enlightenment is therefore: *sapere aude!* Have courage to use your own understanding![4]

Kant is here calling for us to be responsible agents through the free use of our own understanding in contrast to an unquestioning adoption of the common or shared understanding, the 'dogmas and formulas' which are the 'ball and chain of [our] permanent immaturity'. The standards of a community do not hold their own independent validity but must be tested against our own free thought.

However, when we hear demands that we 'think for ourselves' in the sense of not deferring to another authority and avoiding the unquestioned standards of parochial dogmatism, we can no longer, according to the holistic picture, understand this in any radical sense. What I mean by this is, that while we must allow for some truth in the idea of 'thinking for ourselves', there is no longer any notion of the activity of thought being an entirely monological[5] activity; an activity that one can do entirely in isolation. For the holistic picture holds that to engage in rational argument one must be an acculturated member of a particular sort of social community. I do not mean by this that one cannot sit alone and think, I rather mean that thought is always part of an ongoing conversation with others: our formulations must be born out of the standards lived and expressed by others, and our formulations must in turn answer to them, at least in principle.

Alasdair MacIntyre tries to respond to Kant's enlightenment demand that we think for ourselves by highlighting the manner in which any piece of critical or progressive writing will always be given to a particular 'reading public' rather than a more general mass of people. In this respect there will always be shared background assumptions, common ideas of the problems at issue, the sort of solutions that would count as acceptable, even 'which

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[4] Immanuel Kant, "An Answer to the Question: What is Enlightenment?" in *Practical Philosophy*, ed. J. Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 17.

[5] The work of Bakhtin explores the idea of the text, or of dialogue generally, as being dialogical rather than monological, where the former sees texts and dialogue as living within a context of ongoing interactive narratives. See Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogical Imagination*, ed. Michael Holquist (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 2008). Also Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Mennesota Press, 2011).

rhetorical modes are acceptable and which not'.[6] He characterises the social dimension of thought in contrast to mere fantasy:

> What distinguishes my thought from my meditative fantasy is in key part the relationship in which that thought stands to the thought of others, a very different relationship from that which holds between my fantasies and the fantasies of others. For, in the case of thought, what I say both to myself and to others and what they say both to themselves and to me has to involve recognition, almost always implicit rather than explicit, of shared standards of truth, of rationality, of logic, standards that are not mine rather than yours or vice versa.[7]

The problem is that this sort of perspective, in tying individual thought and communal thought so closely together, invites repugnance from people who hold a common critical attitude. The common critical attitude in question demands that we think autonomously by divorcing ourselves as much as possible from the given perspectives we find ourselves having been acculturated into. To do otherwise is to endorse a parochial conservativism; an unquestioning allegiance to given and potentially fallible perspectives.

We can see the dilemma. History attests to social movements involving the dissolution of old institutions and governments, as well as the emancipation of previously subjugated groups. Such progress speaks for the idea that people are capable, in a strong and effective sense, of thinking for themselves, of standing apart from their community and using some sort of standard or criteria for assessment. How can we make sense of, for instance, the feminist critic finding all of her values and aspirations as well as 'standards of truth' within a community, and yet being capable of so radically criticising that community?[8] Isn't thinking in line with communal standards precisely the sort of deplorably uncritical thinking which is contrary to progress?

Taylor argues that the above critical attitude, the idea that one must find their critical standards apart from the communities they are criticising, and which is therefore so disparaging to the holistic picture, gains enormous support from the dominance of foundationalist epistemologies. Consider the affinity between Kant's incitement to

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[6] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Some Enlightenment Projects Reconsidered," in *Ethics and Politics: Selected Essays Volume 2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 176.

[7] Ibid., 177

[8] Marilyn Friedman, "Feminism and Modern Friendship: Dislocating the Community," in *Communitarianism and Individualism*, eds. Shlomo Avineri and Avner De-Shalit (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 101.

enlightenment and Descartes' declaration of the importance of a return to foundations at the start of his *Meditations*: "Some years ago I was struck by the large number of falsehoods that I had accepted as true in my childhood, and by the highly doubtful nature of the whole edifice that I had subsequently based on them. I realized that it was necessary, once in the course of my life, to demolish everything completely and start right again from the foundations."[9] In applying his method of doubt Descartes did not want to take any received fact or principle for granted, requiring instead that we find an indubitable starting point with which we could methodologically work out, from the bottom up, our body of knowledge. Furthermore, it tends to be a characteristic feature of the foundationalist enterprise not just that we *can* think for ourselves but that we *must* do so in order to reach those indubitable foundations; we must consider our thoughts in themselves as they are immediately present to us, and so in abstraction from the external world and, *a fortiori,* from our social environment.

I maintain that the very idea that one can find critical standards apart from social communities relies on a specific form of supposedly indubitable truth - namely, the notion of an immediately given epistemic content.[10] If to think for yourself means to find standards apart from social practice, then this must mean that standards can be given to thought in some way. A middle ground might suggest that while social standards are not necessarily the correct standards, there need not be an appeal to the indubitably given in order to fill the gap. The individual can come up with their own principles of reason, chosen rather than found. This sounds to me like a form of irrationalism; mere choice lacks the normative force required for reason.

For as long as our commitment to 'thinking for ourselves' seems to require a foundationalist model of reason, we are going to find any view of the individual which tightly connects value and reason with communal norms both contrary to our critical temper and incapable of making sense of the clear fact of social criticism. I do not want here to directly argue against the foundationalist project. I will do that in later chapters. I only want here to disassociate the notion of rational criticism from foundationalism, i.e. to argue that we can have the former without the latter.

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[9] René Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. John Cottingham, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 12.

[10] I explain this notion of an immediately given epistemic content more fully in chapter 3.

III - Dialectic in Kuhn

I shall state clearly at the outset the general line of argument that I will offer here in trying to make sense of communal rationality as compatible with critical progress. I will be elaborating a form of social criticism which is dialectical in character. On this view standards which are taken to be in some sense external to our social context are not required in order to criticise that context. Instead we can see that the very social context within which we find ourselves provides the necessary values and standards of rationality to initiate a reflexive critical process, or at least to appreciate the gain in understanding which we may find in adopting a new stance towards social organisation, where that stance better interprets the standards and values that were present in the old form of social organisation. Sean Sayers argues that 'The existing social order is not simple and static - it contains tensions and conflicts. It includes negative as well as positive aspects: tendencies which oppose and negate it, as well as forces supporting and sustaining it. That is to say, negative and 'critical' tendencies are *in the world*.'[11] It is because the object of our critical investigation is itself conflicted in this way, that we can find within it grounds to revise it. I want to try to elaborate a little more on what this approach to understanding social criticism involves.

It is helpful to notice that through thinkers such as Thomas Kuhn this dialectical approach to critical progress has found adherents even as an explanation of scientific progress. Kuhn argues for a picture of science, drawn from attention to its actual historical development, as grounded on the shared activity of those practitioners which make up the profession.[12] The 'rules of engagement' are particular to a scientific community of a given historical period, and do not consist in a universal 'scientific methodology'. Nevertheless, the history of science is one of progress, and that progress can be measured without any sort of universal standard common to all periods of science. The history of science consists of a series of epistemic frameworks or 'paradigms', constituted by that body of practitioners engaged in a shared activity, each with its own particular standards of investigation. When one paradigm falls into crisis, unable to operate according to its own standards anymore, the stage is set for a new paradigm and a new set of standards to take its place. Despite not sharing the same set of scientific standards, however, there is still room to make a relative

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[11] Sean Sayers, "Dialectic and Social Criticism," *Annalen Der Internationalen Gesellschaft Für Dialektische Philosophie - Societas Hegeliana*, no. Band IX (1996): 242.

[12] Thomas S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Second ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1962).

judgement between the old and new paradigms. It will be useful to look at the account Kuhn develops in a little more detail. Though the account I offer is still unfortunately truncated.[13]

The first point to be made is to undermine a common account of science as consisting only of a clear and unified methodology and the body of knowledge which that methodology has helped us achieve. On this view science involves a universally applicable rational standard which, when applied attentively and with skill will show us new truths to be cumulatively added to an ever increasing stock, and also to debunk those myths that are taken to hold science back; and this process of cumulative addition is scientific progress: more and more truths are discovered according to the standards of that clear and unified methodology. Kuhn, however, shows this characterisation of science to be merely the product of contemporary pedagogy in the teaching of scientific method, and an inaccurate account of the actual historical development of science. Kuhn argues for 'the insufficiency of methodological directives, by themselves, to dictate a unique substantive conclusion to many sorts of scientific questions. Instructed to examine electrical or chemical phenomena, the man who is ignorant of these fields but who knows what it is to be scientific may reach any one of a number of incompatible conclusions.'[14] Given only methodological directives, different interpretations of data are possible, and it is only a far wider background of understanding which dictates one interpretation over another to a practitioner of a particular field.

Thus, when considering the diversity of schools in the early development of science, 'what differentiated these various schools was not one or another failure of method – they were all "scientific" – but what we shall come to call their incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practicing science in it.'[15] Older scientific schools are not disregarded as accurate accounts of the world because they fail to meet the standards of scientific methodology broadly speaking, but for other reasons besides; reasons which largely depend on the wider historical contingencies of the time, or the particular historical features of a given scientific community. Those particular historical features of a given scientific community constitute the frameworks which Kuhn refers to as 'paradigms'. A

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[13] An enormous part of the persuasiveness of Kuhn's account comes from the attention paid to historical example, and the discontinuity between that example and common accounts of scientific practice and development. Unfortunately I lack the space here to elaborate on those historical examples or the details of Kuhn's account which depend on them.

[14] Ibid., 3

[15] Ibid., 5

given scientist has a far richer and more concrete body of standards within their paradigm which controls the possible interpretations given to data. The reasons for one scientific paradigm succeeding another are particular to the concrete details of each paradigm and the particular historical relationship that the successor paradigm has to the old. As such, any anachronistic attempt to explain the development according to current critical standards or a general methodology is to misapprehend the nature of scientific progress as it actually happens.

A paradigm is a deeply entrenched set of norms and standards held by a community of scientists which shapes the everyday profession of scientific enquiry; it is 'like an accepted judicial decision in the common law, it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions.'[16] Under a scientific paradigm there are no fundamental disagreements over the general rules of engagement. Scientific professionals share a certain world view, including an ontology about the sorts of objects they should and should not expect to find, the general laws which govern the objects under investigation, even the sorts of equipment and standards of measurement to be employed. Most importantly, a paradigm sets the stage for what counts as a problem to be solved in science, and what sorts of things can count as an acceptable solution i.e. a given solution must conform to the general expectations of a paradigm.

'Normal science' takes place within a given paradigm and is controlled by that paradigm. It is the attempt to articulate the general laws via an application to the most specific of situations and under the greatest scrutiny. Kuhn characterises normal science as a form of 'puzzle solving',[17] where a problem is clearly set, a solution all but guaranteed and largely understood, and the rules of engagement clearly laid out. All one has to do is put in the leg-work. A scientific paradigm then, is the shared communal practice which gives shape to the everyday professional activity of normal science. The important point here is that the paradigm acts as a framework within which normal science takes places, it sets the standards for the work to be done, but the paradigm itself is taken for granted. Normal science does not, indeed cannot, consist or play a part in testing the paradigm itself.

Kuhn allows that the conditions of normal science are liable to result in enormous productive activity. Most of our body of scientific knowledge is the result of everyday scientific enquiry operating under a particular paradigm. I do not have time to go into the

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[16] Ibid., 23

[17] Ibid., 36

details of normal science here. What is important for my purposes is not so much the nature of discovery in the highly productive conditions of normal science as the nature of discovery that is involved in paradigm change. This is the sort of discovery which Kuhn characterises as 'anomaly' seeing as it does not seem to easily fall within the expectations of the current paradigm. Indeed he explicitly distinguishes between the discovery of scientific fact as that which falls within expectations and the discovery of anomaly as that which does not.[18] Normal science does not aim at novelty in the sense of anomalous discovery. On the contrary, insofar as a paradigm aims to further articulate itself through predicting and explaining all discoveries according to its own terms, any piece of experimental data that fails to be assimilated under the general rules of engagement serves only to put that paradigm under pressure.[19]

Kuhn goes so far as to suggest that such anomalies are, historically, often put down to a fault in the scientist rather than the paradigm, or are placed to one side as puzzles to be solved at a later time. As the anomalous data arises more and more often, ad-hoc revisions are offered in an attempt to deal with the anomalous discoveries. The problem is that these ad-hoc revisions often start to conflict and then themselves undermine the integrity of the paradigm. It is the breakdown of a paradigm in this way which sets the stage for a new paradigm to take hold. Thus, although normal science aims to preserve and articulate a paradigm by avoiding anomalous novelty of this sort, the historical fact of paradigm change – such as from Newtonian mechanics to quantum physics - shows that normal science is in fact characteristically prone to giving rise to these anomalous difficulties. The highly productive nature of normal science operates despite itself in uncovering anomalous data which is in turn inevitably destructive of the paradigm at work. This is how, to use the language with which I opened this chapter, our object of investigation can, in the case of science, involve tensions and conflicts which give us a standard of criticism. More needs to be said, however, in order to make sense of the actual process by which one paradigm replaces another in times of crisis.

It is implicit in the account so far that there is no sharp distinction between theory and fact. A given paradigm comes with background assumptions about the sorts of things there are in the world, how they behave, how we measure them and so on. This interdependence of fact and theory has important consequences for our notions of progress and discovery, as I

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[18] Ibid., 53

[19] Ibid., 52

will go on to show. To put it simply, the discovery of facts can put pressure on theory, and the invention of new theory changes the way we conceptualise and order the facts already in play.

We can see this interdependence already in the way that a given paradigm can uncover data through its own trusted instruments for which its wider theory cannot find a place. There is a sense in which such anomaly is a 'fact' and a sense in which it is not: within the paradigm it is known *that* there is something, but sense cannot be made of *what* that something is.[20] Whatever new paradigm comes forward to replace the old must offer a general theory which can take account of the anomalous 'fact' in such a way that it is no longer anomalous, but rather scientific I.e. it must have a place within the wider theoretical account offered by the new paradigm. Furthermore, when the paradigm is reshaped to accommodate this fact, it in turn conceptualises or shapes that fact, as well as, at least sometimes, affecting the wider conceptual ordering of facts. This is because a new paradigm comes with new standards. As Kuhn puts it, this 'is what fundamental novelties of fact and theory do. Produced inadvertently by a game played under one set of rules, their assimilation requires the elaboration of another set of rules.'[21]

It is these details which allow Kuhn to argue that it is in principle a bad question to ask when, exactly, oxygen was discovered. According to Kuhn it is not obvious that oxygen was discovered by any one person or at any one moment, in the same way that I might be said to discover a woodlouse under a garden stone. Rather, the anomaly which later became known as oxygen existed and was measured under some theory by various people, and was conceptualised in various ways - it had been nitrous oxide, 'common air with less than its usual quantity of phlogiston', and 'air itself, entire without alteration' before even being recognised as a 'distinct species'.[22] The conceptualisation of oxygen as we now have it came slowly over time, and after the fact-later-to become-known-as-oxygen was already in play. For this reason there is a sense in which oxygen only became what it is now over an extended period of history. It might yet become something new and different as theory develops further. This is because discovery involves knowing *that* something is, and *what* it is. Kuhn writes:

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[20] Ibid., 55

[21] Ibid., 52

[22] Ibid., 54

Though undoubtedly correct, the sentence, "Oxygen was discovered", misleads by suggesting that discovering something is a single simple act assimilable to our usual...concept of seeing. [However], if both observation and conceptualization, fact and assimilation to theory, are inseparably linked in discovery, then discovery is a process and must take time. Only when all the relevant conceptual categories are prepared in advance, in which case the phenomenon would not be of a new sort, can discovering that and discovering what occur effortlessly, together, and in an instant.[23]

Thus, in the example of discovering a woodlouse under the garden stone, all of my conceptual categories regarding woodlice, what they are, how they look, where we expect to find them and so on, are unproblematically in play prior to the discovery. But when it comes to the sort of anomalous discovery Kuhn is here elaborating on, the discovery is entwined in a particular conceptual framework that does not know how to understand it, and the full development of its discovery takes place as part of a process which demands much wider conceptual change.

Discovery commences with the awareness of anomaly, i.e. with the recognition that nature has somehow violated the paradigm-induced expectations that govern normal science. It then continues with a more or less extended exploration of the area of anomaly. And it closes only when the paradigm theory has been adjusted so that the anomalous has become the expected. Assimilating a new sort of fact demands a more than additive adjustment of theory, and until that adjustment is completed - until the scientist has learned to see nature in a different way - the new fact is not quite a scientific fact at all.[24]

This process relies on the particular shape of the competing paradigms, the conceptual framework, or rules of engagement they each have, and the relative ability of one paradigm to resolve or avoid the problems which have led to crisis in the old, while at the same time promising new productive avenues of normal science. The motivation to move to a new paradigm arises partly from the fact that continued research has become difficult in the old paradigm. Thus, it is due to the problematic conceptual framework of one paradigm, and its inability to follow through on the articulation of its own standards, that another paradigm can take its place. But the new paradigm must be responsive to the old paradigm, it must be able to say something about some of the problems which the old

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[23] Ibid., 55

[24] Ibid., 53

paradigm faced. Importantly then, different paradigm shifts will be justified on the basis of different historical conditions. The breakdown and supersession of one paradigm will not have the same rationally justifiable development as another. Kuhn says that "When the transition is complete, the profession will have changed its view of the field, its methods, and its goals. One perceptive historian... described it as "picking up the other end of a stick," a process that involves "handling the same bundle of data as before, but placing them in a new system of relations with one another by giving them a different framework."[25] On this account there is no appeal to any kind of external, let alone foundational standard.

IV - Raising the issue of relativism

There is an issue that needs to be raised here concerning the two different approaches to paradigm change that seem to come out in Kuhn's writing, the 'two Kuhn's' if you like. The issue between these approaches is important insofar as one reading invites a strong relativism (in the sense of being arbitrary) between paradigms, and thus renders the notion of progress incoherent.[26]

I have so far emphasised the side of Kuhn which does not seem to leave room for relativism: the successor paradigm in some sense grows out of the problems faced by the old paradigm and in turn answers those problems – it can be seen as an improvement upon existing conditions. Thus there is common ground between the competing paradigms and the development from one to the other can be seen as taking place over time as an attempt to adequately conceptualise the facts in play while promising productive future research or room for fruitful articulation of the new paradigm. Elsewhere, however, Kuhn emphasises the 'incommensurability' of paradigms; the impossibility of any translatability between them, and the sudden, inexplicable and revolutionary nature of the switch from one paradigm to the next. Kuhn argues that 'when paradigms change, there are usually significant shifts in the criteria determining the legitimacy both of problems and of proposed solutions... to the extent... that two scientific schools disagree about what is a problem and what a solution, they will inevitably talk through each other when debating the relative merits of their respective paradigms.'[27]

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[25] Ibid., 85, quoting Herbert Butterfield, *The Origins of Modern Science, 1300-1800*, Second ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1957), 7.

[26] Martin Hollis and Stephen Lukes, eds., *Rationality and Relativism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982).

[27] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 108.

Kuhn uses the analogy of a gradual breakdown in political order giving rise to a time of revolution, followed by the institution of a new political system. In the time of revolution when political order is in disarray, the decision between old and new political system cannot take place according to political procedure. Likewise, when paradigms break down and compete, no methodology internal to either paradigm can serve to arbitrate the two.[28] On this view the competing paradigms are closed systems so that in a circular manner each 'group uses its own paradigm to argue in that paradigms defence'[29] and a given paradigm 'cannot be made logically or even probabilistically compelling for those who refuse to step into the circle. The premises and values shared by the two parties to a debate over paradigms are not sufficiently extensive for that. As in political revolutions, so in paradigm choice – there is no standard higher than the assent of the relevant community.'[30] The only option is for some compelling criteria of assessment to be found outside the paradigms, or as Kuhn sometimes suggests, the change of paradigm will rely on something like a religious conversion or a leap of faith.[31]

I am here trying to avoid the foundationalist move of falling back on some kind of external criteria. Indeed, I think it is just these sorts of sceptical, or strongly relativist worries that partly motivates the foundationalist project. However, the seeming alternative of a leap of faith from one view to another is clearly not an adequate account of rational progress, and if this was the only way to interpret the move from one framework to another, then the process would indeed be relative (in the sense of rationally arbitrary) and incapable of rational assessment. I think that the non-relative account of Kuhn I have so far offered is, however, more fruitful and more in line with Kuhn's considered position. After all, Kuhn ultimately gives an account of scientific progress in terms of non-goal oriented evolution.[32] In the same way that evolution is not responsive to a distant teleological goal, but is rather responsive to the problems of the previous stage, so too with scientific progress. This is why the interdependence of fact and theory is so important. It allows us to make sense of two different paradigms having a different conception of the facts under scrutiny, and this commonality between them leaves room for rational comparison of the rival paradigms.

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[28] Ibid., 92

[29] Ibid., 93

[30] Ibid., 93

[31] Ibid., 150

[32] Ibid., 170

My non-relativistic interpretation allows us to see how Kuhn is also working against any foundational or absolute notion of rational criticism and in favour of a dialectical notion. For any two paradigms, where one succeeds the other, the rational justification for the succession is not necessarily dependent on an external standard which can be found independently of the two paradigms. The rational justification relies on substantive truths embedded within each of the paradigms, which relates them in some way, and explains the superiority of one over the other according to their *shared terms*. The move from one paradigm to another is a relative epistemic gain rather than an absolute one, but in this sense of relative the move is not arbitrary. It is not that the replacement paradigm has been shown under universally rational or experimental conditions, let alone indubitable standards, to be in any absolute manner, correct. It is rather that, given the standards of the old paradigm and the problems it faced, adopting the new paradigm stands as an achievement for us in its ability to at least partly make sense of our old standards, and to adopt new ones which allow us to proceed coherently and relatively unproblematically.

It needs to be stressed here that while the account allows for relative judgements between positions in the above sense, this does not reduce to a position of strong relativism in the sense of arbitrary judgements.

V - Transitional arguments

In this section I want to pick up on the non-sceptical reading of Kuhn's paradigm changes, and develop other ways in which we can understand our object of investigation to contain the requisite standards for its own criticism.

In elaborating similar ideas to Kuhn in his paper *Explanation and Practical Reason*, Charles Taylor is concerned with giving an account of rational justification between differing ethical positions. He begins by noting the common demand – at least from those caught in a foundationalist model of reasoning - for external criteria which can serve to show one ethical position as true against another as false. Taylor supposes that 'what is aimed at by [the term criteria] is a set of considerations such that, for two explicitly defined, rival positions X and Y, (a) people who unconfusedly and undividedly espouse both X and Y have to acknowledge them, and (b) they are sufficient to show that Y is right and X is wrong, or vice versa'.[33] The idea here is that any dispute between competing ethical pictures must

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[33] Charles Taylor, "Explanation and Practical Reason," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 41.

ultimately be resolved by externally defined criteria which prove one position right and the other wrong. The foundationalist view understood in this way would hold that, in order to avoid an irrationalism between competing ethical pictures we must suppose there to be some apodictic, i.e. indubitable, critical standard, and that standard must be of such a sort that our opponents cannot help but accept it if we point it out to them carefully enough, and which is also sufficient to show their position to be wrong and our position to be correct. Lacking effective criteria definable in this way independently of particular ethical perspectives, we would not be able to engage in rational debate. On this sceptical view, ethical perspectives X and Y each holds its own importantly different standards; each view thinks what it thinks, and there is nothing reason can say about that.[34] Either there are externally defined standards which are foundational or foundationally justifiable, or we open the door to ethical scepticism.

The potential for sceptical conclusions formulated in this way only follows, however, if one is once again caught in a foundationalist picture of rationality, a picture which requires these externally defined criteria. One should note, however, the similarity between this account of ethical perspectives, and the erroneous interpretation of Kuhn which holds different paradigms to be rationally closed off from one another. The reason we did not become sceptics concerning rational progress in the case of scientific paradigms was because we could make sense of the move from one paradigm to another as a gain in understanding. Even though the epistemic standards in each paradigm differed to some degree, and we may furthermore lack any sort of external criteria, this did not prevent us from speaking of rational progress between positions. What saved us from sceptical relativism was the existence of some common ground between the two paradigms. Likewise, so long as there is some common ground between ethical perspectives X and Y, there may be room for reason to get a hold again.

To this end Taylor gives an account of what he calls the *ad hominem* mode of practical reasoning. The *ad hominem* mode of reasoning contrasts with foundationalist reasoning insofar as it asks us to draw on the perspectives we already find ourselves within, rather than seeking externally defined criteria, or apodictic standards. Taylor puts it like this:

> [In the *ad hominem*] mode – to offer at any rate a first approximation – practical
> argument starts off on the basis that my opponent already shares at least some of the

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[34] Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Relativism, Truth and Justification," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

fundamental dispositions toward good and right which guide me. The error comes from confusion, unclarity, or an unwillingness to face some of what he can't lucidly repudiate; and reasoning aims to show up this error. Changing someone's moral view by reasoning is always at the same time increasing his self-clarity and self-understanding[35]

This mode of argument is compatible with a view which holds all of one's critical standards to be grounded in social practice. In the *ad hominem* mode any critical discussion with an individual will engage with those standards which they already hold and show that their understanding of those standards is distorted in some way. The alternative offered through critical discussion will be an improvement on their own self-understanding, or their own understanding of what those standards really entail.

To this end Taylor tries to lay down three forms of what he calls transitional arguments, where each successive form relies less and less on the foundationalist mode of reasoning, and the conception of criteria that comes with it. He conceives transitional argument to be such that the 'passage from one to the other [perspective] represents a gain in understanding. In other words, we can give a convincing narrative account of the passage from the first to the second as an advance in knowledge, a step from a less good to a better understanding of the phenomena in question. This establishes an asymmetrical relationship between them: a similarly plausible transition from the second to the first couldn't be constructed.'[36]

Taylor's first form of transitional argument is very similar to the one we are already familiar with through Kuhn, and seeing as it is still concerned with scientific progress I shall deal with it only briefly. This form focuses on the comparative feature of transitional arguments. Prior to our elucidation of Kuhn we might have conceived a comparative judgement between two positions to rely first of all on an absolute judgement about each. As Taylor puts it, in the case of 'a football game, the comparative verdict, team X won, is founded on two absolute assessments: team X scored 3 goals, and team Y scored 2 goals'.[37] In the case of scientific theories this might involve an assessment of how each theory deals with the scientific facts of reality. Whichever theory can explain more of the scientific facts is comparatively assessed as superior.

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[35] Taylor, *Explanation and Practical Reason*, 36.

[36] Ibid., 42

[37] Ibid., 43

This picture is only troubled by the nature of facts as theory-laden which we covered previously. The different theories involve different conceptualisations of the scientific facts in play, the facts, so to speak, do not stay still across the theories, and so the performance of each is not easily comparable in this way. But they are still comparable if we note that 'from the standpoint of Y, not just the phenomena in dispute, but also the history of X and its particular pattern of anomalies, difficulties, makeshifts, and breakdowns can be greatly illuminated. In adopting Y we make better sense not just of the world, but of our history of trying to explain the world, part of which has been played out in terms of X.' The example given to us is the move from Aristotelian theories of motion as always relying on a mover, to the Galilean theory of motion with its concept of inertial movement. Aristotelian theories had increasing trouble explaining the continued movement of, say, thrown objects – what was playing the role of mover? Galilean theory avoided this question by removing such continued motion as something requiring explanation. While the problems of Aristotelian theories could be explained away by Galilean theories, there is no room for the reverse move.

Taylor's second form of transitional argument does not depend on the prior position necessarily facing any anomalies. Indeed, he supposes that it does not even depend on the two theories shared attempt to explain the same phenomena. Instead, the transition here is seen as a gain because 'what the earlier science can't explain is the very success of the later *on the later's own terms.*'[38] The example used is again the shift from Aristotelian to Galilean paradigms. The Aristotelian paradigm conceived of explanation in terms of grasping the wider cosmic order 'whose structure could be understood teleologically, in terms of some notion of the good or of what ought to be'.[39] This conception of explanation is what allowed proponents of the Aristotelian theories to offer arguments of correspondence against Galileo. Taylor covers such an argument in his paper *Rationality,* where an opponent of Galileo argues from the fact that animals have 7 'windows' into the head – nostrils, eyes, ears, and a mouth – that there can only be 7 planets.[40]

This paradigm of explanation which seems so strange to us now, gave only a small place to the realm of 'empirics', or to what might otherwise be considered the principle role of science today. The sense of understanding which is connected with practical success or

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[38] Ibid., 47

[39] Ibid., 44

[40] Charles Taylor, "Rationality," in *Philosophy and the Human Science, Philosophical Papers Vol.2* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 141.

being able to find your way about in a particular technical field, was considered trivial in comparison to the form of understanding which helped us to see the wider meaning in the teleological ordering of things. Taylor suggests that the unexpected rise of 'empirics' can explain why the transition to the Galilean paradigm was rational:

> The very existence of such a body of truths and the consequent spectacular manipulative success, represents a critical challenge for pre-modern science... Beyond a certain point, you just can't pretend any longer that manipulation and control are not relevant criteria of scientific success. Pre-Galilean science died of its inability to explain/assimilate the actual success of post-Galilean science, where there is no corresponding symmetrical problem.[41]

However, if it were not for the fact that the Aristotelian theory had at least some room for the role of 'empirics', it might have been argued that regardless of the huge manipulative payoff offered by the Galilean paradigm, this payoff could not properly speaking be considered a success. If the standards of success were wholly different, if Aristotelian science only understood success in terms of finding an ordering towards the good, and Galilean science only understood success in terms of manipulative payoff, then we would be looking at a case of Kuhn's incommensurability. Indeed, the degree to which our social existence is built into technological know-how is not even today a unanimously agreed success, with many arguing that the rise of technology has inevitably involved a separation of ourselves from what is truly good. The technological payoff of the practical sciences could only have a chance of being considered a success if there was already some notion of successful understanding as involving practical know-how within the Aristotelian paradigm.[42] Taylor describes this connection between a certain form of understanding and practical know-how as an implicit constant between the two theories, or in Heideggerian terms, a pre-understanding, because it is a form of understanding we have prior to any articulation within a paradigm. It is the arrival of the successor paradigm which forces us to

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[41] Taylor, *Explanation and Practical Reason*, 47.

[42] Even with the implicit constant giving place to a connection between understanding and practical success, one can still imagine further arguments against the unequivocal success of 'empirics'. I have in mind the sorts of anti-technological arguments offered by Heidegger in his essay 'The Question Concerning Technology', where such manipulative payoff can't be denied as successful according to the standards of the narrowly defined manipulative sciences, but it can be denied as success insofar as it detaches us from our wider investigation into the meaningful order of things. In this respect the implicit constant alone is not enough to justify the transition and drop the prior paradigm. We may instead have to tell a more complex historical story. See Martin Heidegger, "The Question Concerning Technology," in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell, trans. William Lovitt, Second ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 1993).

recognise this implicit pre-understanding, or 'empirics' as the Aristotelians understood it, and to afford it a place in our conception of explanation which it did not formerly have. The implicit constant is like a Trojan horse that had always been there, unarticulated and barely noticed, and which helped carry the Galilean world view to victory.

I would like to draw attention to the idea of an implicit pre-understanding, or of a tacitly understood background against which we operate without necessarily articulating. Again, Kuhn is useful insofar as he touches on similar ideas. Kuhn argues that scientific paradigms are a mixture of explicit rules and principles, and an implicit element operating in the background. While his explication of paradigms is often laid out in terms of an explicit set of rules, standards and commitments into which the new members of a scientific community are educated, and within which they continue their practice, this characterisation may be misleading: 'Though there obviously are rules to which all the practitioners of a scientific speciality adhere at a given time, those rules by themselves may not specify all that the practice of those specialists has in common... Rules, I suggest, derive from paradigms, but paradigms can guide research even in the absence of rules.'[43] Kuhn is quite clear here that scientists can and do often act according to recognised rules or instructions, but he is also claiming that the notion of a guiding paradigm cannot be fully explained in terms of rule following. Indeed, a paradigm can guide us without formulated rules and, what's more, those rules are to be understood as derived from paradigms rather than being the key constitutive element. If rules are not the constitutive element of a paradigm, then what is?

Kuhn suggests an answer by considering some ideas found in Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations.*[44] Though the context of Wittgenstein's discussion is 'meaning', this is irrevocably tied to a discussion of rules: 'What need we know, Wittgenstein asked, in order that we apply terms like 'chair', or 'leaf,' or 'game' unequivocally and without provoking argument?'[45] This is a discussion which I will treat in far more detail in chapter 5, so I shall only give a brief treatment here. Take the word 'chair' and consider how varied those things are to which this term applies, and notice how there is no one shared or common characteristic identifiable in all chairs. There is rather, to use Wittgenstein's famous phrase, a 'family resemblance'. Knowing what the term applies to cannot consist, it would seem, in

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[43] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 42.

[44] Kuhn's treatment is brief, and contains some questionable elements. As such I have taken his lead and spelled this out here in terms I am happier with.

[45] Ibid., 44

consciously grasping a rule for what counts as a chair, for the kinds of chair we might encounter are endless. Our being taught the application of 'chair' will often involve statements of some of the common attributes of chairs, and it will involve being presented with various examples of chair, but we will never be taught, indeed it is not possible for us to be taught, a complete rule-set for all applications of the term. Nevertheless, when confronted with a novel example, we are normally able to appropriately identify chairs as such. As I will argue later, I think that this can be explained by the existence of both a shared practice embodying normative standards, and our own tacit grasp of how to participate in that practice. We should think of our ability to apply terms to objects such as 'chair' as a tacit grasp of standards that are maintained through shared social activity, rather than the following of an explicit set of rules. It is important to realise that on this picture the shared social practice is logically prior to the articulate codifications of rules, and that the unarticulated background can never be fully articulated into explicit rules or codifications. Again, I argue this more fully in chapter 5.

Similarly we need not have, indeed cannot have, a fully articulated set of rules when it comes to following a paradigm. We are first and foremost educated into a paradigm via particular instances, examples, applications and so on, rather than a fully explicit set of rules, and it is our grasp of what's important in those applications which allows us to proceed in novel circumstances. Codifying practice into rules could be the work for later historians trying to make sense of the activity, or scientists may try to articulate them in an attempt to alleviate confusion, settle disagreements or generally be clearer about what they are doing. These codifications, however, will always be conditioned by the implicit practice that grounds them, the codifications are always *articulations* of an underlying practice which the scientific communities have been trained into. Furthermore, just as a complete set of rules to define 'chair' is an impossible task, so too is a fully explicit set of rules for guiding our scientific practice.

An interesting consequence of this towards which Kuhn points us is that even though scientists are educated under the same general laws of a paradigm, due to each particular field being educated through differing applications and consequently the laws being embedded in correspondingly different background practices, the laws themselves inherit a different and – to that practice at least – legitimate interpretation. Kuhn argues that 'though quantum mechanics ... is a paradigm for many scientific groups, it is not the same paradigm for them all. Therefore it can simultaneously determine several traditions of

normal science that overlap without being coextensive.'[46] To illustrate this Kuhn points us to the example of a physicist and a chemist who each give differing answers to whether or not a helium atom counts as a molecule, and what informed their divergent answers were salient features of their own respective practical educations as physicist and chemist: "For the chemist that atom of helium was a molecule because it behaved like one with respect to the kinetic theory of gases. For the physicist, on the other hand, the helium atom was not a molecule because it displayed no molecular spectrum.'[47] The same explicitly formulated laws received differing interpretation on the basis of that implicit background activity in which they had each been trained.

This notion of an implicit background is extremely important for my developing arguments. This is because my ultimate contention will be that none of our epistemological systems - theoretical or practical - are what Taylor calls 'fully explicit closed systems'.[48] Rather, for any system of understanding there is always a presupposed background which makes that understanding possible. It's not just that there is sometimes an implicit element; rather, it is unavoidable that there will be an implicit element, and this element is partly what keeps a system of understanding 'open' and contentious. As I will go on to show, it is our ability to draw on and develop these implicit, taken for granted, previously unrecognised or covered over elements that enables us to engage in immanent critique. This is because once this implicit element is formulated and recognised as part of our own genuine understanding they cannot but hold normative force for us. Thus, while the start of this argument supposed that a reliance on background presuppositions posed a danger for the critical stance, we are now beginning to offer a view which gives such background presuppositions an important and central role in critical discussion. The full account of this will come into play in chapters 6 and 7 of this Thesis, where I argue that paying attention to our own practical activities and attempting to form context-placing explanations or articulations of that activity, plays a central role in self-knowledge and self-development.

I would now like to discuss the third form of transitional argument which Taylor offers us. While the first and second form of transitional argument moved away from any notion of an absolute judgement forming the basis of a comparative judgement, and instead shifted focus to the comparative judgement as primary, and therefore excluded the need for any

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[46] Ibid., 50

[47] Ibid., 50

[48] Taylor, *Explanation and Practical Reason*, 49.

criteria external to and accepted by each of the conflicting systems, these forms still depended on criteria in some sense of the word. The position laying claim to a transitional gain in understanding still had to appeal to something internal to the losing position, whether its own anomalies or an implicit understanding. Taylor's third form is an attempt to move even further away from the notion of criteria, to a purer form of transitional gain: 'the transition from X to Y is not shown to be a gain because this is the only way to make sense of the key consideration; rather it is shown to be a gain directly, because it can plausibly be described as mediated by some error-reducing move'.[49] The third form aims to do away with criteria all together by having an account of the transition as self-justifying in virtue of *itself* being a recognised error-reducing move.

Taylor tries to make this plausible with a simple example. He asks us to consider the case of walking into a lecture hall and seeming to see a pink elephant with yellow polka dots. This strikes us as bizarre so we shake our head, rub our eyes, steady our gaze, and take another more focused look, only to see that it is definitely a pink elephant with yellow polka dots.

> I'm confident that my second perception is more trustworthy, not because it scores better than the first on some measure of likelihood. On the contrary, if what I got from the first look was something like "maybe a pink elephant, maybe not," and from the second "definitely a pink elephant with yellow polka dots," there's no doubt the first must be given greater antecedent probability. It is after all a disjunction, one of whose arms is overwhelmingly likely in these circumstances. But in fact I trust my second percept, because I have gone through an ameliorating transition.[50]

Taylor thinks that many things can count as an 'ameliorating transition', including the removal of confusion, the highlighting of contradiction, the noticing of some neglected but clearly relevant consideration, and so on. What is important to note is that the removal of error just *is* the transitional gain, and there is no appeal to anything outside of the transitional move itself. Similarly, 'instead of concluding that Y was a gain over X because of the superior performance of Y, we would be confident of the superior performance of Y because we knew that Y was a gain over X'.[51]

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[49] Ibid., 51

[50] Ibid., 52

[51] Ibid., 51

Taylor gives an example of this sort of transition as it can be made biographically, or in the sphere of self-understanding.[52] We might imagine someone who is uncertain of their feelings for another person, largely because they also feel a large amount of resentment towards them. They say to themselves: "how can it be love if I resent them so much? These things are not compatible." However, through conversation with friends, through attending a church sermon on love's power to overcome obstacles, or something of the like, this person comes to see their previous view of love as naive and simplistic. In overcoming this confusion they are now confident in their new belief that they are in love. We might even imagine the attempt to convince them of their false conception of love, as involving something of the second form of transitional argument. Their friends might, for instance, point out other instances where they have felt love towards someone, yet unbeknownst to them (for they never at the time articulated their strange behaviour) they were clearly also acting resentful towards them. Their friends would draw attention to this resentful behaviour and interpret it for them as being resentful. They would then point out that this unconscious resentment in no way interfered with that love.

VI - Thinking for oneself

I now want to offer a solution to the issue of 'thinking for oneself' with which I opened this chapter. The suggestion was made there that if 'thinking for oneself' involved drawing on standards that were not given to us by our communities, the only other option was a form of foundationalism, or the idea that we could have an indubitably given epistemic content. It is finding this standard within ourselves that supposedly affords us the requisite critical distance from the object of criticism. I have gone some way to undermining this view by discussing a notion of dialectical development, best exemplified by Taylor's transitional arguments, where the object of investigation contains tensions and conflicts, and those tensions and conflicts are the standards by which we can critically engage with that object. But what does it mean to 'think for oneself' on this account?

I suggest that thinking for oneself involves not radical detachment from the social environment, but close engagement with that social environment, in combination with a willingness, or openness to revision.[53] To not think for oneself is to not engage with all the deepest possibilities opened up by the social environment of which one is a member, it is

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[52] Ibid., 52

[53] Daniel Bell, "Political Theorizing as the Interpretation of a Community's Shared Understandings," in *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

to remain closed off to revisions of that environment when it is facing inconsistencies, or otherwise failing to do its work in some way.

Note that the notion of 'distance' found in 'critical distance' gets a hold here insofar as we must be willing to revise; we must not be dogmatically committed to those frameworks in spite of their internal tensions. To lack this distance and to exhibit such dogmatism, is to be so committed to the framework as it stands that one is incapable, or unwilling, to embrace any potential revisions or improvements. However, it needs to be stressed that this distance is relative distance, or relative detachment, and is always parasitic on some degree of engagement with that framework. It is only by first being closely engaged with the framework, and by exploring to the fullest the possibilities made available to us through that engagement, that it becomes apparent that any revision is needed, or that any notion of what that revision might look like can take shape for us.

Kuhn's elaboration of the historical process of paradigm change offers another good example here. Remember that it is only on the basis of a paradigm that anything counts as a problem or a solution, and that it is only the thoroughly engaged process of normal science that delivers us anomaly after anomaly and creates the need for, as well as giving shape, to the successor paradigm. Kuhn also notes the historical example of scientists who are so committed to old paradigms that they become the last standing practitioners before their deaths. It is the younger generation, committed enough to a paradigm to closely engage with it, but not so committed that they are against revision, who tend to bring about the process of change. I can think of no better example of a form of critical distance which is nevertheless both dependent on and thoroughly engaged with shared social standards. If critical distance is the requirement of 'thinking for oneself' then something of a solution has been offered here. Walzer gives us a nice characterisation of this sort of critical distance, when he compares the 'connected critic' who is 'a little to the side but not outside' with the critic of radical detachment.

> In the conventional view, the critic is not really a marginal figure; he is - he has made himself into - an outsider, a spectator, a "total stranger", a man from Mars. He derives a kind of critical authority from the distance he establishes ... He stands outside, in some privileged place, where he has access to "advanced" or universal principles, and he applies these principles with an impersonal (intellectual) rigor.[54]

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[54] Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, 38.

Against this view - which I characterised at the opening of this chapter - I have put forward a view more consonant with Walzer's 'connected critic', who criticises by 'telling stories about a society more just than, though never entirely different from, our own.'[55]

> The difficulties they experience are not the difficulties of detachment but of ambiguous connection. Free them from those difficulties, and they may well lose the reasons they have for joining the critical enterprise.[56]

VII - Conclusion

I started off by expressing a potential fear that any account of personal identity which closely ties one's evaluative standards, both theoretical and practical, to the community within which one is a participating member, risks failing to make sense of the clear fact of social criticism. I argued that such fears gain credence only through an undue identification of social criticism with a foundationalist mode of reasoning, or a demand for some criteria of assessment recognisable apart from any particular social framework and capable of holding authority over our considerations. While I have not yet shown that such external criteria are impossible, I have argued that we do not need recourse to such a thing to make sense of social criticism. Social criticism can be understood as drawing on standards internal to our theoretical and practical frameworks. Kuhn argues that new paradigms are attempts to solve the disintegration of older paradigms as a result of the proliferation of anomaly, they are attempts to conceptualise those anomalies into facts open to further investigation, and in such a way that tends to restructure the rules governing scientific investigation more generally. In this way new paradigms are both responsive to old paradigms while also reshaping what counts as an explanation and what facts there are that need explaining. Taylor carries this thought further with three notions of transitional argument which offer us gains in understanding: one which is able to make sense of the failures of an old position; one which draws on an implicit background in such a way that cannot but command our ascent; and one which moves us forward on the basis of an error-reducing move. I have suggested that these will play an important role towards the end of my overall argument. I will spend the next few chapters arguing that the very notion of criteria identifiable independently of any social framework is incoherent, so as to more fully justify the position I have here outlined.

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[55] Ibid., 65

[56] Ibid., 37

Chapter 3: Foundationalism and the Disengaged Knower

I - Introduction

In the last chapter I explored an apparent tension between holistic conceptions of the self and the value of critical distance. I argued that this tension was due to an identification of rational criticism with the foundationalist enterprise. While I did not argue against the idea of foundationalism, I did show that we need not identify it with rational criticism. I now want to argue against the very idea of foundationalism, conceived as the search for indubitable or immediately given items of knowledge that can serve as an ultimate ground for all our other beliefs.

This is an extended argument that I will offer over the next three chapters. I will begin this chapter by highlighting some moral or cultural motivations for adopting the foundationalist project, and I will point out some connections between this project and atomist conceptions of the individual. I will then explore some of the philosophical grounds one might take as a reason for adopting the position of immediacy which underpins foundationalism, and I will outline what rationalist and empiricist forms of immediacy tend to look like. I will end by offering an initial diagnosis of the incoherency to be found in the notion of an immediately given epistemic content, and then outline what I take to be the best form of argument for both drawing out this incoherency and for showing what knowledge must in fact consist in. The form of argument I suggest is that of transcendental argument, and I will spend the two chapters following on from this one developing these transcendental arguments in detail, while at the same time working towards a correct holistic account of, not just what it is to know, but what it is to form a conception of anything at all.

The upshot of this extended argument will be the beginnings of a return to the holistic conception of the individual outlined in chapter 1, (with chapter 5 completing the argument) and an account of knowledge and reason consonant with the position I outlined in chapter 2.

II - Connecting epistemology to the self

It might seem odd to be turning to the epistemological issue of foundationalism during the course of an argument which aims to demonstrate a holistic account of the self. However, throughout much of the history of modern philosophy, the notion of an immediately given

epistemic content which normally underpins foundationalism, has tended to form a key component in a general conception of the human condition, and of the nature of individuals therein. This conception is not just a product of philosophy, rather, the same general ideas and tendencies can be found within our wider cultural understandings. Indeed, I do not think it is unreasonable to suggest that the development of philosophy has been at least in part a reflection of those wider cultural understandings, or an attempt to articulate them and given them rational credence. Expressed otherwise than through the jargon of philosophy, it is a conception of human beings with which many people will find resonance.

That general conception of the human condition finds an amicable relationship with the mutually supportive atomist epistemology and atomist conception of the self. I would like to use Rorty to give a rough and ready formulation of this particular conception of our condition, which he refers to as the 'objectivist stance', and to make clear its reliance on some notion of the immediately given. I will suggest some reasons why we might feel morally or culturally motivated towards an epistemology of the immediately given, and I will also show how this epistemology feeds into an atomist conception of the individual. It is by undermining the epistemology which unites this conception of the human condition and the atomist conception of the self, that I aim to demonstrate my own holistic account.

Rorty distinguishes two different approaches people might take, 'by placing their lives in a larger context, to give sense to those lives'.[1] He labels the two approaches as 'solidarity' and 'objectivity'. Solidarity involves trying to make sense of oneself relative to a community, or mediated through a communal story, history or ethos. It involves asking where one fits within the rich concrete world that one has been acculturated into. Importantly, on this view one does not look for something beyond one's community in order to make sense of one's life; nor does one attempt to compare or measure the communal story with anything outside itself. This general picture should be familiar from the preceding chapters. In opposition to this, the objectivist stance tries to find meaning through an immediate relation to a non-human (In the sense of non-social or non-cultural) world. In trying to find meaning by placing oneself in this immediate relationship to a non-human world, one must avoid or distance oneself from communal standards or perspectives. On this view, any mediation through communal relations, common history or

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[1] Richard Rorty, "Solidarity Or Objectivity?" in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth: Philosophical Papers Volume I* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21.

parochial understanding, is a possible distortion or mere appearance of that non-human world of objectivity, or of what is genuine and true. Such mediated understandings are relative, partial, subjective, and in order to achieve objectivity we must distance ourselves from those relations and historical communities, and instead see ourselves as part of something which can be described without reference to any particular human beings or human practices.[2]

This notion of objectivity gives rise to the huge focus on distinguishing appearance from reality in philosophy from Socrates onwards, as well as what some might pejoratively call the scientism of our times. The Truth has become something valuable in itself and irrespective of our historical heritage or local cultures, and is something that can only be found through transcending communal parochialisms and locating the real essence of things. Thus Rorty writes:

> We are the heirs of this objectivist tradition, which centres around the assumption that we must step outside our community long enough to examine it in the light of something which transcends it, namely, that which it has in common with every other actual and possible human community. This tradition dreams of an ultimate community which will have transcended the distinction between the natural and the social, which will exhibit a solidarity which is not parochial because it is the expression of an ahistorical human nature.[3]

Note then that the partisans of objectivity do not reject solidarity but instead see genuine or true solidarity as something to be achieved by moving beyond our local, contingent and illusory communities towards a higher human community; a community grounded in an ahistorical human nature in which we all participate because we are the same sort of biological beings, and within which we find true solidarity. Partisans of solidarity, however, take the reverse position: they do not reject objectivity but rather reduce it to solidarity; they see objectivity as consisting in a greater degree of solidarity, it is a feature of wide spread agreement.[4]

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[2] Rorty gives an extended treatment of the history of this philosophy, which sees knowledge as mirroring the reality, in Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Second ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009).

[3] Rorty, *Solidarity Or Objectivity?*, 22.

[4] While I agree with Rorty that objectivity cannot be seen to consist in any ahistorical or transcommunal criteria that bring us in to contact with reality in itself, and that his account of the advance of knowledge as an advance in solidarity is illuminating, I think that to call knowledge nothing other than widespread agreement is far too simple. Knowledge and reason are *grounded* on a

Rorty elaborates two key moral or cultural reasons - he refers to them as 'metaphysical comforts' - that we have for adopting the objectivist stance. The first is that a certain understanding of human rights which is deeply entrenched in both our everyday discourse and our political organisation seems not to make sense without an appeal to a common human nature: 'The thought that membership in our biological species carries with it certain "rights," [is] a notion which does not seem to make sense unless the biological similarities entail the possession of something non-biological, something which links our species to a nonhuman reality and thus gives the species moral dignity.'[5] Though Kant is not an advocate of immediacy, his moral philosophy is nevertheless an expression of this cultural view. Kant's moral philosophy involves an argument for human dignity and human autonomy, constructed on the understanding of human beings as inherently rational beings. What's more, this notion of reason is non-human in the sense of being above and beyond mere cultural understandings, it is a feature of ourselves as transcendental subjects.[6] If we wish to maintain such a notion of rights, we will be motivated to maintain some notion of a human nature in which we all participate: 'this picture of rights as biologically transmitted is so basic to the political discourse of the Western democracies that we are troubled by any suggestion that "human nature" is not a useful moral concept.'[7]

The second motivation for accepting the objectivist stance concerns something like a hope for the destiny of our species and our place therein:

> The second comfort is provided by the thought that our community cannot wholly
> die. The picture of a common human nature oriented towards correspondence to
> reality as it is in itself comforts us with the thought that even if our civilization is
> destroyed, even if all memory of our political or intellectual or artistic community is

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widely shared activity, and in this way it is something we *do*, but that activity makes available standards of reason and presents tensions and conflicts which can be used as a basis for argument about better and worse ways to conceive of things. Knowledge is the result of employing such standards and overcoming such tensions, and should be conceived as essentially related to that background, and is thus more than simply widespread agreement.

[5] Ibid., 31

[6] Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, trans. H. J. Paton (Oxford: Routledge, 1991).

[7] Rorty, *Solidarity Or Objectivity?*, 31.

erased, the race is fated to recapture the virtues and the insights and the
achievements which were the glory of that community.[8]

 That is to say, the ultimate human community, the truest form of solidarity, is fated to
happen in virtue of our fundamental nature as human beings, and we can take comfort in
the fact that we are one more brick laid on an already elaborate and hard won foundation,
building towards the truest and therefore best form of mankind. If such a picture appeals
to us, we once again have motivation to accept a picture of human beings as all sharing a
common nature, as being connected to an objective reality, and what's more, that
objective reality must be accessible to us.

For the objectivist we are all potential participants in this 'ultimate community'. If only we
can rationally follow through on *our direct and unmediated connection* to the real and true,
we will become what we really are as opposed to what we merely seem to be.[9] But what is
involved in the objectivists immediate contact with an objective reality?

> Those who wish to ground solidarity in objectivity – call them "realists" – have to
> construe truth as correspondence to reality. So they must construct a metaphysics
> which has room for a special relation between beliefs and objects which will
> differentiate true from false beliefs. They must argue that there are procedures of
> justification of belief which are natural and not merely local. So they must construct
> an epistemology which has room for a kind of justification which is not merely
> social but natural, springing from human nature itself, and made possible by a link
> between that part of nature and the rest of nature.[10]

It seems that the objectivist account of the human condition involves a requirement for
something like an immediately given epistemic content. As was explored in the previous
chapter, the foundationalist, in wanting to avoid those relative and parochial communal

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[8] Ibid., 31

[9] The objectivist hope of forming the true human community is often born out in the history of
philosophy via many of the attempts to ground our ethics first of all in a firm epistemology. We saw
this with the supposedly scientific account of morals offered us by utilitarianism, where Bentham saw
it as his task to specifically undermine the baseless and ambiguous moral phrases that were
maintained by parochial wisdom. To get a good sense of Bentham's 'objectivist' task, see Jeremy
Bentham, "The Principle of Utility," in *Ethics*, ed. Peter Singer (Oxford: Oxford University Press,
1994)., and for his view on empty phrases see Mill, *Mill on Bentham and Coleridge*, 51-53., where he
is quoting from Jeremy Bentham, *Introduction to the Principles of Morals and Legislation* (London:
SCM Press, 2009). This particular line of thought can be traced back to Hume's empiricist
epistemology and the account of ethical truth which he drew from this. See David Hume, *An Enquiry
Concerning the Principles of Morals* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1983).

[10] Rorty, *Solidarity Or Objectivity?*, 22.

understandings, which might so easily be false, needed to find another source of reason apart from the social world, or as Rorty argues, springing from our own nature. This is best characterised by the reflexive turn towards analysing the contents of our mind simply as features of ourselves, as they exist in abstraction from the external world. I will return to this.

Taylor comes from another direction when exploring our motivations for adopting what he calls the 'epistemological stance'. His discussion focuses on the representational turn in epistemology, but as we will see, immediacy is a core component of this. He first of all views the move to a representational approach as motivated by the decline of the Aristotelian world view and the subsequent rise of mechanistic science. On the Aristotelian account, knowledge involved the mind becoming one with the object of thought, in the sense that each was informed by the same type, kind or, in Plato's terminology, the same 'form'; Taylor refers to this account as 'participational' rather than representational. However, 'once we no longer explain the way things are in terms of the species that inform them, this conception of knowledge is untenable and rapidly becomes almost unintelligible.'[11] The introduction of mechanistic explanation thus opened the door for a new account of knowledge, but it also played a determining role in what that account would look like. To give a mechanistic explanation of knowledge was to give a mechanistic explanation of perception, involving 'as a crucial component the passive reception of impressions from the external world. Knowledge then hangs on a certain relation holding between what is "out there" and certain inner states that this external reality causes in us.'[12]

However, on this view, it is not enough to have knowledge that my representations happen to correspond to an objective world, I have to know for certain that they do. Furthermore, my only resource for achieving such certainty is through that previously mentioned reflexive turn, by paying attention to the contents of my own mind in abstraction from any claims about the external world.[13] It is those contents of the mind which are immediately known and which must form the basis of all other knowledge claims. Again, we are back with a notion of immediacy.

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[11] Charles Taylor, "Overcoming Epistemology," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 3.

[12] Ibid., 4

[13] Ibid., 5

Outside of the rise of mechanistic science, this reflexive turn and its reliance on an immediately given epistemic content, is motivated by an ideal of self-responsibility which is closely linked to the notion of 'thinking for oneself' as I outlined it in the last chapter.

> The ideal of self-responsibility is foundational to modern culture. It emerges not only in our picture of the growth of modern science through the heroism of the great scientist, standing against the opinion of his age on the basis of his own self-responsible certainty ... It is also closely linked to the modern ideal of freedom as self-autonomy ... to be free in the modern sense is to be self-responsible, to rely on your own judgement, to find your purpose in yourself.[14]

This notion of self-responsibility and freedom, the distancing of oneself from parochial or communal standards in the hope of getting closer to The True through universal standards of reason, the mechanistic and manipulative successes in the sciences and the subsequent valorisation of the heroic scientist on just those grounds of self-responsibility, and the notion of rights as grounded in our connection to something non-human, all form a mutually supportive and deeply compelling picture.

However, the epistemology which underlies and connects the elements of this picture involves an atomist construal of the individual. For Taylor, this epistemological enterprise is irrevocably tied to three broad but interconnected understandings of the self:

1) The ideally disengaged subject who is free and rational insofar as he has 'distinguished himself from the natural and social worlds', and whose identity is no longer bound up with the objects outside of himself – he is completely distinct as a rational agent in this respect.
2) What flows from the disengaged agent: the punctual view of the self, ready at any moment to revise the structure of the world or himself instrumentally so as to improve his well being. For those inessential parts of himself can be instrumentally subjected to his disengaged reason.
3) What follows from the first two: the atomistic construal of social relations and society as explicable in terms of prior rationally self-interested individuals.[15]

Notice that across these three steps we move from an atomist epistemology to an atomist conception of the self. Also notice that the atomist construal of social relations and the

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[14] Ibid., 7

[15] Ibid., 7

instrumental reorganisation of those relations according to the universal principles of disengaged agents, is one way of construing the objectivist stance. Thus, by undermining the epistemology that holds all of this together, I will also be arguing against certain features of the human condition as expressed via Rorty's advocate of objectivity, as well as the atomist construal of the self expressed here by Taylor.

III - Rationalist and empiricist forms of immediacy

I now want to explore the sorts of philosophical grounds there are for seeking out an immediately given epistemic content, as well as the sorts of rationalist and empiricist forms that this might take.

For as long as we are thinking like partisans of objectivity with an absolute conception of truth as something independent of our reasoning, beliefs and judgements about it, then we shall be pushed towards seeking indubitable foundations. The general line of argument which leads one in this direction is as follows: given that truth is something absolute, that is to say non-relative, non-partial, and given that ordinary accounts of what it is to know or doubt are going to be relative and partial, we need to find some way of achieving an absolute conception of the absolute truth. We need non-relative, non-partial standards for sorting out what is true from what is false. In trying to achieve an absolute conception of an absolute truth we cannot rely on any methodological belief which is itself partial or relative, and this amounts to finding a method which is not only error proof but indubitably error proof: its efficacy has to be something which is recognisable to all, regardless of their epistemological prejudices.

In order to make the objectivist project and its commitment to an absolute conception clear I will follow the classic statement given us by Descartes. In particular I will focus on his deployment of a non-relative notion of what it is to doubt and the key role this plays in determining for him the nature of his error proof starting point.

Descartes' peculiar usage of doubt involves an identification of knowledge with certainty and doubt with ignorance, at least within the specially circumscribed circumstances of his philosophical search for truth: 'Reason now leads me to believe that I should hold back my assent from opinions which are not completely certain and indubitable just as carefully as I do from those which are patently false.'[16] This suspect identification of epistemological

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[16] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 12.

concepts is made possible due to Descartes' unusually high standards of application; standards so high that one cannot consider them ordinary uses of those concepts. I will focus on this strange use of the concept of 'doubt'.

Ordinarily this concept would require special circumstances or reasons for a doubt being raised. We can see this in Descartes' argument from the possibility of illusion. In the case of illusory experience a doubt is usually raised because a comparison is made with some other piece of perceptual knowledge. We doubt, for example, that the stick is genuinely bent when placed in water because under commonly recognised 'ideal conditions' it would not appear so and also because while in the water we can use the sense of touch to counter the erroneous sense of sight. The example of the malicious demon on the other hand, a malevolent agency working to render all our thoughts and perceptions erroneous, does not rely on special circumstances or reasons for doubting, rather, it is a thought experiment to show the logical possibility of all our perceptions being illusory all of the time and irrespective of special circumstances. Descartes' use of this example is deliberate and necessary for his sceptical arguments to go through, because in this way being doubtful has become very closely tied with being contingent, which is a much weaker requirement for doubt than the special circumstances of illusory perception. Thus, for as long as we can conceive things being other than how they appear, those beliefs remain unjustified. Scepticism seems to follow because we can always conceive such possibilities via thought experiments of the malicious demon or brain in a vat kind. We should keep in mind though, that insofar as reasons for doubt rely on the mere logical possibility of error, no matter how farfetched, rather than particular contextually suitable reasons for doubt, this remains a peculiar usage of the 'doubt' concept.[17]

One might be tempted to argue on the basis of this peculiar usage that Descartes is, in the case of the malicious demon thought experiment, using the concept 'doubt' in an illegitimate manner. The illusory nature which perceptions can have, or the manner in which dreams can appear to be real when we are having them, are legitimate cases of doubt because they operate within a wider context which gives the doubt sense. We have standards for saying a perception is doubtful, or for distinguishing dreams from waking life. There are, so to speak, objects of comparison. The malicious demon on the other hand

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[17] Williams does not think this is a fair characterisation of Descartes' use of the malicious demon and – beyond his argument that the special circumstances legitimise this use – he offers some other more direct arguments against this characterisation. While I think these can all be answered, it falls too far outside the scope of what I am trying to argue here.

renders even these 'objects of comparison' doubtful; the entire context within which we distinguish veridical from non-veridical perceptions, dreams from waking life, is rendered doubtful on the mere possibility of things being other than they seem – and our intuitions might say that this makes the very notion of doubt senseless. This, however, according to Bernard Williams, is not a criticism, but the whole point.

> We can now see a deeper significance in [Descartes'] objective and what it involves, for, from the point of view of seeking the absolute conception, the distinction between a source of error or distortion which is merely conceivable, and one which we take to be empirically effective, loses its importance. What we judge to be empirically effective is itself a function of what we believe, of our representation of the world, and must be undercut in the critical search for the absolute conception.[18]

What Williams calls 'empirically effective' reasons for doubt are sets of beliefs which are partial and relative, standards of assessment which are the product of a long history of investigation and developed thinking. So if we are seeking an absolute conception of an absolute truth, that is to say, if we are partisans of objectivity, then we cannot rely on these partial or relative conceptions of what it is to doubt. Put otherwise, these standards are not immediate or indubitable, rather, they are mediated and corrigible; such standards are not self-sufficient but depend on something else, and insofar as they depend on something else the logical possibility of their doubtfulness can be raised, we can ask ourselves whether that which mediates these empirical standards is itself adequately justified or doubtful. What we need then, to get us in touch with absolute truth is an indubitable foundation, something which it is logically impossible to doubt, something which must hold true for all human beings.

The associations I make between being indubitable and being immediately given when talking about foundations may not be obvious. Consider though the common formulation of sceptical regress: any claim *p1* must, in order to count as knowledge, be justified. We may justify *p1* via the claim *p2*, but then *p2* in turn needs to be justified. The halting of this regress amounts to a search for beliefs which are *self-evidently true*, or beliefs which cannot be held without being true. This is a consequence of Descartes extreme doubt: if a belief can be held while admitting the possibility of being false, it is because it needs further justification, or because it has implications which need justification. This is why

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[18] Bernard Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, Second ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2005), 51.

Robert Brandom writes, in discussing Descartes' foundationalism, that 'there must be some way of *being* justified without having to *be* justified... there must be some other way of acquiring positive justificatory status besides justifying it in the sense of offering a justification. Besides inferential inheritance, there must also be some noninferential acquisition mechanism for this epistemic status'.[19] Here the myth of an indubitable foundation in the form of something immediate and given is born; the hope for something which is self-evidently true, and which achieves this status in virtue of what it is rather than through reliance on, or mediation through something else. Anything mediated or reliant on something else for its justificatory status is open to Descartes' peculiar form of doubt. This is why I understand these foundations to be indubitable in virtue of their immediacy.

I will now use Descartes to elaborate a rationalist account of an immediately given foundation. After systematically doubting the existence of the external world and even his body by showing the logical possibility of their falsehood, Descartes, of course, lands on the *cogito* as his one indubitable truth. Descartes tries to push his scepticism further than the external world and his own body, and poses the question: 'Does it now follow that I too do not exist?'[20] He responds: 'No: if I convinced myself of something then I certainly existed.'[21] In this way Descartes supposes that to be engaged in the act of doubting at all there has to be a doubter – he, at least, has to exist. But he is cautious in determining what his existence consists in, so he runs through his sceptical doubts once more to see what actually remains beyond sceptical attack, and has the following revelation: 'Thinking? At last I have discovered it – thought; this alone is inseparable from me. I am, I exist – that is certain. But for how long? For as long as I am thinking. For it could be that were I totally to cease from thinking, I should totally cease to exist.'[22]

My calling this a revelation is no coincidence. Remember that we are looking for something indubitable, something which has the quality of immediacy, of being self-evidently true. Does the cogito satisfy this? Descartes certainly argues for it in terms of immediacy: 'When we observe that we are thinking beings, this is a sort of primary notion which is not the conclusion of any syllogism; and, moreover, when someone says: I think, therefore I am, I exist, he is not using a syllogism to prove his existence from his thought, but recognising

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[19] Robert Brandom, "Study Guide by Robert Brandom," in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, ed. Robert Brandom (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 125.

[20] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 16.

[21] Ibid., 17

[22] Ibid., 17

this as something self-evident, in a simple mental intuition.'[23] If the cogito were the product of a syllogism then it would be mediated through a process of reasoning, and that process of reasoning could be called into question. It has to be something like an immediate intuition or revelation to even be a candidate for self-evident certainty.[24] Brandom characterises this sort of move as an attempt to show how non-epistemic facts about knowers can entail epistemic facts about knowers, a move which Descartes attempts to achieve by defining 'the mind in epistemic terms: for a state to be a mental state is for being in that state to entail knowing that one is in that state and for believing that one is in that state to entail being in that state.'[25] Thus the non-epistemic fact that Descartes is thinking, immediately entails the epistemic fact that Descartes knows he is thinking. Note that on this understanding of the mind it is contradictory to be thinking without knowing that one is thinking, and so there is no room for the contingency or mediation which can give rise to doubt.

Descartes' foundation is rationalist insofar as he thinks that 'everything "outside myself" is only known through the medium of *ideas*, which represent reality, and are themselves the immediate objects of the mind's cognition.'[26] In this way it is ideas rather than phenomenal perceptions which are primary. Our phenomenal perception only counts as experience of things because it is mediated through certain ideas. Descartes' wax argument is partly used to make this point. When a piece of wax melts by a fire, and goes through a series of changes, we must admit that it is the same piece of wax after melting as it was before melting. However, Descartes argues, there is no single phenomenal quality or collection of phenomenal qualities which reveals it to be the same wax. Nor can the wax consist in the sum of all possible phenomenal qualities, because there are infinitely many which it could exhibit.

'I must therefore admit that the nature of the wax is in no way revealed by my imagination, but is perceived by the mind alone. It is of course the same wax which I see, which I touch, which I picture in my imagination, in short the same wax which I thought it to be from the start. And yet, and here is the point, the perception I have of

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[23] René Descartes, "Reply to Second Objections," in *The Philosophical Works of Descartes, Volume II*, trans. Elizabeth S. Haldane and G. R. T. Ross (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1931), 38.

[24] For a longer discussion on this see Anthony Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy* (New York: Random House, 1968), 40-62.

[25] Brandom, *Study Guide by Robert Brandom*, 121.

[26] Williams, *Descartes: The Project of Pure Enquiry*, 44.

it is a case not of vision or of touch or imagination – nor has it ever been, despite previous appearances – but of purely mental scrutiny.'[27]

I perceive the wax in my ideas, not in the phenomenal qualities. But which ideas are immediately given? Descartes' method is to use the certainty he has achieved in knowing that he is a thinking thing, and to use it as something like a yard stick for the certainty of other ideas. Thus 'I am certain that I am a thinking thing. Do I not therefore also know what is required of my being certain about anything?'[28] And seeing as it was the 'clarity and distinctness' with which Descartes perceived the *cogito*, no instance of a similarly clear and distinct perception can be considered false, 'so I now seem to be able to lay it down as a general rule that whatever I perceive very clearly and distinctly is true.'[29] In this way Descartes uses the notion of 'clear and distinct' as a yardstick to demonstrate other apodictic truths, and this seems to amount to a commitment on Descartes' part to accept any truth which he cannot coherently deny.[30] We find a particular example in his introduction of the principle 'there must be at least as much reality in the efficient and total cause as in the effect of that cause',[31] a rational principle which is meant to exhibit the requisite immediacy because it cannot be coherently denied. This is a dubious step, but it's being questionable does not concern my arguments. I only wished to show a rationalist form of apodictic foundationalism as involving the immediacy of ideas.[32]

By contrast, empiricist formulations of apodictic foundations place emphasis on phenomenal qualities as the immediate objects of knowledge, with ideas being secondary. It is in this way that Hume argues that all ideas we may happen to have of unicorns, pieces of wax or rational principles are ultimately just the habitual or creative association of

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[27] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 21.

[28] Ibid., 24

[29] Ibid., 24

[30] 'Let whoever can do so deceive me, he will never bring it about that I am nothing, so long as I continue to think I am something; or make it true at some future time that I have never existed, since it is no true that I exist; or bring it about that two and three added together are more or less than five, or anything of this kind in which I see a manifest contradiction' in Ibid., 25

[31] Ibid., 28

[32] It is worth stressing that sensations are not the only things taken to be given in the history of philosophy. Willem A DeVries and Timm Triplett stress this point in their *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given*, where they highlight Spinoza's axioms in his *Ethics,* as well as both Platonic Realists and Bertrand Russell who have claimed that universals must be given. See Willem A. deVries and Timm Triplett, *Knowledge, Mind and the Given* (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 200), XXI. Spinoza is a particularly conspicuous example, as he lists a selection of axioms at the start of each section of his *Ethics*, from which in combination he claims to derive the entirety of his system. See Benedict De Spinoza, *Ethics*, trans. Edwin Curley (London: Penguin Books, 1996).

immediate impressions. We construct our ideas about wax from the constant conjunction of certain patterns of sensory impressions. Bertrand Russell elaborates on the idea of immediate impressions through the terminology of sense-data:

> Let us give the name of 'sense-data' to the things that are immediately known in sensation: such things as colours, sounds, smells, hardnesses, roughnesses, and so on. We shall give the name 'sensation' to the experience of being immediately aware of these things. Thus, whenever we see a colour, we have a sensation *of* the colour, but the colour itself is a sense-datum, not a sensation.[33]

However, if we follow Bertrand Russell in his example of the table, we cannot say that the table is simply the same as the sense-data. Consider how the real shape of the table is never given to us in the form of sense-data because the table is always a different shape from different angles. Similar points can be made with respect to the real colour, texture, feel of the table and so on.[34] We must instead say 'the real table, if there is one, is not immediately known to us at all, but must be an inference from what is immediately known'[35] That is to say it must be an inference from sense-data.

In the same manner that Descartes' thinking entails his knowing that he is thinking, it is argued that having sensations of sense-data entails knowing that one is having such sensations; or put otherwise: 'it is epistemically independent, that is, this positive epistemic status is not derived from some other positive epistemic state'.[36] It needs to be stressed that the sense in which the immediately given does not derive its epistemic status from dependence on other epistemic states, includes both those states which play a role in inference, and those which don't. For instance, I am perfectly happy to accept the idea of non-inferential knowledge, but I am not happy to accept that such non-inferential knowledge can be had independently of any other epistemic states. The difference between the rationalist and empiricist approaches here lies in what they take to be immediately given. Rationalists take certain ideas to be beyond doubt; empiricists take

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[33] Bertrand Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, Second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 4.

[34] Ibid., 3

[35] Ibid., 3

[36] deVries and Triplett, *Knowledge, Mind and the Given*, XXVI.

phenomenal experience to be beyond doubt.[37] Thus we have two forms of apodictic immediacy.

IV - The incoherency of immediacy

I would like now to begin my criticisms of foundationalism with an embryonic statement of the general mistake made by both rationalist and empiricist forms in trying to work with a notion of the immediately given. I will be following a pattern of argument outlined by Charles Taylor in his article 'Overcoming Epistemology', and over the next two chapters I will develop this embryonic statement into a detailed argument against the very notion of an immediately given epistemic content.

Taylor initially characterises the problem in terms of an incoherency in the way advocates of the immediately given have historically tried to conceive it.

> That construal offers an account of stages of the knower consisting of an ultimately incoherent amalgam of two features: (a) these states (the ideas) are self-enclosed, in the sense that they can be accurately identified and described in abstraction from the "outside" world (this is, of course, essential to the whole rationalist thrust of reflexive testing of the grounds of knowledge); and (b) they nevertheless point toward and represent things in that outside world.[38]

Taylor does not phrase this particular discussion in terms of the immediately given, but rather the general representational model of epistemology and its hope to find those representations which can be investigated in their own right irrespective of the things they seem to represent. In particular he uses examples from the theory of ideas prevalent in early modern philosophy.[39] However, these philosophers were clearly advocates of the given. The diagnosis Taylor gives here applies to notions of the immediately given in general, for what they have in common, as argued above, is the thought that whatever experience *qua* mental event is taken to be given, that mental event has in a self-sufficient manner some veridical epistemic content, in virtue simply of being the event that it is. To

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[37] Obviously these are far from being the only ways one can try to offer rationalist or empiricist accounts of apodictic immediacy, however, I cannot deal individually with every form such immediacy might take. I use these as examples, but my criticisms are broadly applicable.

[38] Taylor, *Overcoming Epistemology*, 9.

[39] Locke and Berkeley discussed in the following paragraph are both members of this tradition. See Book II: Of Ideas in John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Roger Woolhouse (London: Penguin Books, 1997). and George Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge, Three Dialogues* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).

form a clear and distinct idea of Descartes' principle of causation is to know that it is true, to have an immediate sensation of red is to know that you are experiencing something red and so on. As deVries and Triplett write: "Although there were plenty of questions raised about the adequacy of our ability justifiably to infer the existence of external objects on the basis of the limited footprint they made on our minds, no one really questioned our ability to recognize the footprint itself - that is, the sensation and its properties - independently of any knowledge of the external world."[40] Thus the given is defined as being a self-enclosed mental event with epistemic content. The claim made by Taylor is that this notion is incoherent: if an experience has epistemic content then it cannot be understood merely as a self-enclosed mental event.

Taylor points out a manifestation of this incoherency through a well known ambiguity in Locke, where Locke shifts between using 'idea' to stand on the one hand for the mental events themselves and on the other hand for the objects of those mental events. Or as Anthony Kenny puts it: 'It is often difficult to tell whether by "idea" is meant an object (what is being perceived or thought about) or an action (the act of perceiving or thinking).'[41] Berkeley uses the term in a similarly ambiguous fashion to support his arguments for subjective idealism. In arguing that the notion of 'matter' is a manifest contradiction, he dismisses the possibility that our ideas may represent something which exists independently of them on the grounds that 'an idea can be like nothing but an idea'.[42] He is trading on the intuitive thought that our having an idea in the sense of a mental event cannot be like anything in the external world, in order to argue that the objects of our ideas cannot be like anything in the external world. The latter claim clearly does not follow, but Berkeley's equivocation obscures this fact.[43] It is this same equivocation which makes accounts of the immediately given seem plausible. There seem to us to be certain mental events which we can understand our having, *qua* events, in abstraction from the outside world. Then we conflate with this the objects of certain mental events such as our believings and knowings, which do seem to be about the world, and we think that they can be considered in the same fashion, which is to say that they have their epistemic content simply in virtue of being the mental events that they are.

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[40] deVries and Triplett, *Knowledge, Mind and the Given*, XXI.

[41] Anthony Kenny, *The Rise of Modern Philosophy, Volume 3* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 132.

[42] Berkeley, *Principles of Human Knowledge, Three Dialogues*, 27.

[43] Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*, 20-21.

Similarly, Wilfred Sellars highlights the manner in which this ambiguity is deployed while he is discussing sense-data as one form of the immediately given. Sellars argues that the notion of a sense-datum is 'a mongrel resulting from a crossbreeding of two ideas.'[44] On the one hand we have the idea of a sensation which occurs to both animals, and humans and is perhaps a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of our seeing. To have a sensation in this way is to be minimally conscious in contrast to being, say, knocked unconscious. On the other hand we have the idea that there are inner episodes which count as knowings without having to be the product of some inferential chain – an example being 'I can see there is a red table there'.[45] Sellars wants to keep the idea of a mere sensation and the intentional acts of seeing or knowing distinct. One could have sensations without cognising anything at all; indeed, this might be an accurate way to describe the mental state of very young babies. Sellars points out that there is, however, 'a temptation to assimilate "having a sensation of a red triangle" to "thinking of a celestial city" and to attribute to the former the epistemic character, the "intentionality" of the latter',[46] and part of this motivation is to give credence to the notion of an immediately given epistemic content. In this way one may try to assimilate the epistemic character of non-inferential claims or instances of direct observational knowledge to the character of a sensation, so that the necessary-for-being-conscious character of a sensation grants the self-justificatory status to our non-inferential knowledge claims. As Sellars says, the notions of veridical and non-veridical do not apply to sensations; they are things we either have or do not have. Of course, rather than realising this is because sensations are not themselves epistemic, advocates of the given assimilate this feature of sensations to the non-inferential knowings of direct observation. Indeed, we have already seen this with the immediacy of Descartes' ideas and the empiricist sense-datum, where what made them indubitable was the fact that it didn't make sense to call them unveridical. It is precisely this 'mongrel' of ideas which Taylor considers to be an inconsistent amalgamation.

So we have a split here between treating our ideas or sense-data in the abstract, as mere mental events on the one hand, and treating them on the other hand as intentional, or as

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[44] Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Knowledge, Mind, and the Given*, eds. Willem A. deVries and Timm Triplett (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 2000), 21.

[45] The motivation for talking of sensations in terms of a necessary condition for our seeing is to offer an account of why one may make false claims about how things appear. If I claim there is a blue box when there is no such thing, then a possible explanation would be that I at least have something like a sensation or an impression of a blue box which leads me in some way to make the false knowledge claim. (Though again, one should be cautious not to think of the sensation itself as epistemic)

[46] Ibid., 23

thoughts with some meaningful object or content. The forms of immediacy I have outlined so far seem to require both features in order to have both the character of being indubitable and to also be capable of saying something epistemically contentful about the world. While Descartes treats his rationalist ideas in abstraction from the external world and his body, they nevertheless come loaded with intentional content, his ideas are about things. Likewise, although Humean scepticism strips back the immediacy to mere sense-data, any given sense datum is still an intentional object of knowledge; it is a sense-datum of redness or blueness and so on. Taylor's argument is that for any idea to have feature (b), the intentional aspect, it cannot satisfy feature (a), being treated in abstraction from its object on the model of a sensation.

V - Against immediacy: transcendental arguments

How, according to Taylor, can we show that these two features of the immediately given are inconsistent?[47] His answer is that the conditions of possibility for intentionality, or more specifically knowledge, take us beyond the supposed self-sufficiency of inner mental events. In order for us to be capable of knowing things about the world we have to be trained first of all into complex social practices. However, if knowledge requires complex social practices then it cannot be the product of a self-sufficient mental event understood in abstraction from the outside world. The foundationalist hope for an immediately given epistemic content aims to abstract away from concrete claims about the world around us, to burrow under our complex representations of the world and get to some basic and fundamental representations which are beyond doubt. However, 'what you get underlying our representations of the world - the kinds of things we formulate, for instance, in declarative sentences - is not further representation but rather a certain grasp of the world that we have as agents in it ... and in this "foundation," the crucial move of the epistemological construal - distinguishing states of the subject (our "ideas") from features of the external world - can't be effected.'[48] Taylor uses the example of a football to help make the point. Were my knowledge to bottom out in basic and immediately given intentional representations, we might be able to think of this knowledge as like a picture of a football which can be grasped in its own right apart from the football that it represents. However, because the conditions of possibility for my knowing are in fact social skills, the

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[47] I think that this argument is broadly consonant with the arguments of Sellars in *Empiricism and the Philosophy of mind.*

[48] Taylor, *Overcoming Epistemology*, 12.

analogy would rather be like the attempt to understand my playing football apart from the football itself, and this is incoherent. If knowing is a social skill, then it cannot be understood as a self-sufficient mental event which corresponds to the world. The supposedly self-enclosed intentional mental states characteristic of theories of the given would in this way be incoherent.

Of course, this relies on arguments being offered concerning the conditions of possibility for our ability to know. I will be arguing this point over the next two chapters using transcendental arguments. Broadly speaking a transcendental argument supposes some 'x' to be true, and asks what else must be the case for 'x' to be true, that is to say, what grounds the possibility of 'x'. If we show that 'y' grounds the possibility of 'x', and suppose further that 'x' itself is true, we are then entitled to infer the truth of 'y'. Taylor more narrowly considers transcendental arguments to consist of three features: 1) a string of indispensability claims; 2) these indispensability claims are not empirically discovered but grounded apriori; and 3) these indispensability claims concern our experience.[49] The first feature concerns the regressive nature of transcendental arguments, where 'they move from their starting points to their conclusions by showing that the condition stated in the conclusion is indispensable to the feature identified at the start.'[50] Taylor considers these regressive steps indispensible because each is a necessary condition of the former; when the condition is articulated we come to see that it has to be the case. Furthermore, he argues that the starting point of these regressions is *a priori* because of the third feature of transcendental arguments, the fact that they are concerned with experience. His claim is that transcendental arguments are in this way anchored in something that we cannot coherently deny, i.e. the simple fact of experience, and so via indispensible steps we reach conditions of possibility which are equally necessary. Against Taylor I see no reason why transcendental arguments need to be concerned with experience[51] except for the hope that they be grounded in something undeniable. However, I also disagree with Taylor here,

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[49] Charles Taylor, "The Validity of Transcendental Arguments," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).

[50] Ibid., 26

[51] In Taylor's 'The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology' he acknowledge that while transcendental arguments traditionally conceived are concerned with experience, there are also arguments with sufficient 'family resemblance' to count as transcendental, despite not being concerned with experience. He gives an example from Strawson's 'Individuals', and also some of Wittgenstein's work in the *Philosophical Investigations*. I take my account of Wittgenstein in chapter 5 to be a transcendental reading. See Charles Taylor, "The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology," in *Hegel: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Alasdair MacIntyre (Garden City, N.Y.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1976). See also Peter Strawson, *Individuals* (London: Routledge, 2003).

and think that even when such arguments are grounded in some feature of experience, that grounding cannot be considered indubitable. I argue this in detail in the next chapter.

Nevertheless, Taylor does elaborate some features of transcendental arguments that I agree with and will develop further in the next chapter. Taylor views transcendental arguments as insights of articulation into our own activity, an insight we can achieve primarily because it involves reflection on *our own* activity. Activities have a point or purpose, and certain activities require our being aware of that point or purpose to be candidates for carrying it out. Consider how one cannot be a candidate for playing chess without some grasp of the rules involved. The rules of chess are constitutive of the game and to count as *playing* the game, or to fulfil the point of the activity, one must be making conscious decisions in light of those rules.[52] It follows that if one is engaged in the activity of chess one must grasp those rules either explicitly or tacitly. Taylor argues: 'Once we are playing chess, we know with unquestionable certainty that this rule is a constitutive rule. Or otherwise put, we couldn't doubt this without doubting that we are playing chess. You can't play chess and not know *this*.'[53] Now, that grasp may be implicit or explicit, the candidate chess player may have formulated those rules to himself or others, or learnt the game by reading those rules off a manual. But he need not have learnt the game in this way. He may have learnt the game - however unlikely - by regular but disinterested observation. In such a case he might be called on to articulate those rules which ground the activity he is partaking in. While chess is an activity that paradigmatically involves an articulate grasp of what is involved in the point or purpose of that activity, the activity of perception which is so often taken to ground our epistemic practices 'is an inarticulate activity; it starts off entirely so, and remains largely so. And even when we learn to articulate what we see, we never (except when doing philosophy) try to articulate what it is to see.' Here, therefore, there is room for a lot of work to be done in articulating those conditions which constitutively ground our activity of perception. We start off with some minimal, hazy grasp of what would count as success or failure when it comes to perception, and we then try to articulate the more detailed but harder to grasp conditions.

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[52] I do not mean by this that one must have an explicit formulation before one's mind, or even that one has ever played by or learnt by such formulations. One might be playing via a tacit grasp. I only mean to suggest by this that one must be intentionally adhering to the normative strictures of the game in question. A person who manages to fortuitously move a number of pieces around is not a candidate for the process of articulating the point or purpose of the activity he is participating in because he is not really participating in that activity!

[53] Taylor, *Overcoming Epistemology*, 29.

I will carry out the project Taylor conceives here and use transcendental arguments to show that for any idea to be intentional, that intentionality has conditions of possibility which take us beyond the model of mere sensation, and that is to say the model of a sensation cannot satisfy the conditions of possibility for our ideas being intentional. Our ideas and our observational claims are only capable of being intentional because they are mediated through a wider practice, and so we cannot completely isolate those ideas from that practice which makes them possible. We cannot treat them on the model of a sensation, a non-epistemic entity which we possess from birth and which requires no training or mediation through social practice. This is what Wilfred Sellars means when he argues that one cannot move from mere sensation to the epistemological stance. Rather, it is education into a practice which allows us to understand our sensations in epistemological terms. Sensations have to be mediated through a practice in order to count as knowledge; they cannot themselves be considered epistemological entities through which we can build up a picture of a reality beyond those sensations.

The transcendental regressions will involve first of all pointing out that direct observational knowledge of particulars requires us to be aware of those particulars. I will then show that awareness requires our grasping things as thus-and-so, or under concepts. (chapter 4) Finally I will argue that a grasp of concepts depends on certain social conditions which we have been acculturated into. (chapter 5) In this way I will begin by focusing on empiricist notions of immediacy (chapter 4) and move on to rationalist forms. (chapter 5)

Note that once this process has been achieved, the three supposed features of the self which I mentioned at the start of this chapter as being characteristic of atomist theories, and as being deeply tied up with certain moral and anthropological notions, will have been undermined. The idea of a radically disengaged agent makes no sense anymore. The agent can no longer chase reason or freedom by distinguishing himself from the natural and social world he is a part of because these things are too integral to his personhood. As Taylor says and as I will argue in more detail later: 'We can't turn the background against which we think into an object for us.'[54] The second feature and consequence of this faulty notion of disengaged agency - the punctual self - is now also under threat. One cannot take an entirely instrumental stance towards the world if that world is constitutive of oneself. The agent is no longer an abstract point of reason standing apart from the world, he is a person of depths, deeply dependent on those rich complexities of social life which he does

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[54] Ibid., 12

not fully understand, but is nonetheless irrevocably tied to. The third feature and social consequence of the first two, largely falling outside the scope of this Thesis, is also under threat. It is no longer so easy to think of communities as aggregates of prior existing individuals, because those individuals are themselves dependent on communities.

Chapter 4: The Transcendental Arguments: Part 1 - Hegel

I - Introduction

In the last chapter I argued that the immediately given, understood as that which is self-sufficient and readily apparent rather than mediated through, or dependent on, partial or relative communal standards, supported a notion of the knowing agent as ideally disengaged. The ideally disengaged agent thinks autonomously for themselves and without distortion when they base their thinking in this self-reflective and self-generated certainty.[1] I proposed the use of transcendental arguments as a way of showing the incoherency involved in the notion of immediacy. I now want to offer those transcendental arguments.

In the current chapter I will use Hegel to argue against the immediacy of sensory particulars, by showing them to depend on mediation through universals or concepts in order to be known. In the next chapter I will use Wittgenstein to respond to the suggestion that it is those very universals or concepts which are immediately known, by showing our knowledge of concepts to depend on mastery of a social practice. In this way I will be starting with empiricist conceptions of the immediately given and moving on to rationalist conceptions. Notice that this train of argument involves undermining positions which suppose the existence of particular, self-sufficient items or acts of knowledge,[2] and replacing them with an account of knowledge as mediated through a wider whole, namely the social whole. In this way we move from an atomist epistemology to a holistic epistemology.

Sections II, III, IV and V of this chapter cover methodological issues, and chapter VI is where Hegel's arguments against immediacy begin. In section II I outline the Hegelian approach to

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[1] When discussing the notion of immediacy in this section as that which we are entirely receptive to, it may seem distortive to talk of knowledge as 'self-generated'. This is because the immediacy which serves as foundation in sense-certainty is immediate in virtue of its not involving any active engagement from our thought, it is not generated by us but rather passively received by us. One must keep in mind that knowledge based on this receptivity is self-generated insofar as it relies entirely on what is given *to us* as knowing agents abstracted from any sort of social relation. While sense-contents may be received without our active interference, they are received by our conscious selves understood in isolation, simply as sensory beings, and thus do not require any socially determined concepts or communal norms. We are then supposed to generate further knowledge claims out of this foundational basis which we find within our own consciousness. This is why sense-certainty can be described as a foundation for self-generated knowledge, and falls under Rorty's characterisation of the objectivist stance.

[2] It is interesting that the distinction between 'item' and 'act' somewhat breaks down within theories of immediacy; to know a particular is to experience a sensory particular, and vice versa. Or as Brandom put it: the non-epistemic fact that I am having a sensation, entails that I know something about that sensation.

epistemology which I broadly endorse, and set it up against foundationalism as involving an 'internal critique'. In section III I develop an understanding of Hegel's 'internal critique' as involving transcendental argument. Both Hegel and Taylor seem to take the starting points of these transcendental arguments to be presuppositionless, and I will spend section IV arguing that we can have no presuppositionless critique. Indeed, to suppose that we can have a presuppositionless starting point is to concede too much to the foundationalist project. Because the transcendental arguments I outline involve showing that a given conception of knowledge is self-contradictory in the way that it conceives its object of knowledge, and because I want this process of criticism to be developmental rather than simply negative, I will spend section V offering a brief account of how contradictions can have a positive result. With my account of method in place I will then move on in section VI to an account of Hegel's arguments against sense-certainty.

II - Hegel's new method of epistemology

In arguing against the foundationalist project and its attendant notion of an immediately given epistemic content, it is obvious that I cannot myself rely on anything like a foundational approach. In other words, I cannot, on risk of an audacious incoherency, criticise foundationalism by claiming to have found the proper indubitable starting point, and using this as a basis with which to show they are mistaken in their project. Rather, I will show that on their own terms they cannot be right, and that in order to surmount the incoherencies within which they are adrift, they must take board within my own account. In this way I am deploying a form of argument not dissimilar to those which I outlined in chapter 2. I am starting with the assumption that my opponents share with me certain standards or principles, (the desire to stay afloat!) and I aim to show how their own conception of those standards or principles are in some way confused, and that they can alleviate that confusion by adopting the new conception I am outlining. In Hegel's language this amounts to an 'internal' or 'dialectical' critique.

Hegel sets up his 'internal critique' against a general characterisation of the traditional epistemological project. The general characterisation of epistemology under attack is the notion of knowledge as a medium or tool through which we have access to reality itself, where that medium or tool is itself in need of investigation so as to be clear on the nature and limits of our claims to knowledge. Norman suggests that Hegel's most direct target here is Kant and the scepticism which is inherent in his epistemology. Kant sets up a clear distinction between things-in-themselves and things-for-us, between the noumenal world

which we can never know and the phenomenal world of experience which we can know, though only as it is filtered through the categories of the understanding. It is because we can only ever see things through the categories that we cannot know things as they are in themselves. This sceptical result follows, however, from any epistemology founded on a deep division between subject and object as is most famously put forward in the Cartesian system. On this general epistemological picture, 'if knowledge is an instrument, actively applied to reality, it must alter what it is applied to, and consequently cannot give us things as they really are in themselves. Similarly, if knowledge is a medium through which reality is somehow filtered, then we can never know reality as it is in itself.'[3]

Hegel does not think we should rest content with such scepticism, and argues against the assumptions which lead to this result: 'that knowledge is aptly described as an "instrument or a "medium"; that there is a distinction to be made between "knowledge" on the one hand and things-in-themselves or "the absolute" set over against it; and that this knowledge, cut off from the absolute, can still appropriately be described as knowledge.'[4] However, the deeper criticism comes from turning the resultant scepticism of this general picture against itself. So long as one thinks of knowledge as an instrument or tool in need of its own prior investigation before it can be made use of in a reliable way, then one is going to be caught in the paradox of needing to know what knowledge is before one can claim to know anything at all, including what knowledge is.

> In the case of other instruments, we can try and criticise them in other ways than by setting about the special work for which they are destined. But the examination of knowledge can only be carried out by an act of knowledge. To examine this so-called instrument is the same thing as to know it. But to seek to know before we know is as absurd as the wise resolution of Scholasticus, not to venture into the water until he had learned to swim.[5]

We have returned to a more nuanced form of the sceptical regress raised in the previous chapter, where our concern is not now with the justification of particular claims, but with the justification of our very conception of knowledge. Either our attempt to justify a particular conception of knowledge presupposes that very conception and is thus circular,

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[3] Richard Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology* (Hampshire: Gregg Revivals, 1991), 10.

[4] Ibid., 11

[5] G. W. F. Hegel, *The Logic of Hegel*, trans. William Wallace (Oxford: Oxford Clarendon Press, 1892), §10.

or it appeals to a criterion external to that conception of knowledge for which we can in turn ask whether or not we know it, thereby leading us down an infinite regress. This is another way of stating the motivation for having some account of immediate knowledge, that is to say, knowledge which does not stand in any need of justification through some other claim, or mediated through something other than itself. Though in order to feel the force of this dilemma, we should notice that the notion of immediacy is a theory of knowledge, and it is one which we can doubt and for which we can demand justification. Indeed, that is just what I am going to go on and do. There is no possibility of avoiding regress or circularity on this model, and the very notion of knowledge as an instrument or medium which needs investigation and justification shows itself to have intractable problems.

Nevertheless Hegel does think some sort of preliminary to knowledge is necessary, he just conceives of this preliminary very differently by stepping beyond the model of enlightenment epistemology. To think of knowledge as an instrument or medium cut off from The True is to put it in a position where it can never truly be grounded because we are trapped within our own subjectivity. Thus, Hegel's most important step is to move between the two horns of the dilemma - regress or circularity - and to propose the possibility of an internal criterion for testing the validity of a given conception of knowledge. By doing so we are no longer forced to rely on something unreachably beyond knowledge to vindicate it, rather, we can find grounds within our very conception of knowledge to critically develop and thereby eventually form a justified conception of knowledge. Taylor claims that 'the method then is to start in ordinary consciousness, not import anything from outside, and make an "immanent critique"',[6] that is to say, in order to avoid impaling ourselves on the horn of regress we cannot appeal to anything outside of a given conception of knowledge for testing that conception: it must validate itself; though in validating itself it must not simply take its self-conception for granted, it cannot circularly ground itself. To extend Hegel's metaphor, rather than the misguided attempt at learning to swim before entering the water, we must start in the water, and from there learn to swim. (With no small amount of struggle along the way!)

This is why Norman, correctly I think, talks of the process as descriptive.[7] It is descriptive insofar as we are not bringing any theoretical considerations from outside that conception

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[6] Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 129.

[7] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 14.

of knowledge, we are simply entering into that very conception and exploring it internally. Emphasising the descriptive element is important because it is just this which avoids us making the same mistake as enlightenment epistemology, it stops us from *constructing* a substantive theory which would in turn need justification and so lead to regress.[8] Thus 'it is important to stress here that Hegel is not proposing the use of a dialectical 'method' or 'approach'. If the argument follows a dialectical movement, then this must be in the things themselves, not just the way we reason about them.'[9] However, the notion of description deployed here differs in important respects from the usual understanding of this term, because this process of description is simultaneously critical.

But how can any internal exploration or description of a given conception of knowledge lead to a critical result, either the denial or vindication of that conception? That is to say, how can the description supply us with a criterion of critical assessment for the conception of knowledge which we are describing? This issue might seem especially pressing give that, while Hegel has set aside the pre-judged conception of knowledge as involving phenomenal appearances and the unknowable world of things-in-themselves, he nevertheless accepts that knowledge at least takes the form *for us* of a knower and an object known or 'between reality as we know it, on the one hand, and *truth* on the other.'[10] It is this *apparent* dichotomy of subject and object which encouraged the sceptical dilemma just posed:

> We can only know things as they are for us, and therefore, conversely, we cannot know things as they are in themselves. Accordingly, in the present case, where we are investigating the nature of knowledge, we can only know what knowledge is for us, not what it is in itself. The criterion which we apply to it is our criterion, one which we have to presuppose, and there can be no independent way of knowing whether it is an objectively correct one.[11]

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[8] One should not take my methodological outline here as a constructed theory put forward as part of an attempt to *explain* or *justify* knowledge, and to allow us to proceed with confidence in making knowledge claims, well aware of its scope and limits. It is rather an attempt to understand what is going on in the process of internal critique, what it is that makes the attempt at description or articulation a critical process with a positive result. The internal critique stands on its own, though it is better understood with this methodological preliminary.

[9] Taylor, *Hegel*, 129.

[10] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 18.

[11] Ibid., 19

Doesn't the so-called Dilemma of Epistemology[12] just force itself upon us once again; are we not trapped within our own subjective conception of knowledge, out of touch with the reality of knowledge that could serve as a criterion for determining whether or not our own conception is adequate? According to Hegel, however, this would be a premature conclusion.

It might be that if my object of enquiry were some scientific matter, I would be trapped, as subject of knowledge, with how things appear *for me*. I couldn't tell if the actual object of enquiry conformed to the way it appeared *for me*; thus I couldn't rely on the object of knowledge to play the role of criterion for whether or not my knowledge claim was accurate. But when our object of enquiry is knowledge itself, the whole subject/object dichotomy falls within the remit of investigation.[13] A given conception of knowledge involves an account of the subject/object relationship, of what kind of object it is that is known, and by what means the subject is capable of knowing it. Thus, 'given the subject/object dichotomy, what consciousness itself declares to be its object constitutes the criterion by which that consciousness is to be tested.'[14] This is what Hegel means when he talks about taking a 'form of consciousness'[15] and testing it against itself: a given form of consciousness comes with a characterisation of its object of knowledge, and we can therefore ask whether or not that form of consciousness is capable of knowing that sort of object. If it cannot know that object, then that form of consciousness, or that conception of knowledge is contradictory. In this way a conception of knowledge can supply its own internal criterion to test itself against itself, to see whether or not it can live up to its own standards. The reader should again note how this marks this out as one more form of the kind of argument outlined in chapter 2.

An example of a 'form of consciousness' would be what Hegel calls 'sense-certainty': this is the empiricist notion of immediacy which I am arguing against, which takes as its object sensory particulars passively received by us without any active interference from our cognition or filtering through concepts, and which particulars stand in no relation to one

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[12] This phrase is Norman's own.

[13] Ibid., 19

[14] Ibid., 19

[15] The phrase 'form of consciousness' is Hegel's own, and it is one he adopts because in his system he takes the stages of development to be stages which consciousness actually undergoes, and the philosopher merely looks on and draws out explicitly the rationality of this development. This is a contentious and difficult to understand feature of Hegel's arguments in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. I adopt the phrase from him but I use it to mean nothing other than 'conception of knowledge'.

another. In entering into a process of critically articulating sense-certainty I am effectively accepting that I cannot just argue for the importance of mediation through practice over and against the person who takes things to be immediately given. Instead I will be taking my opponent, the advocate of immediacy, and showing how their own conception of knowledge, spelled out in its own terms, is deficient in such a way that points towards my own mediated conception of knowledge. I will return to the arguments against sense-certainty in section VI of this chapter.

Three other issues need to be spelt out first. First of all I need to say a little more about what is involved in drawing out a criterion for testing a given form of consciousness and why this internal testing should be seen as a transcendental argument. Second of all I need to say more about what the role is – contra Hegel and Taylor – for presuppositions. Third, I need to say a little bit about how such a criterion, which seems so far to have the merely negative role of showing that a form of consciousness cannot know its corresponding object, can also have a positive result. For as I have outlined it in the preceding discussion, any descriptions of 'forms of consciousness' are not mere descriptions. While ordinary descriptions are passive, these descriptions are critical and form part of a developmental process. The very act of description involves the highlighting of contradiction *and* the articulation of a new form of consciousness i.e. a new description.

III - Hegel's dialectics as transcendental arguments

Hegel explicitly takes the form of argument he follows to be his own dialectical method. In what way can we understand his arguments as transcendental? I want to show that we can understand his arguments to be both dialectical and transcendental.

When describing a 'form of consciousness' and the corresponding characterisation of its object, we are entering into a process of critical articulation. That is to say, we are trying to form an adequate description of our chosen conception of knowledge, and that process of descriptive articulation will result in a critical overturning of that conception, and its replacement with a new conception. Taylor describes this process in the following terms: 'This inner articulation… is one where we can distinguish what the thing concerned is aiming at or meant to be, on one hand, and what it effectively is on the other. Once this is so, then there can be a clash between effective existence and the goal or standard aimed at, and hence the thing is liable to contradiction';[16] in other words we can show that a given

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[16] Taylor, *Hegel*, 130.

conception of knowledge cannot live up to its own self-ideal. Put more simply still, knowledge is something which we can achieve or fail to achieve and as such any given conception of knowledge will have standards of success, standards which it can fail to meet. Thus, in the form of consciousness Hegel terms 'sense-certainty' the goal or standard is first and foremost a form of knowledge, but it is also a particular conception of knowledge which involves the subject's direct, unmediated contact with sensory particulars. We can then ask whether this sort of knowing subject can have epistemic access to those sorts of objects; this is the same as to ask whether sense-certainty's effective existence can live up to its own goal or standard. If it cannot do so, then that conception is self-contradictory.

I said that the goal or standard of sense-certainty is first and foremost a form of knowledge and distinguished this from its being a particular conception of knowledge. I make this distinction to mark the difference made by Taylor between certain basic criterial properties involved in the standard or purpose of knowledge, and the particular conception of that standard or purpose.

> [Thus] we start off with an inadequate notion of the standard involved. But we also have from the beginning some very basic, correct notions of what the standard or purpose is, some criterial properties which it must meet. It is these criterial properties which in fact enable us to show that a given conception of the standard is inadequate. For we show that this conception cannot be realized in such a way as to meet the criterial properties, and hence that this definition is unacceptable as a definition of the standard or purpose concerned. [17]

I take the idea to be that the concept of knowledge has to have certain minimally regulative standards for it to even count as a concept of knowledge; for it to be knowledge under discussion rather than some other notion such as, say, 'justice'.

The two main criterial properties which I will deploy in the subsequent argument are that knowledge must involve 'awareness' and it must involve 'objectivity'. Taylor focuses on the criterial property of awareness and he thinks this amounts to a requirement that one be able to say what one knows (though I think this identification is hasty). To help understand what is meant by a 'criterial property', let us focus on that of awareness, without recourse to language. If we tried to deny that knowledge (or at least propositional knowledge)

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[17] Ibid., 133

involves some level of awareness then we couldn't really be taking ourselves to be having a discussion about knowledge any more. Consider the following claim: 'I know that it is before me but I am not aware that it is before me'. Doesn't this strike us as incoherent? Wouldn't we ask whether such a person really meant to talk about knowledge? Awareness in this way shows itself to be one of the basic criterial properties of knowledge. And yet, beyond these basic criterial properties, the particular conception of knowledge under discussion will come with its own less basic, more theoretically articulate standards as well. Sense-certainty, for example, will require that this awareness must be of bare sensory particulars, and that awareness must also be immediate. In this way we have the basic criterial properties involved in the standard or purpose of knowledge, and we have the particular conception of that standard coming with its own more theoretically articulate criteria. Though Taylor does not make this entirely clear, I see no reason why *both* the criteria basic to the concept of knowledge and those particular to our current conception cannot be used to locate contradiction.

The picture which is developing here is one which takes the critical articulation of a conception of knowledge to involve the 'deepening [of] our conception of a given standard and of the reality which meets it.'[18] The failure of a given conception, in reality, to live up to either the basic standards or the more particular standards put forward by the conception, shows the conception to be inadequate, and calls for the adoption of a new conception. The reason Taylor talks of the 'reality which meets the standard' is because we have to take knowledge to be something we are in fact achieving and which does in fact involve those criterial properties, otherwise we could not talk of a given conception being an inadequate conception. It is only inadequate because it is failing to make sense of something which we know to be already realised. I want to leave the status of such criterial properties and the notion that the standard is already realised open at the moment, as I will discuss this in some detail in the following section. For now, however, we should note that these criterial properties have to be at least taken as true, and the standard has to be taken as in fact realised regardless of our faulty conception, in order for the process of critical articulation to go through.

Taylor finds a much needed example in one of Plato's dialogues to help make all this clear.[19] In the example offered from *Republic I*, Cephalus puts forward a definition of justice

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[18] Ibid., 131

[19] Ibid., 133

to Socrates. The definition put forward is that justice involves telling the truth and giving back what one owes. Socrates then shows the inadequacy of this definition with the counter-example of 'a man whose arms one is keeping, and who asks for them back in a state of madness.'[20] What enables us to say that this definition is inadequate is that, as with knowledge, there are certain basic criterial properties which must be involved for it to even count as a conception of justice. The example criteria offered by Taylor is that a just act has to be a good act; there is no such thing as bad justice. Given that Cephalus' definition of justice allows for a bad act to take place, i.e. the returning of arms to a madman, we can see that his definition is self-contradictory. The particular conception of justice does not live up to the basic criterial properties which we know to be true of it – it's effective reality fails to live up to its own standard or purpose. Taylor claims that 'we shall see a parallel with Hegel's dialectical arguments ... which always operate with three terms, the true purpose or standard, an inadequate conception of it, and the reality where they meet and separate.'[21] For it is in trying to produce an effective case of the particular conception, by trying to bring it into reality, that we see it to be contradictory.

Why should we think of the pattern outlined here as transcendental? Furthermore, in what way is it dialectical? It is the criterial properties which are involved with any given conception of knowledge that make this form of argument transcendental. It is the fact that we show a given conception of the standard or purpose to be contradictory, and use that contradiction as a compass with which to formulate a new conception that makes these arguments dialectical. Let me elaborate. We take a given conception, and we show that it is not a sufficient account of the standard or purpose of knowledge, we show that it conflicts with the requirements of those criterial properties basic to the standard or purpose. So we then elaborate a new conception of knowledge in light of that contradiction, in response to the manner in which the previous conception failed to account for those basic criterial properties. This new conception is an attempt to move closer towards the actual conditions of possibility for knowledge, to give an adequate account of the standard or purpose involved in that activity. Demonstrating that sense-certainty, as a conception of knowledge, cannot live up to its criterial properties, and then surmounting it with a richer conception, is a process of articulating a wider background to the activity of knowledge than sense-certainty originally conceived. I am showing the background conditions required for our conception of knowledge to count as knowledge,

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[20] Ibid., 133

[21] Ibid., 134

for it to be able to meet its basic criterial properties and fulfil its standard or purpose. That wider background will not yet involve social practice, but I will continue the regressive steps in later sections until we have moved beyond the notion that our ideas –whether simply phenomenal perceptions or full blown rational principles - can be understood in abstraction from the outside world.

We have here a unique mix of Hegelian dialectics and transcendental argument. It is the fact that we have a basic criterial property which must be involved in any conception of knowledge that we can talk of this as a process of articulating the necessary background conditions. It is because we are taking particular attempts at theoretically formulating a conception of knowledge which involves those basic criterial properties that we can talk of this as a dialectical process, a critical process of drawing out and overcoming contradiction.

IV - The role of presuppositions in the transcendental interpretation

I want in this section to discuss the status of those criterial properties, as well as the claim that the standard or purpose of knowledge is in fact realised. Taylor argues that each of these is undeniable. Indeed, he thinks that were they not undeniable our arguments could never yield us a binding result. I will argue against this. While Taylor wants to make good on Hegel's notion of a presuppositionless philosophy,[22] I argue instead that we must start with presuppositions, and I suggest that this is not only necessary but unproblematic. Though more will be said about the unproblematic nature of this in chapters 6 and 7.

First, I will say something about the way I use the word 'presupposition'. By presupposition I mean something which has not been argued for on the basis of prior claims and which cannot be seen as indubitable. In a sense my starting with sense-certainty is a presupposition, as it is just my chosen target. The subject/object dichotomy involved in consciousness or in our conception of knowledge as I explored it in the last section, might also be thought of as a presupposition, no matter how difficult it is to deny (and rightly so). However, I do not want to involve either of these in the current discussion. I want rather to disambiguate two different features of my overall account which might be thought of as presuppositions. First of all I take the criterial properties and the notion that knowledge involves a standard or purpose which is in fact realised to be presuppositions. However, in Hegel's system, where he moves by dialectical argument from the most abstract moments

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[22] See Chapter 2, 'Thinking without presuppositions', in Stephen Houlgate, *Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, Second ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2005).

to the whole on which they depend, he talks of the whole as the presupposition of the parts, because the parts are not self-sufficient without that whole.[23] Similarly, one might think of the conditions of possibility which I articulate for our activity of knowing as presuppositions of that knowing and its standard or purpose (including its criterial properties). I reserve the phrase 'presuppositions' for those criterial properties and the notion that knowledge involves a standard that is in fact realised. I talk of the conditions of possibility as the 'ground', 'background' or the 'presupposed background'. Otherwise the context of the discussion should make this clear.

Taylor's reading in *Hegel,* which I have been following, does not explicitly take the above details to suggest a transcendental reading. However, in another article titled 'The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology',[24] while covering the same ground as the above, he is explicit that his reading is transcendental: 'I would like to look at the first three chapters of the P*henomenology of Spirit* - the section on "consciousness" - as an essay in transcendental arguments'.[25] He goes on to talk of transcendental arguments as 'arguments that start from some putatively undeniable facet of our experience in order to conclude that this experience must have certain features or be of a certain type, for otherwise this undeniable facet could not be'.[26] In other words, his transcendental interpretation of Hegel requires that the starting point of these arguments not be presuppositions, but undeniable facets of experience, and in this way he is honouring Hegel:

> We have to be able to identify some basic and pervasive facets of experience independently of our model [of knowledge] ... Hence the method that Hegel outlines in the Introduction to the *Phenomenology* can only be applied if such basic facets can be picked out, and his arguments will stand only to the extent that they can be shown as beyond question ... Hegel's arguments will thus have to start from some undeniable characteristics of experience.[27]

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[23] Collingwood also has a discussion of presuppositions understood in this latter sense. See in particular, Part 1, sections IV and V of R. G. Collingwood, *An Essay on Metaphysics* (London: Oxford University Press, 1940).

[24] Taylor, *The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology*

[25] Ibid., 151

[26] Ibid., 151

[27] Ibid., 160

He also has the following to say concerning the need for knowledge to involve a standard or purpose that we do in fact realise in our actions:

> We are deepening our conception of a given standard and of the reality which meets it. And essential to the dialectical argument is the notion that the standard is already met. It is because we know this that we know that any conception of the purpose or standard which shows it as unrealizable must be a faulty conception; and it is this which takes us from stage to stage of the dialectic.[28]

Thus, the standard must in fact be realised otherwise once we noticed that our conception was faulty, we might just as easily declare knowledge impossible as attempt to conceive it anew.

Thus, if Taylor wants to vindicate Hegel's dialectics as genuinely presuppositionless he needs to show that the conception of knowledge counts as 'a starting point in a reality which is a realized standard or purpose' and that 'it is not enough that we *be able* to look on something as the realization of an intrinsic goal, that this be one way we *could* look at things ... to do the work Hegel wants this starting point has to be undeniable'[29] Taylor therefore wants both the criterial properties and the idea that the standard of knowledge is in fact realisable to be undeniable facets of experience. In this way Taylor is taking transcendental arguments in the full blown Kantian sense. Thus he claims that 'the significance of indispensability claims about experience is that it gives us an unchallengeable starting point ... [they] are not meant to be empirically grounded but a priori. They are not merely probable, but apodictic'.[30] Kant makes a similar point in the following way: 'There is one single experience in which all perceptions are represented as in thoroughgoing and orderly connection... Now, since... identity must necessarily enter into the synthesis of all the manifold of appearances, so far as the synthesis is to yield empirical knowledge, the appearances are subject to *a priori* conditions, with which the synthesis of their apprehension must be in complete accordance'.[31] Thus both Taylor and Kant take features of experience to be undeniable in such a way that they can form a necessary basis for further necessary claims which are their condition of possibility.

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[28] Taylor, *Hegel*, 131.

[29] Ibid., 134

[30] Taylor, *The Validity of Transcendental Arguments*, 27.

[31] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. Norman Kemp Smith, Second ed. (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 140.

 However, this is just one more, albeit rather obscure form of immediacy, the very notion I have been arguing against. It is perhaps this aspect of Hegel which Taylor has brought to the surface which leads Wilfred Sellars to suggest that 'even Hegel, that great foe of "immediacy"' is never entirely free of 'the given'.[32] To reiterate, what is needed for Hegel's dialectics to begin is 1) for the basic goal or purpose (knowledge) to be something which is actually achievable and 2) for certain aspects of the conception, the criterial properties, to in fact be true, and for both these features to avoid being presuppositions they have to be taken as indubitably the case. I will argue that neither of these are indubitable, and that they are in fact presuppositions.

Taylor's argument for 1) is put forward on the basis of a paradoxical phrasing of the sceptical consequence involved in its denial: 'For if we show that [the standard] cannot be met, then either we have got it wrong, or there can never be knowledge. But the second alternative is one we cannot embrace; we should refute the thesis in formulating it.'[33] This is like the epistemological sceptic who in showing the doubtfulness of all things and thus the impossibility of knowledge, must, in a paradoxical and self-defeating way, lay claim to *knowledge* that all things are doubtful and that there is no knowledge. On this view the impossibility of knowledge itself becomes impossible and we are always entitled to think of knowledge as something we can in fact achieve and for which we must continually develop our conceptions to a point of adequacy. Notice how close this form of argument is to Descartes' argument for immediacy as that which one cannot deny with contradiction. However, such "knowledge" hardly shows scepticism to be self-defeating - quite the opposite! One should say that the word 'knowledge' is being used loosely in order to bring out this paradox: the sceptics claim that 'S cannot know anything' should not be read as 'S has a piece of knowledge concerning the fact that nothing is known', it should rather be read as 'S has a notion of knowledge which has broken down into incoherency and senselessness'. Therefore, if our conception of knowledge turns out to involve a standard that cannot be met, and if we then choose to accept the impossibility of knowledge, this should be read as an admission that knowledge is senseless, rather than an admission of the paradoxical claim: 'I know that I know nothing and therefore I know something'. Denying knowledge is a possible manoeuvre, and so to assert its possibility is a presupposition, an unjustified assertion: it is not an indubitable facet of experience, and nor has it been argued for on the basis of a chain of reasoning.

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[32] Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 14.

[33] Taylor, *Hegel*, 136.

Because of a quirk in Taylor's own account he takes 2), the requirement of awareness, as amounting to an ability to say what one means: '[Hegel] treats the requirement to say as one of the criterial properties of knowing ... The point is only that what is known be enough of an object of awareness that we can put ourselves to the task of trying to describe it. An experience about which nothing could be said ... would be below the threshold of awareness which we consider essential for knowledge.'[34] While I think that the role of language in this discussion is of the utmost importance, I think that presumptively connecting the ability to say with the ability to be aware is far too hasty. But what about the undeniability of awareness alone as a criterial property? Aren't we, insofar as we are engaged in the activity of knowing, certain of this? I have agreed with Taylor in the previous chapter that for something to count as an activity it has to have a point or purpose, and I have also agreed that for someone to be engaged in that activity they have to have some minimal grasp of that activities point or purpose. However, just as one might mistakenly think they are playing chess because they do not really grasp the point or purpose of that game (they only think they do), it might also be the case that one can mistakenly think they are engaged in the activity of knowing. There is no *prima facie* reason to think that the activity of knowledge differs from the activity of chess in this regard, or that to attempt an articulation of knowledge involves an error-free grasp of the basic criterial properties of knowledge. The notion that we can see, as an undeniable facet of experience, that awareness is a minimal criterion of knowledge, is mistaken. While certainly hard for us to deny, it is hardly undeniable as a given facet of experience. It is far too articulate and far too reflective an account of knowledge to play such a role. To hold certain criterial properties (or at least this one insofar as Taylor puts it forward) as basic is then a presupposition: it is not an indubitable facet of experience, and nor has it been argued for on the basis of a chain of reasoning.

It might seem that by putting forward a form of transcendental argument which does not claim to have its starting point in any indubitable features of experience, I am weakening the form of argument to the point of being uninteresting or not very useful. The criticism might be that all I am left with is a way of determining the conditions of possibility for some starting point which I happen to take to be true, or which I think my interlocutors will also happen to take as true, but at no point is the articulated conception anchored in that starting point actually justified. The conception might be said to float due to its anchor - the

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[34] Ibid., 141

presuppositions - lacking a ground. In a sense this criticism is true, though I do not take it to be a criticism insofar as it is the very point I am in part making. Consider that what I am arguing against here is the indubitability aimed at by Descartes and similar thinkers, who, as discussed previously, want some feature of experience to offer foundational grounds for thinking of knowledge in certain terms. It should be no surprise that even here in Hegel I am keen to avoid any notion of indubitable immediacy.

I take the presuppositions required to begin the transcendental process to lack justification in any indubitable, immediate or foundational sense. Those presuppositions are an anchor, and while they lack a ground in the sense of having a prior justification or being indubitable, they do not lack a ground in a quite other sense. I do take them to be justified in a non-foundationalist sense. I think that the presuppositions are ones which my targets in empiricist foundationalism will accept, and I think they are presuppositions which the reader will accept. I also think that there is an explanation as to why we share these presuppositions, and I think that I can offer an account which would show the problems that would result from our trying to wholly deny any such presupposition.[35] In brief, consider the distinction I drew earlier between two ways we might apply the term 'presupposition' to my account. The distinction I draw there only gets a hold during the process of critical articulation. Strictly speaking both the criterial properties and the background conditions are equally, and in the same sense, presuppositions. Once the background conditions of possibility are fully articulated and shown to involve a social practice within which we are members, this also provides an explanation for why we all share those basic criterial properties and the belief that knowledge is in fact a realised standard - and that is because they are features of that practice into which we have been educated. It is just that prior to the process of articulation, we only have an articulate grasp of the criterial properties, the rest was only implicitly understood and so subject to faulty articulation.

It seems to me that Taylor wants it to be the case that within a given conception of the standard or purpose of knowledge, there are certain basic criterial properties which that given conception of the standard fails to live up to, and he wants those basic criterial properties to be not just true, but known to be true in an undeniable way. They are what anchors each of our conceptions of knowledge to the truth of what knowledge actually is, and allows us in turn to develop our conceptions to a point where they fully capture that

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[35] See chapter 7, section II for why we cannot deny these presuppositions as a whole.

truth. Much like advocates of immediacy he cannot accept an account of knowledge which is not grounded in the way the world actually is independently of our knowing about it. Knowledge is part of the fabric of the world 'out there' in itself, and our various conceptions are fortunately and unavoidably anchored in that truth, though in varying degrees confused about how to properly conceive of it. In this way he has smuggled back in through the back door part of what was so problematic on the traditional construal of enlightenment epistemology. Just as they had to conceive of some immediate item of knowledge that grounded their conception, so Taylor has to assume some undeniable criterial property. However, just as we can question advocates of immediacy and leave them impaled on the horn of regress or circularity, so too can we question the supposed undeniability of Taylor's criterial properties and impale him on the horn of regress or circularity.

These criterial properties are better thought of as minimal or pre-theoretical features of knowledge that we all do in fact share, and on that basis are common to all the competing conceptions of knowledge. My argument is that knowledge is something that we *do* already within *our* world, and its ultimate vindication comes from the fact that it is what *we* do, and our task at this stage is to help ourselves be clearer on *what* exactly it is that we are doing. This involves working out those minimal pre-theoretical commitments and seeing if our particular conceptions of knowledge can live up to them.[36] In this way knowledge and the world are brought into close connection rather than separated off from one another. Knowledge is not a medium or a tool through which we grasp the absolute set over and against it, and so it does not even become an issue whether or not it can be given a prior absolute justification, or necessary connection to things in themselves; that is to say we do not have to construct a theory which attempts to make the tool or medium infallible on some level, despite being cut off from The True.[37] If we take this mistaken approach we 'employ a means which immediately bring about the opposite of its own end; or rather,

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[36] I would like to point out what I think are affinities between what I am attempting to do here and Heidegger's task in Being and Time. Heidegger similarly thought that we could not proceed without presuppositions, but he also thought that there were better places to begin. Aside from his argument to the effect that we must use Dasein as our 'clue' to an investigation of Being, he also argued that we must take Dasein 'proximally and for the most part', i.e. apart from any more articulate theoretical considerations. Similarly, I am accepting presuppositions, but suggesting we start with those criterial properties which are pre-theoretical.

[37] Hegel brings out the incoherency inherent in this approach quite nicely: 'It presupposes that the Absolute stands on one side and cognition on the other, independent and separated from it, and yet is something real; or in other words, it presupposes that cognition which, since it is excluded from the Absolute, is surely outside of the truth as well, is nevertheless true as well' See G. W. F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, ed. J. Hoffmeister, trans. A. V. Miller, Fifth ed., 1952), 47.

what is really absurd is that we should make use of a means at all.'[38] To separate knowledge from the world and demand that the former be vindicated is to leave us not just in a state of scepticism about the world generally, but about our very conceptions of knowledge. My suspicion is that Taylor has not quite freed himself from this view.

V - An account of how contradiction can have a positive result

Now that I have discussed the notion of presuppositions and the role they can play as the criteria for a process of internal criticism, I will move on to discuss how the uncovering of contradictions through this process of internal criticism can give us a positive result. The core idea here is the Hegelian notion of determinate negation, which he contrasts with a sceptical notion of negation.

> This is just the scepticism which only ever see pure nothingness in its result and abstracts from the fact that this nothingness is specifically the nothingness of that *from which it results*. For it is only when it is taken as the result of that from which it emerges, that it is, in fact, the true result; in that case it is itself a *determinate* nothingness, one which has a *content*.[39]

As Norman explains, contradiction is usually understood as purely negative, 'but in fact negation is never merely negative. It is always a negation *of* something, a *determinate negation*, and as such it always has a positive content.'[40] When something is negated we are not left simply with nothing or a mere void where there used to be something. Rather, because it is some*thing* that is negated, with a particular shape, we are left with a new shape in its place. Similarly, Sean Sayers argues that it 'is vital to understand that the dialectical concept of contradiction is not the same as the concept of contradiction in traditional formal logic. The dialectical contradiction is a *concrete* contradiction ... when dialectical thinkers talk about contradictions they are referring to conflicts of opposing forces or tendencies in things'[41] and it is these opposing forces or tendencies which lead to change. I will briefly follow Sayers in discussing traditional and dialectical notions of contradiction and their philosophical backgrounds.

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[38] Ibid., 46

[39] Ibid., 51

[40] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 16.

[41] Richard Norman and Sean Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1980), 7.

Sayers discusses the traditional notion of contradiction in relation to the atomistic metaphysics which much of traditional philosophy adopts, and which views all things as externally related, as 'self-contained, positive existences, indifferent to other things'.[42] For the atomist things are not essentially related in such a way that they depend on one another in order to be what they are; or to put it another way, things are externally or accidentally related rather than internally or essentially related.[43] On this view a thing either exists or it does not exist, as a self-sufficient entity, and in its existence or non-existence it cannot be said to contradict anything else. It is only our thoughts which can be contradictory, and it is only by chance that a thing may come to conflict or oppose - but never contradict - another thing. Thus, as Sayers points out, this gives us an expression of the traditional principle of identity which grounds formal logic: 'everything is what it is... A is A and B is B. They *may* be opposed, but not necessarily'. It should be clear that this view allows for the negation of something to be a mere negation that has no effect other than to leave an empty space where it once was. If A is not essentially related to B, then the negation of A need not have any positive effect on B.

However, in terms of the philosophical background that supports determinate negation 'it is crucial to see that dialectical contradiction is more than mere conflict and opposition: it is essential opposition; conflict within a unity; internal conflict - not mere external and accidental conflict'.[44] It is because opposition and conflict can be found between two things which are essentially related to form a unity that we must still speak of contradiction. It is not the accidental and conflicted meeting of A and B that the atomist outlook speaks of, it is rather the essential opposition of two internally related things. It is not too difficult to see how this allows for the idea of determinate negation. If A and B are essentially related in such a way that they also conflict, then the negation of A by B cannot help but effect the nature of B, thus giving us a positive result. If there is anything correct in this view, then the very least that can be said about formal contradiction is that it is not the only notion of contradiction.

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[42] Ibid., 7

[43] Joachim holds this metaphysical outlook of internal relations, and he uses arguments towards such a view in undermining an atomist empiricism of the sort Hegel is also denying. The general argument is that the object of experience and experience itself cannot be understood as distinct entities, to do so is to render knowledge impossible. See chapter 2 of Joachim, *The Nature of Truth*. See also: footnote 63 on page 30, for more references.

[44] Norman and Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic*, 16.

Let us return to the contradictions within our conceptions of knowledge. If we try to understand contradiction in the sense offered us by formal logic, then finding a contradiction between those basic criterial properties and our current working conception of knowledge, will involve our simply negating or removing the current conception while leaving us only with the basic criterial properties and nothing else. We would, for example, drop sense-certainty as our working conception, and be left only with the criterial properties. We would therefore be left with no signs or suggestions as to how we should try to form our next working conception of knowledge. By limiting our understanding of contradiction to that of the atomist view, we would rob the notion of transcendental articulation which I have been outlining of its developmental nature, its ability to offer gradually increasing insight into our conception of knowledge. With this merely negative result, any further conception would have to be entirely conjectural.[45]

In light of these comments, however, we should take notice of the fact that our conception of knowledge *is* an essential unity consisting of criterial properties and the working conception, where each is determined in some way by the other. Thus, the criterial property of awareness is being given a particular understanding under the conception of knowledge as sense-certainty, and sense-certainty necessarily involves an account of awareness. As a unity each determines the other even as we come to see that they also contradict one another. It is because each is essentially related in this way that the negation of sense-certainty as a conception of knowledge can't help but change our understanding of what awareness as a basic feature of knowledge must consist in. Our advancing understanding of what knowledge as awareness must consist in will amount to a new conception of knowledge. Put in less philosophical terms, if we think of the basic criterial properties as regulative ideals, then those regulative ideals will, in showing the manner in which a particular conception cannot meet them, evince the manner in which the next conception should develop.

I only wish to avoid here the sort of conjectural irrationalism which seems so often to follow from the atomistic outlook, and which is often symptomatic of empiricist philosophies.[46] Fortunately the problematic between two understandings of contradiction

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[45] See Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery* (London: Routledge, 1992). See also Karl Popper, "Conjectural Knowledge: My Solution of the Problem of Induction," in *Objective Knowledge*, Second ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[46] We need look no further than Hume for the classic example. By offering a psychologistic account of causation Hume side-lined the issue of finding a *justification* for why effect follows cause and settled for a psychological *explanation*. On this view there was no rational basis for the association of

which I have outlined here can also be found in other notable areas, in particular the philosophy of science as I discussed it in chapter 2.[47] The main thrust of my argument there, following Kuhn, was that contradictions form within scientific theories on a regular basis, and that these contradictions are never mere negations of an old theory. Rather, the contradictions are maintained until a new theory is made available which can in some way respond to those contradictions present within the old paradigm. New paradigms are not arbitrarily adopted, and nor are they mere conjectures, they are instead part of an ongoing historical process or narrative. This contrasts sharply with Karl Popper's account. For Popper, a scientific theory is nothing more than a creative conjecture which is then tested.[48] For as long as a theory survives testing without contradiction it is maintained, and as soon as it produces contradiction it is discarded. New theories are then once more creatively conjectured in the place of discarded theories. Sayers describes Popper as failing to see both the positive and negative aspects of contradiction, he 'focuses almost exclusively on the negative aspect, "refutation"; and he entirely isolates this from the positive aspect, which he calls "conjecture", and which he regards as a non-logical, merely "psychological" process.'[49] Scientific conjectures understood as creative 'bolts from the blue' are certainly not rationally motivated. Likewise, if new conceptions of knowledge had to be understood on the model of conjecture, then my developing account couldn't be so easily considered a process of rational articulation.

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cause and effect, it was simply a psychological happening, the habitual association of regularly occurring entities. Importantly, this irrationalism was a direct result of Hume viewing things in an atomistic manner, as externally rather than internally related. By investigating the ideas and impressions which were phenomenally presented to him he could find no principle of association within the isolated, self-subsistent experience of a cause that necessitated its effect, and seeing as experience alone qualified as a source of knowledge, he concluded that there is no such thing as necessary connection. It is also telling that reason for Hume was demonstrative i.e. deductive reasoning, and this is because deduction can be explained as 'relations of ideas' i.e. ideas which, in virtue of their content, are essentially related - for example, 12 inches is essentially related to 1 foot.

[47] It should be noted that examples of determinate negation are not rare in philosophy. Joachim, writing in the Hegelian tradition, argues against correspondence theories of truth in his book *The Nature of Truth*. He does so by showing that various attempts to formulate the correspondence theory descend into incoherence. He notes in Chapter 3, however, that despite appearances his investigation has not been merely critical or negative. He notes that his criticisms of correspondence theories have been developed under the control of an implicit positive notion of truth, namely coherency. It is the emergence of coherency as a cornerstone of truth that entitles him to develop a coherency account of truth in subsequent chapters. See Joachim, *The Nature of Truth*, 64. Richard Norman highlights similar situations in the philosophies of Mill and Locke: See Norman and Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic*, 51.

[48] 'The scepticism that ends up with the bare abstraction of nothingness or emptiness cannot get any further from here, but must wait to see whether something new comes along and what it is, in order to throw it too into the same empty abyss.' See Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 51.

[49] Norman and Sayers, *Hegel, Marx and Dialectic*, 122.

To bring these thoughts back to my own arguments, and to discuss them in the terms I have been using, the contradiction should be seen as arising between a particular conception and its basic criterial properties, and is thus a contradiction within our notion of knowledge. However, such contradictions do not lead us simply to negate the given conception, rather, the particular form of contradiction within our notion of knowledge points us towards a new notion of knowledge that surmounts the previous inadequacy. As Taylor puts it: 'The contradiction between model and reality is a determinate one; as such, it calls for a particular transformation to overcome it; and of course, the transformation must be in the model or yardstick, for it is this which is at the root of the contradiction, that in trying to realise it, effective experience violates it'.[50] In this way we see more clearly how it is that these basic criterial properties, these minimal presuppositions, help to orient our developing conceptions. It is because sense-certainty fails to live up to the basic criterial property of awareness, that we are given a positive result, that we form a new conception of what the standard or purpose of knowledge, including those criterial properties, must consist in.

VI - Hegel's dialectics of sense-certainty

Taylor describes sense-certainty as 'a view of our awareness of the world according to which it is at its fullest and richest when we simply open our senses, as it were, to the world and receive whatever impressions come our way, prior to any activity of the mind, in particular conceptual activity'.[51] This stance holds us to be entirely receptive to the epistemic content we receive from sensation, and thought plays no active role in shaping these immediately given contents. This is, of course, a common feature of all empiricism. Russell, for instance, talks of 'sense-data' or what is immediately given in sensation as knowledge by acquaintance,[52] and Hume takes himself to be offering descriptions of impressions simply as they present themselves in experience.[53] In either case, the objects of sensation, whether they are sense-data, impressions or some other variant such as Lockian ideas,[54] are received in complete self-sufficiency and form the basis for the rest of our knowing. In this way sense-certainty is meant to be both the richest and truest form of

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[50] Taylor, *The Opening Arguments of the Phenomenology*, 159.

[51] Taylor, *Hegel*, 141.

[52] See Chapter 5 in Russell, *The Problems of Philosophy*

[53] See Part 1, Sect 1 of David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature* (London: Penguin Books, 1985).

[54] See Book II, Chapter 1 in Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*

knowledge because our conceptual activity has not yet divided, abstracted or shaped in any way this fundamental source of knowledge. It is when we begin to interfere with, judge, or make inferences based on these sense-contents that room for error arises. It is as soon as we try to mediate them that mistakes can be made. Hegel gives the following, more detailed, account of sense-certainty:

> I, *this* particular I, am certain of *this* particular thing, not because I, *qua* consciousness, in knowing it have developed myself or thought about it in various ways; and also not because *the thing* of which I am certain, in virtue of a host of distinct qualities, would be in its own self a rich complex of connections, or related in various ways to other things. Neither of these has anything to do with the truth of sense-certainty: here neither I nor the thing has the significance of a complex process of mediation; the 'I' does not have the significance of a manifold imagining or thinking; nor does the 'thing' signify something that has a host of qualities.[55]

Again, Hegel explicitly sets sense-certainty up as an immediate as opposed to mediated form of knowledge, and the model is clearly sensation.

Norman picks out two salient features from Hegel's initial account of sense-certainty: first, as mentioned previously, there is the idea that our receptivity to the objects of sense-certainty is entirely passive such that we alter nothing in the object of sensation; second there is the idea that the objects of sense-certainty are taken in isolation, without being related to any other objects. This second point 'carries the implication that the object is a bare *particular*',[56] and so involves no universal element, for to have a universal element is to share in common with other things or stand in relation to other things. As such 'sense-certainty appears to be a relation between two particulars, regarded purely as particulars – "I", the subject, and "this", the object'.[57] Furthermore, one can see that the account of immediacy outlined here satisfies the requirement of immediate knowledge as it was outlined in the last chapter. I argued there that immediate knowledge involved a direct knowing of a self-sufficient object, where to experience that object was the same thing as to know that object, and to know that object was the same thing as to experience it.

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[55] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58.

[56] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 30.

[57] Ibid., 30

The contradiction to be brought out in this conception of knowledge relies, as I have suggested previously, on its containing criterial properties which it cannot meet, and those criterial properties are 'awareness' and 'objectivity'. Given that my key argument relies on knowledge having to meet the demands of awareness, I want to say something to give this demand plausibility.

It may be argued that there are certain kinds of knowledge which need not involve 'awareness' of an object, and I concede this. The know-how I demonstrate when riding a bike need not involve an awareness of objects, and if it does involve some such awareness, it is still hard to imagine how such know-how could consist *entirely* in an awareness of objects. But what about when we are quite explicitly dealing with knowledge of an object, for 'what is awareness if not a transaction between a "subject" and an "object"?'.[58] For Loewenberg any *cognitive* state must involve these two terms and the relating of the two through an act of awareness, and at least insofar as we are concerned with propositional knowledge we can see the plausibility in his claim: I cannot know that there is a bird on my window sill if I am not aware of it. One may, however, consider counter-examples even to this: I have never been directly aware of Australia or atoms and yet I know them to exist. However, even in these cases, I still have to have – as I will discuss shortly - some sort of selective grasp of what these objects consist in. Either way, sense-certainty itself does claim to have a direct awareness of sensory objects; for one cannot have a sensation any other way than directly. One cannot therefore be an advocate of sense-certainty without being committed to the criterial property of awareness.

Before getting into the details of the difficulties this criterion causes, we can give a more summary account, following Hegel's own words. Thus, in discussing sense-certainty as the supposedly richest, truest form of knowledge, Hegel claims that 'this very certainty proves to be the most abstract and poorest truth. All that it says about what it knows is just that it *is*; and its truth contains nothing but the sheer *being* of the thing'.[59] This reference to pure being, directly parallels an argument offered by Hegel in his later logical works.[60] Here the concept of 'pure being' is understood to be not any particular being, but being as such, and in order not to be any particular being, pure being has to be the absence of any determinacy or relation, which, of course, turns out to be nothing determinate, i.e.

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[58] J. Loewenberg, "The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"," *Mind, New Series* 44, no. 173 (1935): 26.

[59] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 58.

[60] Hegel, *The Encyclopaedia Logic*, 135-157.

nothingness.[61] The lesson here is that to think anything at all, we must think determinately, we must conceive things as having limits or boundaries, and as standing in relation to other things. To be aware of an object before me, I must see that object determinately, but to see it determinately I must actively apply some principle of selection, and to not do so is to not be aware of anything at all. If sense-certainty involves direct contact with bare particulars then this precludes the selectivity[62] required for awareness because such selection requires universals, and this 'condemns it to emptiness' and leaves unmediated sensation as a 'trance-like stare'.[63] Therefore, insofar as knowledge requires awareness, it also requires concepts. I will unpack this argument in more detail.

The best way to understand the demand of 'awareness' is as a call for the knowing subject to produce an 'instance' of knowledge, whether we understand the producing of this instance as something done publicly for others or privately to himself. He must be able, as it were, to hold the selection before him, as his object of knowledge. Thus, Loewenberg writes: 'the evocation of an instance of immediacy is justified on two grounds'.[64] The first ground is as follows:

> Being by hypothesis concrete sentience without reflection, sense-certainty is real only in a given example, whenever *this* content manifests its indubitable presence to *this* mind. Particularity is the soul of sensuous experience. What falls within the compass of a sensation must be assumed to have a character it cannot lose or exchange without forfeiting its claim to be *this* entity and no other.[65]

Which is to say that that the particulars of sensuous experience exist only in the present act of sensation, and outside of that moment they are something other than themselves. To show that we can have such knowledge, we must produce an instance of sensuous

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[61] For Hegel pure being amounts to nothing, but this is arguably far too strong a claim – a complete lack of determinacy leads to nothing determinate, but not necessarily sheer nothingness. This is especially clear in the parallels I am drawing with sense-certainty, for if sense-certainty, in lacking all determinacy, really were equivalent to nothing then this would amount to a denial of sensation and subsequently any role it might play in knowledge. Philosophers have taken this approach, with attempts made to make knowledge entirely conceptual or linguistic, but this is not the route I wish to take.

[62] Taylor gives the example of seeing objects on his desk as either use objects or pure shapes, such that seeing them in one dimension or aspect excludes seeing them at the same time in the other dimension. He therefore understands awareness to be the act of selecting certain dimensions of our experience as 'prepotent'. See Taylor, *Hegel*, 142.

[63] Ibid., 142

[64] Loewenberg, *The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 26.

[65] Ibid.: 26

knowledge as it actually is. We cannot refer to it from afar, or gesture at it from a distance. Loewenberg's second ground is as follows:

> If no individual object of experience could be actually indicated, this content always turning into any content and this mind into any mind, there would be nothing for sense-experience to rest in; there would be no specific datum to contemplate and no specific intuition to enjoy the contemplation. Where specificity is absent, where anybody is aware anywhen and anywhere of anything, we have experience in vacuo, a strange antithesis to the position occupied by sensuousness.[66]

Note that Loewenberg's call for the production of an instance as the specifying of a datum, and his characterisation of the failure to do so as 'experience in vacuo' parallel Hegel's own point that an unselective awareness is sheer abstraction. Also worth noting is that Loewenberg's demand for an 'instance' avoids bringing in strong theoretical claims. Taylor, for instance, takes the call for selection as virtuously synonymous with the need for language right from the outset, but this is too fast. While the demand for an instance may amount to giving public verbal expression to what one knows, it may also amount to either a literal pointing, or a kind of private pointing, a merely mental gesture. The clear point is that while we need not understand awareness as the need to express in language what we know, we do in some sense have to produce an instance of this knowledge, we have to show our ability to select, specify or be aware of that which we know. Knowledge requires awareness, awareness requires the selective production of an instance, and the attempt to produce an instance of immediate sensory knowledge will be shown to always contradict what sense-certainty supposes its objects to be.

In being called to produce an instance I shall begin with an attempt to do so discursively, and then move on to an attempt to do so non-discursively.[67] The bare particulars of sensuous experience are taken to be simple 'Thises': where one is aware of a simple *this*. Norman notes that this bears a striking resemblance to modern versions of empiricism and

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[66] Ibid.: 26

[67] I am extracting for my own purposes what I take to be the most salient and persuasive aspects of Hegel's arguments. His own dialectic involves a series of more specified steps wherein he tries to identify immediacy first of all in the object of experience, then in the subject of experience, and finally in the whole subject/object manifold. I consider his arguments to have variable degrees of success, but his overall structure perhaps does more to mystify the issue than it does to help. As such, I have abandoned his particular steps and been selective in the arguments I have adopted for my own use. Here my structure takes the form of identifying an instance discursively, and then non-discursively, with the failure of each being the inability to identify a particular without recourse to universals or concepts.

logical positivism, in particular the theory of Russell which drew a distinction between 'knowledge by description' and 'knowledge by acquaintance', where the former is reducible to the latter. Sense-data then 'are the most common objects which we know by direct acquaintance'[68] and 'most common words, even proper names, are really descriptions, and that there are only two words which are strictly proper names of particulars, namely, "I" and "this"'.[69]

Hegel takes the attempt to produce an instance of 'this' as the attempt to produce something either 'here' or 'now', and seeing as we are offering an instance discursively, he imagines it as the answering of a question:

> To the question: 'What is now?', let us answer, e.g. 'Now is Night.' In order to test the truth of this sense-certainty a simple experiment will suffice. We write down this truth; a truth cannot lose anything by being written down, any more than it can lose anything through our preserving it. If *now*, *this noon*, we look again at the written truth we shall have to say that it has become stale... The same will be the case with the other form of the 'This', with 'Here'. 'Here; is, e.g., the tree. If I turn round, this truth has vanished and is converted into its opposite: 'No tree is here, but a house instead'.

Hegel's argument here is surprisingly simple: the terms 'this', 'here' and 'now' can apply equally to anything or anytime, and as such are the most abstract of universals, and so can hardly be considered the 'strictly proper names of particulars' in the way Russell hopes. In being universal they are not immediate or absolutely particular, rather they are thoroughly mediated, the 'Now' for instance, remains applicable across a variety of instances and in relation to many things, in the same way that the universal 'table' remains applicable across a variety of instances and in relation to many things. Worse still, our reliance on abstract universals in the attempt to offer up an instance of immediacy only helps to enforce the idea that sensuous experience is itself utterly abstract; 'this', 'here' and 'now', while linguistic mediations, are also wholly negative and indeterminate. Thus, in attempting discursively to produce an instance of bare particulars, the supposedly richest and truest form of knowledge, we have in fact produced the most abstract of universals. In trying to produce an instance to demonstrate our awareness, we produce something which sense-certainty cannot accept as its object.

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[68] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 30.

[69] Ibid., 30

Now, one might object, as Loewenberg does, that 'Immediacy raised to the level of discourse is indeed absurd, but the absurdity inheres in the attempt to formulate a type of experience whose nature beggars all description',[70] for 'putting the immediate into words is like pouring water into a sieve. Accordingly, it is easy to convict a man of folly if he is inveighed into uttering the ineffable'.[71] The criticism here is that language inherently involves universals and mediation, and so the attempt to capture sense-certainty in language is misguided from the start. Whatever the objects of sense-certainty are, they obviously cannot be captured in language. However, there is a way we can get these arguments to still go through. Norman argues, for instance, that we should consider it of the very essence of knowledge that it be publically available for discursive scrutiny.[72] If knowledge is something privately held within each individual's own experience, incapable of public expression, then at the very least we are dealing with an impoverished form of knowledge. On this account, my own sensuous "knowledge" may clash with someone else's, but there is not only no public criterion for the disputation to be settled, there is no public way of giving expression to the dispute. I argue that we should see the inability of unmediated bare particulars to play a role in rational *discourse* as a failure to meet the criterial property of objectivity. A form of knowledge which can never be spoken and so can never enter into argument is arguably not a form of knowledge at all. In trying to meet one criterial property, (awareness) it has become apparent that immediate sensory particulars cannot be captured in language, and so they violate a different criterial property. (objectivity) While I think this is a powerful argument against sense-certainty, it does rely on the more contentious criterial property of objectivity and how to characterise this. I think we can limit our criterial property to awareness alone, and still push the point further against sense-certainty by arguing that even a form of knowledge which admits it cannot enter into language, and so claims a form of pre-conceptual knowledge, must still be contradictory.[73]

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[70] Loewenberg, *The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 25.

[71] Ibid.: 31

[72] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 32.

[73] As an article by Stern (Robert Stern, "Taylor, Transcendental Arguments, and Hegel on Consciousness," *Hegel Bulletin* 34, no. 01 (2013).) points out, it has been a point of criticism aimed against Taylor by Houlgate that his strong thesis about language violates Hegel's immanent methodology by bringing in a thesis about the role of language from outside sense-certainty. It is worth noting that under my own developing account I need not face the charge of relying on such strong thesis. The requirement for awareness is internal to sense-certainty, and this requirement demands that we produce an instance. This can either be done linguistically or through some sort of pointing. Either way the result is the reliance on conditions for knowledge other than sense-certainty

Offering up our instance of knowledge by expressing it in language emerges as one possibility amongst others. We have also noted that one may literally point or mentally gesture towards the object of awareness. Consider Loewenberg's criticism again:

> The immediate and its expression being at loggerheads, we are called upon to sacrifice the authenticity of intuition to the ambages of locution. Because the immediate, admittedly inexpressible, turns into its opposite as soon as we open our mouths, we are required to hold that it is other than itself on its own plane of being. The *non sequitur* of this is evident. The contradiction is not in sense-certainty but only between it and discourse.[74]

We might be led into this *non sequitur* if we make the hasty mistake of presuming that awareness must be expressible in language to count as awareness. However, given that I am allowing for the production of instance via other means, it so far only remains true that 'we cannot say what we *mean*' in sense-certainty, but not therefore that we have to 'end by *meaning* what we say'. We do not yet have to presume that knowledge is necessarily linguistic. An awful lot hangs then, on the success or failure of producing an instance of sense-certainty by literal or mental pointing.

Hegel describes this next step in his argument, the inarticulate literal or mental pointing, as follows:

> I, this 'I', assert then the 'Here' as a tree, and do not turn round so that the Here would become for me *not* a tree... or that I myself at another time take the Here as not-tree, the Now as not-day. On the contrary, I am a pure [act of] intuiting... We must let ourselves *point to it*; for the truth of this immediate relation is the truth of this 'I' which confines itself to one 'Now' or one 'Here'. Were we to examine this truth *afterwards*, or stand at a *distance from it*, it would lose its significance entirely; for that would do away with the immediacy which is essential to it.[75]

Houlgate considers this next step to be an attempt at banishing 'all indeterminacy from my consciousness and guaranteeing that I am, indeed, conscious of the specific object that I mean, even though I think of it as nothing but *this*'.[76] And this manoeuvre is self-consciously a retreat from any requirement to express publicly what one means, it is

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would be willing to accept.

[74] Loewenberg, *The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 36.

[75] Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 62-63.

[76] Houlgate, *Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, 59.

instead the attempt to capture in an instantaneous intuition the bare particular before me, and as such we no longer need to worry about shifting contexts, as in the case of offering a discursive instance of sense-certainty. If you put yourself in my context, looked on and mentally pointed as I am, here and now, then you would see as I see. Taylor elaborates on this by arguing that sense-certainty, as a pure contact with the particular, 'is of course only available in context, and as a knowledge unmediated by concepts, it can of course only be shown'.[77]

Loewenberg calls this attempt to point out the object of sense-certainty 'solipsism of the present moment', a fitting description of sense-certainty's hope for direct awareness of sensory objects, where in the attempt to escape anything mediated - a memory, a recollection, a verbal expression - all that is left is the absolutely present moment of sensation. This title – the 'solipsism of the present moment' - also gives us a clue to understanding Hegel's criticism of the attempt to produce an instance by pointing, where one tries to point out the 'here' or the 'now' that one means.

Beginning with the attempt to point out the 'now', Loewenberg puts Hegel's criticism succinctly in the following way: 'an instant intuition does not endure long enough to suffer its datum to be indicated',[78] and he reinforces this point with the paradoxical example of Heraclitus's river that one cannot step into twice. The moment one steps into the river, the flowing waters have caused the river to change, and likewise the moment one points out the now, it has vanished into the 'now that was', a now that one is not directly aware of, but which one can only recall. In its place one is indicating a new 'now' which similarly vanishes into a 'now that was'. The very act of pointing out an instance of the 'now' that one *means,* causes it to vanish *qua* sensation, and become a series of 'nows' or a history of 'nows': 'The now necessarily shows itself, in the very experience of it, to be the now-that-has-been or the continuity of present and past moments. As such, the object of sense-certainty proves to be "an absolute plurality of nows"'.[79] The only way we can hold onto this 'now that was' as an instance of knowledge is by seeing it as one 'now' in a series of 'nows'. Thus the now is not a simple and immediate object which we are directly aware of, but a complex mediation of many 'nows'. The 'now' understood as an absolute moment can only be saved by being put into relation with a series of other 'nows', or in other words,

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[77] Taylor, *Hegel*, 141.

[78] Loewenberg, *The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 32.

[79] Houlgate, *Hegel: Freedom, Truth and History*, 59.

by being subsumed under a universal.[80] We can say 'now, this minute' or 'now, this hour', where each is 'a block of time composed of smaller chips [and] only the smallest of these, itself a composition, is actually present'.[81] To be clear, the argument here is that experience itself, with all considerations of language put to one side, shows itself unable to hold onto bare particulars which are being mentally pointed to. We can only save the particular moment by capturing it in the net of a universal concept, by relating many 'nows' together as a duration of time. Once again mediation and relation are shown to be essential to producing instances of knowledge.

A similar argument is proposed for the attempt to point out a 'here' in experience, what Loewenberg calls 'local solipsism'. Just as the inability to point out a 'now' of experience hinges on the impossibility of absolute instants of time, so the inability to point out a 'here' hinges on the impossibility of absolute instants of space.[82] In the same way that an instant of time can only ever be a duration-block of moments containing many smaller moments, so too can an instant of space only ever be an extension-block, a 'here' that contains many smaller 'heres'.

> The spot at which any datum appears, however constricted, is always distended; the word "here", by which I indicate the position of the datum, represents an extent made up of several extents. And the extent for which the "here" serves as a symbol has elastic boundaries; for we may designate as being here anything found in this room, in this country, on this continent, on this planet. Nothing is here in an absolute and literal sense.[83]

Loewenberg needlessly supposes that we could be pointing out anything in this room, country or continent, when clearly the range of our pointing is restricted to what is present in a particular individual's sensory field at any given moment. However, the key argument is that within a field of sensation the act of mentally pointing is ambiguous. Any point which I might *mean* when mentally gesturing contains many other points within it, and there is no reason to think that the pointing itself means one arbitrary point, rather than any of the other arbitrary points within it or, for that matter, outside it. Which range within my sensory field am I actually delineating? Once again the act of pointing on its own can in

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[80] Hegel would think of these universals as concrete universals in sharp contrast to the abstract universals of 'this', 'here' or 'now'.

[81] Loewenberg, *The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 34.

[82] Norman, *Hegel's Phenomenology*, 35.

[83] Loewenberg, *The Comedy of Immediacy in Hegel's "Phenomenology"*, 34.

no way succeed at indicating a datum, and so cannot produce an instance of awareness. The only way to indicate a datum is to capture an 'extension-block' under a universal, to have a concept through which we can grasp those particulars under definite relations.

I would like to elaborate a little on the point we have reached here. The argument is that pointing alone does not constitute the production of an instance; you have to also characterise that which you are pointing to, you have to be able to delineate the object in some way, you have to see it as a certain sort of distinguishable thing within your experience by relating it to other things of the same kind. As Sayers argues, following Berkeley's example of a portrait of Julius Caesar, two individuals can have the same sensory experience of such a portrait, but only someone who mediates those sensations through a wider knowledge of Caesar would see the portrait *as Caesar.*[84] This requirement of mediation also needs to be seen as applying to such supposedly basic sensory particulars as colour. As Sayers argues, to say 'there is a brown, rectangular patch in my visual field is equally to have classified and interpreted my experience'.[85]

To be clear, I am denying neither the role of sensation in knowledge, nor that we are directly aware of things such as tables, chairs or even red colour patches. Rather, for such sensation to count as knowledge or for us to have direct awareness of objects such as tables and chairs or red colour patches, those sensations have first to be mediated through concepts.

> Knowledge is *neither* the product of pure, direct and unmediated sensory contact with the world, *nor* is it a purely intellectual and mental creation. These either/or alternatives must *both* be rejected. In their place must come the realization that knowledge essentially and necessarily involves *both* an immediate and a mediated aspect… For immediacy and mediation are opposites which exist in unity. Each is relative to, and correlative with, the other.[86]

Following Sayers, we should thus say that the notions of immediacy and mediation are useful in a relative sense. I can quite rightly say that I am immediately aware of this desk before me, but the sense in which it is immediate is not an absolute sense, rather, it is relative to the conceptual mediations I actively contribute. It is a mediated immediacy. If the table was immediately there in an absolute sense, then it would be seen as such by all

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[84] Sean Sayers, *Reality and Reason* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 85.

[85] Ibid., 114

[86] Ibid., 116

sensory creatures, and this just cannot be so. As another example of this Sayers argues that 'to a doctor an X-ray photograph may immediately disclose the signs of tuberculosis, where I see nothing but a blur of greys.[87] We also cannot overplay the role of mediation without accepting that something, i.e. sensation, is there to be mediated. We bring our active conceptual engagement to bear on sensation as it is given in experience, and in this way we become conscious of objects. As Sayers argues: 'My interpretation must be *of* the given experience, it must *refer* to it, it must be governed and *determined* by it. The role of interpretation is not simply to fabricate a "world", but rather to determine and to specify, to elucidate and illuminate, the nature of the world which is, in fact, given in experience'.[88] In other words, my arguments have shown only that 'nothing specific – no particular data, no concrete and determinate content – is given purely, directly and immediately in experience, which can serve as a basis for knowledge'.[89]

VII - Conclusion

I have argued that in order to demonstrate the errors of foundationalist reasoning we cannot base our accusations on the same model of epistemology which is involved in that view. I proposed the use of an 'internal critique' whereby we show foundationalism to be incoherent on its own terms. This internal critique involves drawing on a minimal criterial standard which knowledge must meet, and which can be used to draw out contradictions in a given conception of knowledge while supplying us with a positive result, a new conception of knowledge. This process is therefore both transcendental and dialectical.

I then moved on to show that the objects of sense-certainty cannot enter into language, and therefore violate the requirement of objectivity for knowledge. I pushed the criticisms further, however, and argued against any notion of pre-conceptual knowledge, or knowledge of sensory particulars not already mediated through universals.

Thus, the key result of this chapter has been to show that the requirement of awareness as a criterial property of knowledge forces us to see the objects of knowledge as other than those proposed by sense-certainty. The objects of knowledge cannot be bare particulars unmediated by our active conceptual engagement, and so sense-certainty is contradictory.

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[87] Ibid., 116

[88] Ibid., 138

[89] Ibid., 114

Because our conception of knowledge was internally related to those bare particulars which were its supposed objects, the negation of those objects as objects of possible awareness, has involved a change in our conception of knowledge. We must now conceive knowledge as necessarily involving active conceptual engagement, or mediation through universals. Sensation must be interpreted through concepts to count as knowledge.

Chapter 5: The Transcendental Arguments: Part 2 - Wittgenstein

I - Introduction

Pressing the demands of awareness against the position of sense-certainty has negated that position and given us the positive result that awareness must consist in a grasp of universals, rather than a grasp of immediate sensory particulars. While Hegel characterised the objects of sense-certainty as pure being, where 'the thing *is*, and it *is*, merely because it *is*',[1] knowledge now involves seeing objects as being 'thus-and-so'. I now want to consider the position which tries to hold that universals are in some way immediately given to us, that our seeing the world to be 'thus-and-so' is at least on some level given. By the end of the chapter I shall have reached the point I set out towards in chapter 2: a construal of knowledge as being essentially grounded in shared social practice. I will then be able to use this as a basis to return to issues concerning the nature of the individual for the remainder of my arguments.

In the next section I will give an account of the conception of knowledge we have now arrived at, as involving the idea that one can know facts about particulars, or that one can privately identify things as thus-and-so. I will suggest that this amounts to the ability to have a private language, and I will spend the rest of the chapter arguing against the possibility of having such a thing. In section III I will prepare the way for my arguments against a private language via a discussion of the impossibility of ostensive acts being able to fix a rule for how to go on using a concept. In section IV I will respond to the consideration that we can, by virtue of a private mental act, determine the rule ourselves. My response will involve arguing that the issues of ostensive definition repeat at this level. I will also in this section offer an account of what *can* fix a rule, and what *can* count as understanding a rule. In section V I will bring the arguments to bear directly on the possibility of a private language and show that there can be no such thing. In sections VI and VII I will respond to some criticisms put forward by Ayer. I will start by clearing up some of his misinterpretations and thereby undermine the force of one of his criticisms. I will then consider a compelling counterexample he offers us in the form of a Crusoe-like figure who seems to unproblematically demonstrate the ability to have a private language.

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[1] Hegel, The Phenomenology of Spirit, p.59

II - A statement of the problem: can facts about particulars be immediately known?

In *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind* Wilfred Sellars discusses the ineliminable gap between what he calls non-epistemic facts and epistemic facts about subjects where the latter are facts about what one knows, believes and so on. It is a non-epistemic fact about me that I am male and having sensory experiences, and it is an epistemic fact about me that I know my own phone number. Sellars argues that nothing can play the role of a justification for some knowledge claim unless it itself falls within the domain of epistemic facts about knowers. Only a belief, or at least the sort of thing that can potentially be believed, can in turn justify another belief. Non-epistemic facts just can't do the job.

> Now if we bear in mind that the point of the epistemological category of the given is, presumably, to explicate the idea that empirical knowledge rests on a "foundation" of non-inferential knowledge of matter of fact, we may well experience a feeling of surprise on noting that according to sense-datum theorists, it is *particulars* that are sensed. For what is *known*, even in non-inferential knowledge, is *facts* rather than particulars, items of the form *something's being thus-and-so* or *something's standing in a certain relation to something else*.[2]

The argument is that the non-epistemic fact of one's having a sensory experience can never alone serve the role of a justification for an epistemic fact about what one knows. If sensation is taken to be the sensing of bare particulars, *without any universal mediation*, then sensation alone could never entail knowledge of anything. I take this to be the same basic thought as the one I have argued for via Hegel: knowledge requires awareness, and awareness requires that we be able to identify the object of knowledge as being of a certain sort. Note Sellars own emphasis on knowledge as being knowledge of *facts*, of things characterised as 'thus-and-so'. So long as particulars are understood in such a way that precludes this characterisation, as happens when they are understood as lacking any universal element, they will not be suitable items of knowledge. Facts are the sorts of things we can be aware of and can believe, not bare sensory particulars.

There is a potential ambiguity in the use of the term 'particular' which should be cleared up now. The way in which Sellars discusses particulars here may make it seem as if particulars are by definition non-relational and devoid of any universality. However, the arguments I have developed out of Hegel saves the particular, as it were, by showing that all particulars

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[2] Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 17.

must be mediated particulars. Thus, I can pick out a particular in my field of vision by abstracting it away from those features of my experience which surround it and seeing it in relation to other experiences of the same sort. For instance, the particular shade of red on the book before me can be picked out as 'red', though be sure that there is a characterisation of the particular going on here: I am seeing a fact, not a so-called bare particular. Here there is some sense to be made of the notion 'particulars of experience' without retreating into those notions of the particular which I have argued against. Thus, whatever sense there is to the notion of an unmediated bare particular, such a thing cannot play an epistemic role; only mediated particulars can serve as reasons for belief, or things believed. Knowledge requires an awareness of something *as* such and such, and any notion of the particular which falls outside this net of awareness cannot play an epistemic role. As such, particulars need to be understood in epistemic terms, they need to be grasped under universals.

There is, however, a potential escape for theorists of the given.[3] In effect they could grab hold of the notion of a particular as it has been preserved in my Hegelian arguments. They could accept that for particulars to count as objects of knowledge they must be characterised in a certain way, only they would then argue that to sense a sense-content is to sense it as of a certain character. As Sellars claims, they would have to say something like:

> The non-inferential knowing on which our world picture rests is the knowing that certain items, e.g. red sense contents, are of a certain character, e.g. red. When such a fact is non-inferentially known about a sense content, I will say that the sense content is sensed *as being*, e.g., *red*. I will then say that a sense content is *sensed*... if it is sensed as being of a certain character, e.g. red. Finally, I will say of a sense content that it is *known* if it is sensed, to emphasise that sensing is a *cognitive* or *epistemic fact*.[4]

The move Sellars is making here on behalf of theorists of the given is an attempt to make sensation an epistemic fact about subjects by characterising sensation not simply as the sensing of unmediated bare particulars, but as the sensing of facts about particulars - sensing *just is* the seeing of particulars as having a certain character, as standing in relation

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[3] Sellars notion of 'the given' is shorthand for 'the immediately given', or 'immediacy' as I have been discussing it.

[4] Ibid., 17

to other things. What is now given to experience is not the unmediated bare particular, but facts about particulars, and this means that what must be given in experience is conceptual content - i.e. that something is 'thus-and-so'.

Before continuing I would like to connect the current stage of my argument with some of the preliminaries I outlined in Chapter 3. In that chapter I discussed the possibility of both empiricist and rationalist forms of immediacy. My characterisation had to be somewhat rough,[5] but I used Descartes' philosophy to show what a rationalist notion of immediacy could look like, and I have now reached a stage in the argument where these attempts to shore up notions of immediacy look an awful lot like my explication of Descartes. I argued previously that unlike sense-datum theorists, who took phenomenal experience as given and tended to think of such experience as an array of unmediated particulars before the mind's eye, Descartes instead took 'ideas' to be given. He took himself to be able to see the wax before him as the same wax whether it was melted or whole, only because he filtered the flux of phenomenal experiences through his idea of wax. Those sensory inputs would mean nothing for him if they were not conceptually grasped. For Descartes there was no such thing as experience without ideas. Kenny illuminatingly quotes from Descartes' *Notes against a Programme* on this point.

> In our ideas there is nothing which was not innate in the mind, or faculty of thinking, except only those circumstances which concern experience - the fact, for instance, that we judge this or that idea, which we now have present to our thought, is to be referred to certain extraneous things, not that these extraneous things transmitted the ideas themselves to our minds through the organs of sense, but because they transmitted something which gave the mind occasion to form these ideas, by means of an innate faculty, at this time rather than at another.[6]

For Descartes then, concepts are given as part of an innate faculty and they give form and shape to our sensory experience of the world around us; we find ourselves already within a privately given conceptual space. Sellars captures this idea of finding oneself already in a

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[5] Part of why my characterisation can only be a rough one is that there are various ways in which one might try to formulate a rationalist notion of immediacy, but my argument needs to apply generally. Another reason my characterisation needs to be rough is that Descartes' own account of 'ideas' is rife with difficulties. Anthony Kenny, for example, spends much time discussing the manner in which Descartes' 'ideas' are both like concepts and unlike concepts, how they are capacities in some respects, but representations in others, and so on. See chapter 5 of Kenny, *Descartes: A Study of His Philosophy*

[6] Ibid., 103

given conceptual (or logical) space using terms closer to those with which I have been working.

> When we picture a child - or a carrier of slabs - learning his *first* language, *we*, of course, locate the language learner in a structured logical space in which we are at home. Thus, we conceive of him as a person (or, at least, a potential person) in a world of physical objects, colored, producing sounds, existing in Space and Time. But though it is *we* who are familiar with this logical space, we run the danger, if we are not careful, of picturing the language learner as having *ab initio* some degree of awareness - "pre-analytic", limited and fragmentary though it may be - of this same logical space. We picture his state as though it were rather like our own when placed in a strange forest on a dark night. In other words, unless we are careful, we can easily take for granted that the process of teaching a child to use a language is that of teaching it to discriminate elements within a logical space of particulars, universals, facts, etc., of which it is already undiscriminatingly aware, and to associate these discriminated elements with verbal symbols.[7]

As Sellars would have it, it is our own ready acquaintance with a conceptually ordered world, and our own ability to describe it as such, which makes it seem so easy, inevitable even, that we think of the pre-socialised child as living in a 'world'[8] much the same as our own. The child may lack the words to express the various conceptualised items within this world, and as such his ability to clearly discriminate those items may be partial and grasping, but he nevertheless has an awareness of the world as being of a certain sort, as filled with items of a particular character. The child is aware of the box, the animal, the pointing gesture, he just lacks words for them. Our ability to think of the pre-socialised child in this way encourages the idea that we can prior to any process of socialisation have

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[7] Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 64.

[8] The term 'world' is here being used in a special sense. In a perfectly ordinary sense of the term 'world' the child does live in the same world as us. But there is another sense of the term 'world' in which the child does not live in the same world as us. I think this second sense is captured by Kuhn when he talks of the scientist moving into a new paradigm as no longer being in the same world he was before, as having undergone something like a gestalt switch whereby they no longer see the same things when looking in the same direction (so to speak). I think that Heidegger is also making use of something like this sense of 'world' when he talks about Dasein as Being-in-the-world, and gives us a characterisation of the worldliness of the world as not reducible to a simple collection of objects or present-at-hand things, it is the way in which things appear, or the horizon within which things are intelligible. To focus on Kuhn's account, the scientist no longer sees things *as* he saw them before, he see them differently, and the child does not see things *as* things at all, and is in this sense not living in our world. For Heidegger's account see the section 'The Worldhood of the World' in Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 1962).

awareness of things around us as being of a certain character. My contention, however, is that when we think of pre-socialised children in this way, we are - perhaps unknowingly - signing up to an untenable form of rationalism. We are attributing capabilities to the child which can only be acquired through acculturation into a shared activity, a cultural form of life. There is no given conceptual space with which we can sense sense-contents as being of a certain character.

The issue can be usefully framed within Sellars own inconsistent triad:

A. *X senses red sense content s* entails *x non-inferentially knows that s is red.*
B. The ability to sense sense-contents is unacquired
C. The ability to know facts of the form x is φ is acquired.[9]

Claim 'A' amounts to the rationalist variant of the given which I have explained above. This is the position which I attribute to Descartes, and which Sellars offers his own account of, where sensations are epistemic acts in virtue of being mediated through given conceptual contents. Claim B signals that common notion of sensation as something both animals and humans share, and which is arguably a necessary (though not sufficient) condition of our being able to see anything at all. We can only drop claim 'B' if we wish to deny our commonsense understandings of 'sensations, feelings, after images, tickles and itches, etc.'[10] Claim 'C' is where things get contentious because, as Sellars writes, 'most empirically minded philosophers are strongly inclined to think that all classificatory consciousness, all knowledge that something is thus-and-so, or, in logicians' jargon, all subsumption of particulars under universals, involves learning, concept formation, even the use of symbols'.[11] Now, the assertion of any two of these claims necessarily involves a denial of the remaining third claim.

We have therefore, a picture of sensation understood in epistemic terms, that is to say, we sense particulars which are characterised in some way by being subsumed under universals. The attempt is made, however, to understand this as in some sense immediately given to us, where conceptually organised sensory experience is understood to be an *unacquired ability*. This combination of claim A and B contradicts the third claim, that all characterisation, all subsumption under universals is an *acquired ability*. By arguing

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[9] Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, 21.

[10] Ibid., 21

[11] Ibid., 20

in favour of a particularly strong form of this third claim, and taking the second claim to be true, it is the first claim which must inevitably crumble. To argue that conceptual awareness is an acquired ability is to argue against the claim that one can simply sense sense-contents as of a certain sort, that to sense a sense content is to see that sense content as being of a certain universal character. In short, the rationalist variant of the given exemplified by Descartes will be undermined.

What the claim to have immediate awareness of conceptual content amounts to is the ability to privately identify objects of awareness, independently of any sort of language formation, learning, acculturation into a form of life, or shared normative practice. I will therefore turn to Wittgenstein's private language argument in an attempt to demonstrate that we are unable to perform such private acts of identification.[12] For, as Wittgenstein argues, any act of identification already depends on some form of language in the sense of a shared form of life, or normative practice, and so cannot be seen as the fundamental or foundational act of language formation.[13] To be clear then, although Wittgenstein's arguments are focused on language, and a demonstration of our inability to simply name things given to us in private experience, his arguments essentially depend on a critique of our ability to privately identify objects of awareness. In terms of seeing why I think arguments which are *prima facie* about language and meaning have something to say about this notion of the conceptually given, it will help to quote the Augustinian passage which orients Wittgenstein's own investigations.

> When they (my elders) named some object, and accordingly moved towards
> something, I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they
> uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily
> movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples: the expression of the face,
> the play of the eyes, the movement of other parts of the body, and the tone of voice
> which expresses our state of mind in seeking, having, rejecting, or avoiding
> something. Thus, as I heard words repeatedly used in their proper places in various

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[12] Hegel and Wittgension are not often used together as part of a singular argument. However, others have seen the similarities between the two on issues of perception. See David Lamb, *Language and Perception in Hegel and Wittgenstein* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1979).

[13] As Rorty argues, the world cannot supply us with criteria for correct and incorrect uses of language outside of our already being competent language users, our vocabulary is not out there in the world waiting to be discovered. "The world does not speak. Only we do. The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs. But it cannot propose a language for us to speak.' Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

sentences, I gradually learnt to understand what objects they signified; and after I had trained my mouth to form these signs I used them to express my own desires.[14]

We have here a clear, non-technical expression of a picture of language and language formation which bears a remarkable resemblance to Sellars' own characterisation of language learning quoted above. Here, the young Augustine is seen as already living, prior to language formation, within a given 'logical space', a conceptually ordered field of experience consisting of objects, actions, properties, particulars, emotions, intentions, a 'natural language of all peoples' consisting, for instance, in an innate ability to understand the role of pointing and so on. All that is required of Augustine here, to learn the language, is that he figure out which words to attach to which concepts, as the concepts themselves are already given to him in experience. Or, as McGinn writes: 'The private essence is conceived as somehow already fully human, but as lacking the capacity to communicate with others. It already possesses its own internal articulations into particular thoughts and wishes, which cannot yet be expressed, in much the way that the physical world is seen as articulated into particular objects that the names of language unproblematically latch on to.'[15]

It is this idea that the world is already articulated in such a way that one can simply attach names to things which amounts to a private language. Consider Wittgenstein's own characterisation of a private language as one wherein "the individual words… are to refer to what can only be known to the person speaking; to his immediate private sensations. So another person could not understand the language"'.[16] For somebody to name what is given only to him in his experience he would have to be able to privately identify that thing as the thing it is. By a private act of identification, I mean the ability to take something private to my own experience - the paradigm is usually a sensation of some sort - which is in principle inaccessible to the public eye, and to then name that sensation.

Whether or not one can privately identify (conceptualise) objects of awareness comes down to the issue of whether or not criteria of correctness can be privately understood by subjects or whether such criteria have to be located in normative practices. There is a matter of getting it right or wrong with concepts, and we must decide whether or not these

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[14] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, Third ed. (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2001), 2.

[15] Marie McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations* (Oxford: Routledge, 1997), 38.

[16] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 75.

criteria of correctness can be found within private subjects or whether it is a social phenomenon. It can now be seen that the arguments have reached a stage in the transcendental regressions where the conditions of possibility not just for empirical versions of immediacy, but rationalist versions of immediacy are being sought out. We are now asking whether one can privately locate standards of correctness or incorrectness for conceptual applications, for conceptual content, and this will touch not just on one's ability to correctly identify X as such and such, but also the wider notion of rationality as such. I thus need to show that the notion of privately identifying conceptual contents cannot be done in isolation, but relies on conditions of social practice to provide criteria of identity.

III - Ostensive definition

Let us begin by taking the Augustinian conception of language, and seeing if its notion of how one comes to know what words mean is plausible. A key part of his picture seems to be the role played by ostensive definition in pointing out which words to attach to which objects of awareness. Recall how Augustine writes: 'I saw this and I grasped that the thing was called by the sound they uttered when they meant to point it out. Their intention was shewn by their bodily movements, as it were the natural language of all peoples'.[17] Suppose, as Peter Winch argues, that I have been taught the meaning of 'Mt. Everest' by having it pointed out to me as I fly over in an aeroplane. The idea is that I now know the meaning of 'Mt. Everest' in virtue of having it defined to me in this way. This seems *prima facie* plausible but actually hides a philosophical perplexity. Thus, Winch requires answers to some further questions: 'What is the connection between those acts in the past and my utterance of the words "Mt. Everest" now which now gives this utterance of mine the meaning it has? How, in general, is a definition connected with the subsequent use of the expression defined? What is it to "follow" a definition?'[18] The answer one wants to give is that the act of pointing makes clear the meaning of 'Mt.Everest', and to use the word correctly in the future is to use it in accordance with the meaning as laid out by the act of pointing. But this is precisely the sort of move which covers over the philosophical perplexity by taking for granted - as argued earlier - the fact that we are already members of a linguistic community. Of course *for us*, such acts of pointing are usually unproblematic, and philosophically uninteresting. The philosophical issue, however, is to determine exactly

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[17] Ibid., 2

[18] Peter Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, Second ed. (London: Routledge, 2003), 26.

what it means to use a word *in the same way*, and how this is supposed to be set out in the definition, that is to say, in the act of pointing.

Winch makes the philosophical issue more perspicuous by highlighting the manner in which the pointing gesture made from an aeroplane, taken in isolation, is open to multiple interpretations. Had I been in the process of learning English, and my teacher uttered 'mountain' while pointing to Mt. Everest, the gesture would be no different than the first case where I was being taught the name of Mt. Everest. Given that the gesture is identical in both cases, does this mean that what counts as going on 'in the same way' is the same in both cases? Clearly not. To use 'mountain' as a name for Mt. Everest is to misunderstand the word 'mountain' as it was being taught. But then it seems that the pointing gesture alone cannot determine what counts as 'going on in the same way', and the *prima facie* plausibility of simply associating names with things via ostensive definition is put under pressure. The notion of setting a standard for what counts as 'going on the same way' by simply pointing to something, is philosophically puzzling. But while the pointing gesture alone does not set up a standard for what counts as 'the same', we are nevertheless able to ostensively define things.

What then, over and above the act of pointing, does our ability to ostensively define things consist in? To keep in mind that I think these arguments should be understood in transcendental terms, we might better ask what the conditions of possibility are for my defining something through a pointing gesture. In the previous examples we might imagine a shift in context taking place. When naming Mt. Everest the subject may already know what mountains are and be simply taking an aeronautical tour of the Himalayas, aware that he is having the names of mountains pointed out for him. When learning a language, the subject may be aware that he is learning geographical features. These differences in context, which the subject is aware of, will help specify what exactly is pointed out. An awareness of the fact that one is being taught a name, for instance, will specify what counts as 'going on the same way'. Winch specifies what he means by context: 'It is only in terms of a given *rule* that we can attach a specific sense to the words "the same". In terms of the rule governing the use of the word "mountain", a man who uses it to refer to Mount Everest on one occasion and to Mont Blanc on another occasion is using it in the same way

each time; but someone who refers to Mont Blanc as "Everest" would not be said to be using this word in the same way as someone who used it to refer to Mount Everest.'[19]

Thus, pointing alone cannot tell us what counts as 'the same' because we need to grasp a rule for what counts as 'going on the same way' in a given context before we can understand a pointing gesture appropriately. As Winch notes, it won't do to try and give sense to the notion of a rule by calling 'following a rule' the same as 'going on the same way', because what counts as 'the same' in 'going on the same way' is the very thing at issue. Winch quotes Wittgenstein on this point: 'The use of the word "rule" and the use of the word "same" are interwoven.'[20] There is truth to the idea that one is following a rule when one goes on in the same way, but once again, this is only because we are illegitimately importing the way things are *for us* as speaking members of a rule-governed linguistic community into a context of enquiry that excludes this possibility, and as members of a linguistic community we already grasp what counts as 'the same' in various contexts. The thing at issue is what our ability to do this consists in. In particular, I am criticising the idea that we can found the notion of 'sameness', or the ability to identify an object of awareness, as a pre-social ability, and so such social abilities cannot be presupposed in any attempts to shore up the position. So far, the notion of 'the same' has proven itself to be systematically ambiguous across contexts and interwoven with the notion of a rule - a notion that still needs explanation.

The issue raised by the 'Mt. Everest' example is, broadly speaking, about the relationship between defining a concept and then applying that concept in the future, and this has been shown to require an understanding of rules. This act of defining a concept and then proceeding to apply it correctly may seem more obviously problematic in the above case, but is it so obviously a problem with such things as the particulars of experience? I have in mind here something like a red patch in one's field of vision. If anything can be unambiguously pointed out, surely it is the particulars of experience? One might get confused over whether a particular thing is being named ('Mt. Everest'), or over whether a type of thing is being named ('mountain'), but can one be confused when pointing out a particular? Can one make sense of failing to apply the concept 'red' correctly in the future? According to Rhees, we can: 'If I say "This is the colour red", that is a definition - I am giving you a definition by showing you a sample. And the point of that depends upon the

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[19] Ibid., 28

[20] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 73.

definition's being taken in a particular way; and also on its connexion with other uses of language." Consider, when someone points in combination with an utterance of the word 'red', I might take this to mean what we mean by 'colour', I might take it to mean the object which happens to be red, I might take it to be the naming of a number rather than a thing and so on. Furthermore, even if I do follow the gesture roughly as it is meant to be followed, I might not accord it its appropriate place in wider practice. I might, for instance, be able to point to red things when asked, but be unable to follow the order 'paint this wall red'. The rules for using the term 'red' are countless and varied across contexts, and none of them are contained in the simple act of pointing. Thus the ambiguity of 'sameness' really is a universal ambiguity.

Also contained in these argument is a particular idea of what a concept is. Thus, to expand on the above quote, Rhees writes:

> Of course the colour red is not the word 'red'. And I suppose if a man cannot see he will never know what it is. But the colour red is not *this*, either. This is red. But if I say 'This is the colour red,' that is a definition - I am giving you a definition by showing you a sample. And the point of that depends upon the definition's being taken in a particular way; and also on its own connexion with other uses of language. If I had just shown you the sample, and without your asking - what would you have learned from this? Not what the colour red is, anyway.

The idea here is that while the concept red might be thought to depend on people's ability to see, and so sensations of a certain sort might be afforded a place in forming colour concepts, this does not exhaust the concept 'red'. The concept also involves its countless complex uses, or put otherwise, it involves all the various rules that govern its various applications across changing contexts. This is a long way from any notion of 'concept' as an object or a simple idea to which our words attach (though this is something I will discuss more in the next section). A concept is a thing used in various ways, with correct and incorrect applications.

A concept, therefore, understood as involving complex rules for application, cannot be simply given in a pointing gesture, and nor can it be explained as people going on the same way, for this circularly relies on the very notion of 'sameness' which we are trying to explain. Where might we turn next? Perhaps a rule can be something simply thought by the private subject. Perhaps applications can be determined and understood in virtue of a simple private act. As Winch writes: "It might be thought that I could settle at the outset

what is to count as the correct use of this word in the future by making a conscious decision to the effect: "I will use this word only to refer to this mountain"'.[21] Here we are closer to the notion of a private language, or of a conceptual grasp as immediately given in some way. However, as I shall now argue, the problems raised by ostensive definition repeat themselves in attempts to, as it were, privately define. Criteria of correctness, or rules for the applications of a concept, are even more problematic in cases of private definition than they are for public ostensive definition.

IV - Private languages: meaning and understanding as a mental act

The idea to be explored now, is the idea that the meaning of a concept or our grasping the meaning of a concept, involves or can be achieved by some kind of private mental act - i.e. 'I will use *this* word as a name for *this* mountain before me here and now'. Given that concepts involve their applications, and that an understanding of, for example, red, involves an understanding of its uses, this means that any private act of understanding must involve an understanding of the concept's applications. If meaning and understanding are some kind of mental act, then this mental act must determine the future applications to be made of that concept. The hope is that the rules or criteria for what counts as 'the same' - those things which caused us problems in the case of ostensive definition - can be understood as something like a private mental state. Wittgenstein has this problem in mind when saying the following: 'When someone says the word "cube" to me, for example, I know what it means. But can the whole *use* of the word come before my mind, when I *understand* it in this way?'[22] Similarly, can I grasp the meaning of a concept like 'mountain' or 'red' through some sort of mental act, in such a way as to set or determine for me those future applications? The grasp of context, or rules for application required for ostensive definition to work, is something that we might try to make sense of in this way, as understood in a flash. It is this I will try to criticise in the current section.

As Winch has suggested, I might think that I can settle what is to count as 'the same' when using the name 'Mt Everest' by focussing on the mountain itself and making a decision to apply *this term* to *that thing* in the future. But just as in the case of pointing, where we asked what the connection was between the act of ostensive definition and the applications I go on to make of the word, here we can ask what the connection is between my focusing on the mountain in a certain way and my going on to use the word in such and

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[21] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 28.

[22] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 46.

such a manner. What does my going on to use the word *correctly* or *in accordance with my decision* consist in? How does my focusing on the mountain in a certain way with my mind's eye, determine for me how to use the word in the future? This questioning of whether or not one can privately define a word in this way amounts to a questioning of whether or not one can have a private language. For looking at *'that mountain'* involves having an idea of what that mountain is in virtue of this mental focusing, or what one might call 'inner ostensive definition'. In building up to a critical discussion of this 'inner ostensive definition' I would like to discuss whether, in general, meaning can be understood as something 'in the head'.[23]

Thus Wittgenstein asks: 'What really comes before my mind when I *understand* a word? - Isn't it something like a picture? Can't it *be* a picture?'[24] He then asks whether a picture which we grasp in a flash when we understand a word, can be understood as fitting or failing to fit a particular use. The example he draws on, as quoted above, is that of having a schematic image of a cube come before our mind. Presumably when such an image comes before our mind we understand it as pertaining to cubes, and the use we go on to make of this understanding will apply to cubes as opposed to spheres. In this way the image might be thought to force future applications - real cubes fit the image in my head in such a way that real spheres do not. However, as McGinn writes:

> Wittgenstein has purposely chosen the example, so that when we look carefully at this particular case we can quite easily see that this initial sense that the picture itself somehow imposes a particular use on us is quite empty. For when I reflect on the matter, I see that it is quite easy to imagine another method of projecting the picture, e.g. one by which it fits a triangular prism.[25]

What is being combated here is the idea that the image *itself* determines what counts as correct and incorrect applications. When I understand the meaning of 'cube' we cannot think of this understanding as consisting simply in a mental image, because different applications can, with a little imagination, be made to 'fit' the image of a cube. The argument parallels that of ostensive definition. In the same way that pointing can be variously interpreted, so too can mental images. The conclusion to draw is likewise the

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[23] I take this phrase from Hilary Putnem, though in doing so I do not wish to imply that my views are necessarily consonant with his. See Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of 'Meaning'," in *Philosophical Papers, Vol.2: Mind, Language and Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

[24] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 46.

[25] McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, 84.

same: just as pointing could not determine the meaning of a concept because it cannot determine the applications to be made, nor can a mental image determine the meaning of a concept for the same reasons.

Caution must be taken here. What is at issue is not whether or not a particular image can ever be understood to have correct or incorrect applications - it is plain that they can and do. Nor is it being doubted that certain uses *suggest* themselves to us when faced with such schematic drawings or images. What is at issue is the question of whether or not a picture itself, understood in isolation, can ever *force* future applications, or determine in an absolutely unambiguous way what the rules for use are. It is an important feature of Wittgenstein's arguments, and my own, that particular uses do suggest themselves to us when people ostensively define things, or when we are presented with schematic drawings. As will become clear through the course of my argument, if human beings systematically failed to respond to training in the appropriate way, and if common ways of proceeding did not suggest themselves to us throughout the employment of our words in various different practical contexts, it would be hard to imagine how 'rules' or 'meaning' could ever be possible.[26] Furthermore, that certain uses do occur to us is an important part of explaining why we ever form this empty notion of 'force' between image and use in the first place. Thus, as McGinn writes, quoting Wittgenstein: "all our idea that a particular use is forced on us amounts to is 'only the one case and no other occurred to us'(PI 40)"[27] As discussed previously, this example was purposely chosen because it is quite easy to imagine different applications 'fitting' the picture. But we can construct examples where alternative interpretations are less easily imaginable and the idea of 'force' more readily encouraged, though no less empty. Again, beyond the fact of 'suggested uses' there are *correct* and *incorrect* ways to follow a pointing gesture or a schematic drawing; we can understand and fail to understand such things. Put transcendentally, mental images by themselves fail to make sense of the clear fact of conceptual normativity, and conceptual understanding.

I have intimated above in discussing the idea of 'suggestion' that training and shared ways of responding may offer us a way forward. The notion of 'shared ways of responding' does, of course, start to connect with my ultimate goal of grounding conceptual awareness and observational knowledge in social practice. Though I have not finished showing the

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[26] For more on this see Kenneth R. Westphal, "Kant, Wittgenstein, and Transcendental Chaos," *Philosophical Investigations* 28, no. 4 (2005).

[27] McGinn, *Wittgenstein and the Philosophical Investigations*, 85., quoting Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 47.

problems with 'private language', I would like to start bringing in this alternative position now, and to develop it as the argument proceeds. I will discuss social practice here in order to show how it can satisfy our sought after 'conditions of possibility' for meaning and understanding in the cases I am currently discussing. What still needs explaining is where the requisite rules for meaning come from (since it can't come from a mental image) and how we understand such rules (since it can't come from the possession of such an image).

We shall try to answer these two questions - *what a rule is*, and what *understanding a rule* consists in - through an exploration of a particular concrete case offered by Winch. He introduces the discussion in the following way:

> What is the difference between someone who is really applying a rule in what he does and someone who is not? A difficulty here is that any series of actions which a man may perform can be brought within the scope of some formula or other if we are prepared to make it sufficiently complicated. Yet, that a man's actions might be interpreted as an application of a given formula, is in itself no guarantee that he is in fact applying that formula. What is the difference between those cases?[28]

The example Winch offers is that of a man offering a number series to an audience trained in mathematical formulae. The man begins by writing '1 3 5 7' on the black board and asks his audience to continue the series. They continue it '9 11 13 15' only to be corrected; the sequence was in fact '1 3 5 7 1 3 5 7 9 11 13 15 9 11 13 15'. The audience is asked again to continue the series, only to be corrected once again with a continuation that can be made to fit a formulae, but which suggested itself to none of the audience. This process of suggested continuation and subsequent correction continues for some time. Winch argues that we would eventually refuse to allow the man to be following a *mathematical rule* at all. We might think him instead to be following the rule of always diverging from the opinions of his audience.

Winch thinks this 'suggests that one has to take account not only of the actions of the person whose behaviour is in question as a candidate for the category of rule-following, but also *the reactions of other people* to what he does.'[29] This of course recalls the earlier remark that following a rule cannot consist simply in going on the same way, because this takes for granted what is to count as 'the same'. This example seems to suggest a non-

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[28] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 29.

[29] Ibid., 30

circular solution to the philosophical puzzle of what a rule is, or what counts as 'the same'. The solution is that what counts as 'the same' is importantly connected with the shared responses of others; in this case the shared responses of the mathematical community sets the standard for what counts as following a rule of mathematics. Consider that insofar as we are allowing him to be going on 'the same way' at all, it is a sense of 'the same' that does not allow for a *mathematical mistake*. Put otherwise, if he were to make a mistake by suddenly agreeing with his audience, this would not be a mathematical mistake, and this inability to make a mathematical mistake explains why he is not to be taken as following a mathematical formula. As Winch puts it: 'The notion of following a rule is logically inseparable from the notion of *making a mistake*'.[30] Using our previous example of the schematic image of a cube, and the possibility of applying it to a cube or a triangular prism, what makes one application correct and the other incorrect is just that people tend to apply that image in one way, rather than another. And the reason one use suggests itself strongly to us is just that we have been trained to respond in one way, and other people all tend to respond in that same way. As Wittgenstein says: 'We have here a normal case, and abnormal cases'.[31] Thus, we should say that a formula or an image is something we use, and its having a use is grounded on shared ways of responding or reacting, where those shared ways of responding ground the notion of a mistake which is so essential to the notion of a rule.

To elucidate a little on what it is to understand a rule, I will return to, and expand on, my earlier arguments concerning the schematic picture of a cube and its possible applications. Let us consider the following: the schematic of a cube is not a mental image but rather forms some part of a larger blueprint being used on a building site. The various builders have been educated in the use of such blue prints in connection with certain building materials, and the manner in which they should be put together to form buildings. This training is more extensive than I could cover here, or am even capable of understanding. Now, the particular meaning of the schematic cube does not come from the image itself, but from the fact that the team of builders have been trained to respond to this image, in this context, in such and such ways. The cube-image does not contain rules for its own application, rather, the rules for application come from the shared ways of responding to the image that the builders have been trained into performing. As I suggested earlier, were it not possible to train people in such a way, or to have people develop tendencies to have

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[30] Ibid., 32

[31] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 48.

certain uses suggest themselves, that is to say, were it not possible to have shared ways of responding, it would be hard to make sense of the notion of 'a rule' nor in consequence 'meaning'. Rules come from what might be called 'normative practices',[32] they are housed in the shared ways of responding to various situations that we have been trained into doing. In this way, meanings 'just ain't in the head'[33], they are embedded in our social practices. Our understanding of the context within which we are given schematics, expected to understand pointing gestures, spoken to and so on, involves an understanding of the rules involved. But this understanding is not 'in the head', it is not a mental image nor is it something simply seen in an immediate way. Insofar as 'rules' are embedded in our normative social practices, our understanding those rules consists in our ability to respond appropriately according to our training, to use these things in the same sorts of ways that others do. Consider the original case of pointing to and naming 'Mt. Everest'. To understand the pointing gesture correctly is not to have a mental image before me which forces future applications, it is rather my responding appropriately in accordance with the normative practice that houses the gesture in the particular context that it is made.

V - Private definitions as private acts of identification

In exploring whether meaning can be something 'in the head' I have reached a clearer sense of what the normativity of concepts consists in, as well as our understanding of those concepts. Let us return now, to the private language hope of determining what a word is to mean by an act of inner ostensive definition, that is to say, by making the decision to use *this* word in *this* way on future occasions. What, given my arguments so far, is problematic with this? To return to the question with which I opened the last section, when we ask what my going on to use the word *correctly* or *in accordance with my decision* consists in, is there any answer left to us, or are such private acts of identification impossible?

In short, there is no sense to the notion of giving a private definition and then following that definition. Rhees discusses the possibility of private definition in terms of the paradigm case of seeing a red patch and saying to oneself something like: 'I know what this colour is; I know what *I mean* by "red" because I can see it before me'. This, of course, parallels the case of seeing Mt Everest and knowing what one means by this through mentally focusing on it in some way, and deciding how to use the name 'Mt. Everest' in the future. Rhees, drawing on the sorts of considerations I have so far offered, says the following:

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[32] I take my use of this term from the works of Julia Tanney.

[33] I take this phrase from Putnam, *The Meaning of 'Meaning'*

I suppose the point would be that I know this independently of having learned the (public) language. If I know what I mean, in this way - if I know what colour I am referring to - then apparently I have done something like giving myself a definition. But I must also have confused giving a definition and following a definition. It is this which allows me to evade the difficulty of what I am going to *call* "following the definition." Which is a real difficulty: what could it mean to say that I had followed the definition - "my" definition - incorrectly? But if that has no sense, then what on earth is the point of the definition? And what does the definition *establish*?[34]

What exactly does Rhees mean when he says that such a manoeuvre confuses giving a definition and following a definition? The answer lies in what Rhees calls 'making a difference', and I have called 'making a mistake'. As I argued previously, the notion of a rule is closely connected with the notion of making a mistake. For Rhees, the idea that what we say makes a difference concerns the fact that when we speak, the things we say play a role in social space, in our practical dealings with one another. Thus, Rhees writes: 'Our words refer to things by the way they enter in discourse; by their connexions with what people are saying and doing, for instance, and by the way they affect what is said and done. What we say makes a difference'.[35] Thus, if I request someone to pass me the red paint, and they pass me the green, I will correct them. If I fail to correct them and proceed to paint the room green, then the contractors I am working for will refuse - on good grounds - to pay me. If I want 34 apples, then it makes a difference whether I say '34 apples' or '6 carrots'. Saying the former will tend to get me - in the appropriate circumstances - what I want, saying the latter will not. Our shared ways of responding allow for language to take place, for words to effect regular and expected differences. If 'red', 'green', '34 apples' and '6 carrots' were not embedded in these shared ways of responding, if each individual responded to (one can't say 'used') these words as they pleased, then the notion of making a mistake or a meaningful difference would not have a place - it would all just be so much noise.

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[34] Rush Rhees, "Can there be a Private Language?" in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. George Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1968), 271. For more on private languages from the same volume see John W. Cook, "Wittgenstein on Privacy," in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. George Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1968). Alan Donagan, "Wittgenstein on Sensation," in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. George Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1968). Anthony Kenny, "Cartesian Privacy," in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. George Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1968). For an overview of Wittgenstein's earlier and later philosophy (which I would characterise as atomist and holistic respectively), as well as more on his private language arguments, see Anthony Kenny, *Wittgenstein* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1975).

[35] Rhees, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 267.

Now, if a private definition is to be remotely meaningful, then there has to be something called 'following the definition', and following the definition only makes sense if there is something to the idea of following it correctly or incorrectly, of it making a difference how I follow it. In the case of supposedly knowing what *I mean* by 'red' insofar as I have a certain experience of it, one is acting as if the giving of a definition was simultaneously the following of it, in such a way that the question of what counts as correct and incorrect uses simply gets ignored. As our previous discussion has shown, a mental act cannot determine rules for application. As such any supposed private definition I make can be applied in the future any way I wish, and this only make the notion of private definition senseless. As Rhees argues: "It seems that in a private language everything would have to be at once a statement and a definition. I suppose I may define a mark in any way I wish. And if every use of the mark is also a definition - if there is no way of discovering that I am wrong, in fact no sense in suggesting that I might be wrong - then it does not matter what mark I use or when I use it'.[36] Can someone privately identify, prior to any social participation or training, a red patch, or a mountain before them, as the things they are? No. The identity of such things is housed in shared normative practices, and our understanding them depends on our being trained into that activity, on our knowing how to perform as members of that social world.

The consequence of this is, as Ayer writes, 'that someone who tried to use language in this private way would not merely be unable to communicate his meaning to others, but would have no meaning to communicate even to himself'.[37] This is why we should view these arguments not just as arguments about the nature and possibility of language, (though they are that too) but about the possibility of purely private acts of identification. And since the rationalist variant of immediacy requires that we be able to identify objects of awareness prior to and independently of any socialised membership in a community of language users, this amounts to an ability to have a private language - something I have now shown to be impossible. Thus, Augustine's ability to simply *see* objects around him, or to understand pointing gestures appropriately and so on, depends on the existence of rules for what these things are, as well as an understanding of those rules. But rules have been shown to be socially constituted, and our understanding those rules has been shown to consist in a practical grasp of how to apply them across varying contexts, *not* in any simple

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[36] Ibid., 274

[37] A. J. Ayer, "Can there be a Private Language?" in *Wittgenstein: The Philosophical Investigations*, ed. George Pitcher (London: Macmillan, 1968), 255.

act of seeing, nor in any sort of intellectualist or theoretical grasp. Augustine's ability to identify objects of awareness is misconstrued if it is understood as pre-social. Descartes too, is mistaken if he thinks he can privately have a pre-social grasp of concepts, simply in virtue of being the kind of being he is (a rational being). It is a practical grasp, formed through training, of how to perform within a social space created and sustained by ongoing shared activity, which shapes our experience and enables us to be aware of things at all, i.e. to have direct knowledge of the world around us.[38] 'Red' is not an unmediated sensation, it is a concept, and concepts are embedded in social life, acquired through training. Whatever sense there is to pre-social sensation, it cannot, on its own, serve as a basis for knowledge, because knowledge is conceptualised experience. As Rhees puts it: 'No one can get the concept of colour just by looking at colours, or of red just by looking at red things. If I have the concept, I know how the word "red" is used. There must *be* a use, though; there must be what I have been calling common reactions.'[39] A nice complement to this is the thought he offers us later in the paper: "I cannot learn the colour unless I can see it; but I cannot learn it without language either. I know it because I know the language".[40] The latter quote in particular makes clear that the concept 'red' connects with pre-social sensation in *some* way. We might say that the pre-social sensation is part of what the concept 'red' is, but it is not the whole of it, indeed, it is nothing without the shared ways of responding, or 'common reactions'.[41]

VI - Ayer's misinterpretation

I would now like to consider a critical counterpoint to the position I have been developing by exploring Ayer's paper 'Can there be a private language?' In doing so I will both clear up some misunderstandings of my position, and clarify further the position itself. In this section I will focus on the manner in which Ayer misunderstands the private language

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[38] It might be thought that there is a prejudice in my view here against the ability of animals to be aware of things around them, since animals might be thought of as not participating in normative practices, and this in turn makes my position absurd. I shall deal with the issue later in the current chapter.

[39] Rhees, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 270.

[40] Ibid., 271

[41] This is a feature of Sellars account as I discussed it in chapter 3. The thought here was that one half of the mongrel idea of 'the given' involved the notion of a sensation which occurs to both animals and humans and is a necessary (though not necessarily sufficient) condition of our seeing; and to have a sensation in this way is to be minimally conscious. Sellars ultimately argues for an account of this notion, which he terms 'sense-contents', as theoretical posits put forward as part of an explanatory project for what is involved in our seeing and knowing. Importantly, this account does not involve putting them forward as epistemic entities forming the foundation of our knowledge, but nor does it completely deny them.

argument, and the subsequent criticism he builds on the basis of this misunderstanding. By correcting the misunderstanding I'll remove the force of the criticism. In the next section I will outline Ayer's counterexample of a Crusoe-like figure who we can quite readily imagine partaking in a private language.

How does Ayer misconstrue the Private Language argument? By turning it into an issue about the fallibility of memory, and the need for public checks to remedy this.[42] This misinterpretation then makes for an easier target, and an unwitting straw man fallacy. His misplaced reading of the private language argument is helped by his particular selection of quotations from Wittgenstein, along with some misplaced emphasis. For example, Ayer quotes Wittgenstein's imagined scenario of concentrating on a sensation, and writing the symbol 'E' in a diary as if one were recording the sensation. In this example the act of concentration is the sort of inner ostensive definition discussed above, and is intended to impress on oneself the connection between the sign and the sensation. In the quote Ayer uses, Wittgenstein says: 'But "I impress it on myself" can only mean: this process brings it about that I remember the connexion *right* in the future. But in the present case I have no criterion of correctness. One would like to say: whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that one can't talk about "right"'.[43] Out of all this, and the surrounding argument (not quoted), Ayer places almost exclusive emphasis on the issue of memory raised by the phrase 'remember it *right*'. He misses the fact that it is the word 'right' which gets emphasis here rather than 'remember', and that concerns over whether it even makes sense to talk of right or wrong follow, not discussions about the fallibility of memory. This then leads him to interpret the call for a 'criterion of correctness', as a call for independent - that is to say public - justifications or checks on our memory. Had he not misplaced the emphasis in this way, he might have seen that the concern over such criteria is really about what is required to ground notions of right or wrong.

Similarly, with other examples Ayer cites,[44] he emphasises the term 'justification', and interprets the demand for items of our language to be public (time tables, characteristic expressions of sensation, experimental results) as amounting to a claim that only these sorts of things can count as a justification or a check on our 'inner world', and so are able to safeguard us against fallible memory. However, the call for items of language to be public is

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[42] For another brief account of the 'memory interpretation', see Malcolm Budd, *Wittgenstein's Philosophy of Psychology*, ed. Ted Honderich (London: Routledge, 1989), 55.

[43] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 78.

[44] Ayer, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 254-255.

really the call for things that can enter into public discourse, for things that can be used appropriately or inappropriately, for things that can be subject to rules through communal use. Thus, an ostensive definition can be part of a normative practice, and so can be used to define things, or at least it can do on the presumption of a pre-existing practice of pointing at things for certain purposes. A so-called private ostensive definition cannot be part of a normative practice and so cannot properly speaking be a definition at all. Note that what distinguishes ostensive definition from private definition is not that the former can play the role of justification in a way that the latter cannot. The concern here is not with 'justification', but with what can enter the social space required for normativity, with what can be used within a shared social practice.[45]

Thus, as Ayer would understand the examples of 'red' and 'Mt. Everest' which I have been discussing, the problematic connection between giving myself a definition, and my going on to use the word *correctly* or *in accordance with my decision*, amounts to an issue of remembering the thing I defined as I originally recognised it. The process would involve something like the following: I recognise Mt. Everest, name it 'Mt. Everest', and must then remember it as such when I apply the term 'Mt. Everest' in the future. The only reason this connection is problematic, according to Ayer, is because our memory sometimes lets us down. We sometimes *seem* to remember when in fact we don't, and if our only check on memory was another memory, the problem simply repeats at a higher level. On Ayer's interpretation of the Private Language argument, this then means that we have to step outside our 'inner worlds' and seek some sort of publicly verifiable justification or check on the appropriate use of the signs of our language. Ayer puts it as follows: 'His claim to recognise the object, his belief that it really is the same, is not to be accepted unless it can be backed by further evidence. Apparently, too, this evidence must be public: it must, at least in theory, be accessible to everyone. Merely to check one private sensation by another would not be enough. For if one cannot be trusted to recognize one of them, neither can one be trusted to recognize the other.'[46]

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[45] Though it is too much of a side issue to cover in detail, Ayer's misunderstanding does indeed lead him to radically misunderstand the contrast between proper ostensive definition and inner ostensive definition. He supposes that the problem of meaning is equally applicable to both cases insofar as memory can be made an issue for both. However, while meaning is an issue for both ostensive definition and inner ostensive definition in the sense that meaning is not grounded in either of them, it is not an issue for ostensive definition in quite the same way. This is because it is very much possible for ostensive definition to enter into normative practices, but it is in principle impossible for so-called private definition to do so.

[46]Ibid., 256

Ayer swiftly builds on this misinterpretation to offer his arguments against it. If our ability to recognise private objects is in question, and requiring of independent justification, then the concern should strike us immediately, that any external check or justification has equally to be recognised by us. Thus, if I want to know whether I am identifying Mt. Everest correctly, it may seem to do no good asking someone else, because I then need to take it for granted that I hear my interlocutor appropriately, or that I trust their testimony and so on. Ayer puts it tellingly in the following way: 'Let the object to which I am attempting to refer be as public as you please, let the word which I use for this purpose belong to some common language, my assurance that I am using the word correctly, that I am using it to refer to the "right" object, must in the end rest on the testimony of my senses.'[47] Ayer doesn't accept these seemingly sceptical consequences of his misconstrued Private Language argument. Instead he views this as something of a *reductio*, and he argues that we must allow acts of recognition to count at some point as justifications or no test could ever be completed. Furthermore, he supposes that there is no reason to think acts of recognition in the case of public criteria are specially privileged in this respect over acts of private recognition. There are no grounds in the Private Language argument, according to Ayer, for enforcing this discrimination. If we accept acts of recognition, we can do so equally for both cases, for both rely on our senses.

If my arguments have been clear, the response should be clear. The issue is not one of memory or justification, but rather what concept-rules are and how we can be said to understand them, it is an issue of what grounds the normativity of our concepts. To even talk of remembering or failing to remember, there must be objects of awareness which we are capable of remembering and failing to remember. My arguments in this chapter have involved an attempt to show that the conditions of possibility for objects of awareness, and therefore *a fortiori*, memory of those objects, are the very thing at issue. As such, it is a plain misunderstanding to make memory such a core feature of the private language argument in the way that Ayer does. The crux of the private language argument cannot come down to memory because we are enquiring into the very conditions of their being objects we can remember or fail to remember. Rhees makes the same point when discussing the possibility of remembering or misremembering a private definition.

> This is not a question of whether I can trust my memory. It is a question of when it makes sense to speak of remembering; either of a good memory or a faulty one. If I

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[47] Ibid., 256

thought I could not trust my memory, then of course I might look for confirmation. But there cannot be any question of confirmation here, nor any question of doubting either. There is just no rule for what is the same and what is not the same; there is no distinction between correct and incorrect.[48]

If I want to know whether I have remembered Mt. Everest correctly, I may, of course, want to check some other source, perhaps a photo album or a tourist guide. However, for such an act of confirmation to take place, there must be something that *counts* as 'Mt. Everest', and this brings us back to the issue of what the concept 'Mt. Everest' consists in, and whether it can be privately identified.

So much for the misplaced emphasis on memory. Now what of Ayer's misunderstanding of what is meant by 'justification'? Insofar as Wittgenstein does use the word 'justification', it is only in a specific sense. Thus, when someone asks for a wall to be painted red, and I bring over the red paint and start applying it with my brush, there is a sense in which I am justified in doing this, but my being justified doesn't involve an appeal to some kind of prior justification. My doing what I do in this circumstance is justified because this is just what we all mean by the phrase 'paint that wall red', and we mean this in virtue of having those previously discussed shared responses. This sense of 'Justification' then, is perhaps better captured by the term 'ground' which I have been using. Why is 'justification' a bad term for this? Because this ground, understood as practical activity, can no more serve as a justification for what we think or know than a sensation can,[49] because our ways of behaving are not themselves epistemic, they are not beliefs. I do not justify my painting the wall red when my boss says 'paint that wall red' by appealing to the evidence of how I and others behave. Rather, because we behave in these ways, we know what we mean when we say things like 'paint that wall red'. Of course *sometimes* the context calls on us to reflect, i.e. form beliefs, on how ourselves and others act in order to justify what we are doing. The point, however, is that we cannot view the background as a whole operating as a justification in the sense of evidence appealed to. What grounds normativity is not a justification to be found in public space and appealed to by us in order to justify to ourselves or others what we are saying or doing. More than anything the very notion of a 'justification', much like 'memory', presupposes the very normative standards to be explained, and so cannot be appealed to as part of the explanation. If all of the uses I make

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[48] Rhees, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 273.

[49] I refer here, of course, to my previous arguments to the effect that non-epistemic facts about agents, such as sensations, cannot serve the role of justification for beliefs or things potentially believed.

of concepts had ultimately to be justified by an appeal to the behaviour of others, then this would presuppose an ability to grasp, i.e. bring under concepts, the behaviour of others, and we get caught in a regress.

We might put this otherwise by saying that my 'knowledge' of this ground is a practical know-how or, to use Heidegger's language, a circumspective awareness of the ready-to-hand environment,[50] rather than representational or theoretical knowledge.[51] I do not first formulate a theory, or an inductive generalisation, about how others act in these situations, and then use that as a justification to myself for how to proceed. I simply understand the practice in the sense that I can ably participate in it. Thus, when I argue for practice as a condition for the possibility of knowledge, I am not postulating one more step in a foundational regress, one more thing we must appeal to in order to justify our knowledge. I am offering up the basis upon which we are able to talk about justification, memory, recognition, identification and so on. Ayer's whole misguided characterisation is a result of trying to squeeze Wittgenstein's arguments into his own representational view of what knowledge must be, where knowledge has to terminate in some primitive act of recognition, or verifiable feature of experience.

One should reconsider the quote from Charles Taylor which I used in chapter 3 to describe my position: we cannot keep digging under our representations to get to some more basic, self-evident representation. When we keep digging, what we get to is human practice, and - to extend the metaphor - we must then 'turn our spade'. This particular phrase comes from Wittgenstein himself when he writes: "'How am I able to obey a rule?' - if this is not a question about causes, then it is about the justification for my following the rule in the way I do. If I have exhausted the justifications I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned. Then I am inclined to say 'This is simply what I do'".[52] Furthermore, this notion of turning one's spade is another way of phrasing my acceptance of presuppositions in chapter 4. I argued there that direct observational knowledge requiring awareness was a presupposition taken to anchor my transcendental regressions. Now that I have shown practice as the condition of possibility, as the articulation of that presupposition, I can say

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[50] As well as the sections 'Analysis of Environmentality' and 'Worldhood in General', see Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 98.

[51] Again, we might use Heidegger's language here and say that the practical ground of our conceptual awareness is not present-at-hand knowledge. See the section 'Being-in-the-world in general as the basic state of Dasein' and 'How the Worldly Character of the Environment Announces itself Within-the-world' inIbid.

[52] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 72.

that the presupposition is simply a feature of our shared epistemic practices. We all just do think of direct observational knowledge as requiring awareness, and as something we are able to achieve. To return to the issue of justification, this is best thought of as a poor and misleading choice of term for the normative activity which grounds our conceptual grasp of the world, and the related requirement that items of our language be capable of entering into that normative activity.

We might summarise Ayer's misinterpretation as the confusion of ground with justification, and of normative standards with memory. The result of these confusions, or misplaced emphases, is a radical misunderstanding of the full purport of the private language argument, and a subsequent straw man argument against it. These confusions seem to me, to be the result of Ayer's adherence to his own representational epistemic model - the very model I am arguing against.

VII - Ayer's Crusoe

My stance may seem a counterintuitive one to take for the simple possibility that we can describe (imagine) situations of lone language users quite easily, and therefore make perfect sense of their ability to identify and know objects in the world around them. On this view, we are quite capable of conceiving what, by my arguments, should not be possible,[53] and this shows the error in my position. This offers a powerful but ultimately misguided line of argument, and I will spend some time trying to defuse its allure. It is, in fact, particularly important that I defuse this line of argument due to the ultimate goal of this Thesis. The long term argument has been that we cannot make sense of ourselves as agents of knowledge and reason in isolation from the social practices we are participants in. This idea then forms the core of my argument that the properly human individual must be understood as socially constituted. It would, therefore, be a nuisance if my whole position were undermined by the imagined possibility of a lone language user.

Ayer introduces a Crusoe-like figure, whom I shall refer to as 'Ayer's Crusoe'. Unlike the better known Crusoe, Ayer's Crusoe did not grow up in civilized society only to become shipwrecked, but was left on an island from infancy.

> Imagine a Robinson Crusoe left alone on his island while still an infant, having not
> yet learned to speak. Let him, like Romulus and Remus, be nurtured by a wolf, or

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[53] This is how Winch characterises Peter Strawson's arguments in Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 33.

some other animal, until he can fend for himself; and so let him grow to manhood. He will certainly be able to recognize many things upon the island, in the sense that he adapts his behaviour to them. Is it inconceivable that he should also name them?... Surely it is not self-contradictory to suppose that someone, uninstructed in the use of any existing language, makes up a language for himself.[54]

As the description continues, Ayer mentions a few linguistic activities that his Crusoe might engage in, each of which requires him to be able to recognise things in the world around him, and to then apply signs to them. The first activity involves his Crusoe being able to identify the flora and fauna around him insofar as he adapts his behaviour to it in various ways. It seems hard to imagine, as Ayer sees it, why his Crusoe would not then be able to use signs for such flora and fauna. I imagine this might involve something like leaving one sort of mark on trees where good mushrooms grow, and another sort of mark on trees where bad mushrooms grow. No one would want to deny the adaption of animals behaviour to their environment, and leaving marks just seems like one more sophisticated but innocuous behavioural adaptation. The second activity involves naming a bird, and then proceeding to recognise that same bird in the future and to apply the name appropriately. One might imagine this to be an extension of the mushroom based activity, where he names the birds he enjoys eating. The third activity Ayer mentions is that of keeping a diary. This may seem more immediately contentious than the simpler behavioural adaptations just mentioned, but again, Ayer sees no reason why his Crusoe couldn't make marks on paper in a meaningful way. He concedes that there might be psychological grounds for doubting whether a lone individual could develop such sophisticated behaviour outside of any social training, but this is beside the point. It is at least conceivable in the broadest sense. We might imagine this diary behaviour starting out as an extension of the mushroom based activity, where he simply records what he has eaten by marking the appropriate sign in his diary, and the diary steadily grows in sophistication from there.

It is certainly hard to deny the plausibility of these descriptions. The simple fact that we can well imagine these behaviours taking place seems to show that we can recognise things in the environment around us and then come to apply signs to them, and we can do so in such a way that does not essentially presuppose any prior language formation, training, or most importantly, participation in shared social activity. These descriptions seem to speak very strongly to the idea that we have a pre-social conceptual awareness of our

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[54] Ayer, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 259.

environments. As Ayer says, Crusoe's 'justification for describing his environment in the way that he does will be that he perceives it to have just those features which his words are intended to describe. His knowing how to use those words will be a matter of his remembering what objects they are meant to stand for, and so of his being able to recognize these objects.'[55]

The supposed absurdity of my position can be further brought out in the following way. Imagine that Ayer's Crusoe has reached some level of sophistication in describing his environment. Man Friday comes to the island and observes the activities of Ayer's Crusoe. He pays attention in particular to the uses he makes of these signs and in this way learns Crusoe's language. It would seem fair to say that Man Friday *understands* what Crusoe *means* by this or that sign, and can then communicate with him. Because of this it would seem absurd to say that Crusoe could only *mean* anything by these signs upon the arrival of Man Friday.[56] It is rather because they meant something that Man Friday could understand them and use them to communicate with Crusoe. Thus, Ayer writes: 'It would be difficult to argue that the power of communication, the ability even to keep a private diary, could come to him only with the arrival of Man Friday.'[57] What I aim to do is to reassert my arguments against these descriptions while explaining away their *prima facie* plausibility.

Let us start with Ayer's example of his Crusoe naming a bird, since this makes particularly perspicuous the manner in which Ayer argues right past the full purport of the Private Language argument. Ayer brings in this example to discuss issues surrounding our tendency to misremember and so make mistakes, i.e. to expound his misinterpretation. Ayer writes: 'Undoubtedly, he may make mistakes. He may think that a bird which he sees flying past is a bird of the same type as one which he had previously named, when in fact it is of a different type, sufficiently different for him to have given it a different name if he had observed it more closely.'[58] Ayer's argument is that fallibility of memory in no way changes the status of the thing recognised. There is a bird of a certain type which Crusoe has at one point recognised and named, and his making occasional mistakes in the future does not make acts of recognition in any way impossible. It only gives us reason to find ways of checking or improving our memories. But of course, this begs the question. In the above

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[55] Ibid., 259

[56] A more detailed exposition of this line of argument can be found in Peter Strawson, "Critical Notice," *Mind* 63, no. 249 (1954): 84.

[57] Ayer, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 259.

[58] Ibid., 260

quote Ayer helps himself to the phrases 'the same type' and 'sufficiently different', not to mention 'naming', and so takes for granted the very things at issue. Winch argues that 'a "sufficient difference" is certainly not something that is given for one absolutely in the object one is observing; it gets its sense only from the particular rule one happens to be following.'[59] It should seem particularly clear that Ayer is implicitly relying on a notion of the conceptually given in order to philosophically ground this description. There just is something that counts as *that bird*, which we can unproblematically and pre-socially recognise. However, given that this is the philosophical position being argued against, it can't very well underpin the descriptions used to counter-attack. Insofar as his Crusoe adopts the behaviour of producing certain sounds in the company of certain birds, we cannot yet speak of him in the terms Ayer uses.

However, it might be thought that this just brings to a head the issue concerning my own arguments and the seemingly implausible consequences of them. The point of these descriptions is to show how my arguments lead to the absurd. I can't just reassert my arguments without explaining why these descriptions seem so plausible, and why they don't really cause any problems for my own stance. Consider the mushroom based activity I mentioned earlier. It could be said just as equally that to speak of Crusoe identifying good mushrooms and bad mushrooms, and then applying signs to each by inscribing them on trees, is to take for granted notions of identity and difference, or naming, just as the bird example does. And yet, this behaviour at least, is eminently plausible. As such, I need to offer an account of this kind of activity which is consistent with my own arguments and does not lead us into accepting the immediately given.

I will state at the outset what my response to this issue shall be. The reason these descriptions are so plausible to us in such a way that it is extremely difficult to think of Crusoe's behaviour without thinking of it as meaningful, is because we are outside observers who already speak a language. We tend to think of certain behaviours performed by our peers as meaningful in particular ways, and therefore describable as such. When we imagine Crusoe behaving in similar ways, we naturally apply the same sorts of descriptions. This explanation for why the description is so plausible to us also offers the resources for explaining why the description is in some sense illegitimate. To speak a language or to perform meaningful behaviour, to have a conceptual grasp or to follow a rule, these things are not simply an individual's behaving a certain way. There is a very natural tendency to

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[59] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 36.

think of speaking, meaning, naming and so on, as something we do, in a moment, i.e. as a particular performance or piece of behaviour. But each of these is more than mere behaviour, and it is that 'something more' which is lacking in the case of Ayer's Crusoe, and which ultimately makes the descriptions illegitimate.

I will use the case of Ayer's Crusoe writing a diary to explore this idea of the 'something more'. Suppose that Ayer's Crusoe could reach a point where he was displaying certain behaviours consonant with what we would call 'writing a diary' when describing our linguistic peers. My claim is that despite eliciting similar behaviour, he is not actually writing a diary; when he puts marks on the page much as you or I would, he does not mean anything by what he "writes". Why is he not actually writing a diary? Rhees argues: 'The point is that I speak a language that is spoken. What I say has significance in that language, not otherwise. Or in other words, if I *say* anything I must say it in some language.'[60] And this really follows from the arguments so far. If meaning is not something in the head, i.e. psychological, but is instead parasitic on shared ways of responding, then I can only speak and mean something by what I say, if there is a meaning out there to be spoken by me. In this way meaning takes on an independence from any individual, or any isolated pattern of behaviour. Thus, when discussing this 'something more' over and above mere behaviour, Rhees writes: 'If I say there is "more" than that - it is that I use the expressions in the meanings they have'.[61] My writing a diary means something because it connects with the shared ways of responding that I have been acculturated into. I write words in the meanings they have for you and I; they have meaning because of the ways you and others would respond. The trouble is that it becomes very easy, when fully embedded in such meaningful interactions, to abstract the particular behaviours from the conditions which give them meaning, and so to see them as meaningful in their isolation. We just *see* someone's behaviour *as* someone's writing a diary, and think of the behaviour alone as constituting the meaningful act.

It might be thought that this doesn't quite respond to the point. In the example I've offered we imagine Crusoe to behave just as you or I might, by putting the same symbols on the page as you or I perhaps would. If this is the case, doesn't Ayer's Crusoe 'speak a language that is spoken', seeing as it is spoken by us? Our linguistic community has set the normative standards, and he is following those rules as he writes. Consider how, if we found the diary

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[60] Rhees, *Can there be a Private Language?*, 278.

[61] Ibid., 278

of Ayer's Crusoe we could read it and understand what was written, which may be thought to show that it was written meaningfully. The answer here is to point out that the phrase 'We speak a language that is spoken' refers to a language that is spoken, *and* an individual who speaks it. When Ayer's Crusoe is seemingly writing his diary, he is (by unimaginable chance) producing shapes which correspond to symbols of a language that is spoken, but he himself is not speaking that language. We might phrase this by saying that Ayer's Crusoe acts in accordance with a rule (our rules), but he does not follow those rules. Rhees makes this point with the example of a tape recorder: 'If you say something to me I understand you. If a tape recorder plays back what you have said, I understand what I hear but I do not understand the tape recorder. Which is a grammatical statement: I do not fail to understand either.'[62] The difference between the person who spoke, and the tape recorder which plays him back, is that the former understands what he says and is making use of the words he speaks, whereas the tape recorder is doing none of these things. The tape recorder does not follow a rule because it does not grasp any rules, which is to say that it does not make use of the words within the shared practice. It does not *speak* the language.

We must be careful here not to make the mistake of resorting back to something 'psychological' in explaining the difference between the speaker and the tape recorder, or Ayer's Crusoe and ourselves. Following a rule rather than merely acting in accordance with a rule does not consists in some sort of 'inner state', or else we would be back with the arguments against immediacy. Rhees also discourages this misguided temptation: 'If I say that you have said something but the tape recorder has not, I am not saying that something has happened in your case which did not happen in the other. But I do have an entirely different attitude towards you and towards what I hear from you, and I behave towards you in a host of ways as I should never behave towards a machine'.[63]

Our different attitude towards the actual speaker and the tape recorder comes down to our expectations about how each will respond in a wider number of potential circumstances. One follows a rule when one knows how to use the word appropriately. But this means that one must be able to use it in a variety of situations, that one must be able to respond appropriately when others enquire about what has just been said, that one be able to correct oneself, and so on. Understanding a rule such that one can follow the rule, involves being trained into a rich pattern of shared activity, and how to participate therein.

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[62] Ibid., 280

[63] Ibid., 280

This is why a parrot does not show that it is able to understand me when it answers my question 'who's a pretty boy' with 'I'm a pretty boy'. Thus, whether or not someone follows a rule rather than acts in accordance with a rule depends on a wider pattern of activity and interactivity than any isolated performance can offer us. And our differing attitude towards the tape recorder and the person involves our expectation that the person will be able to engage in those other activities, that he will, for instance, be committed to further sorts of action on the basis of what he has said, whereas we do not hold the tape recorder accountable in the same way, nor do we expect it to engage in that more extensive pattern of activity. A parrot can say 'crackers', but the parrot does not understand the meaning of 'crackers', and this is connected with the fact that we do not expect the parrot to answer further questions about crackers that we might ask. The parrot is not really able to make use of the term 'crackers' in the uses that it has, it is not actively participating in the practice that gives 'crackers' its meaning. Rhees supposes that Ayer's Crusoe, in "writing" such a diary, is more akin to the tape recorder than an able speaker - he is merely parroting, rather than using the words he "writes".

Suppose, however, that Ayer's Crusoe did not exhibit behaviour merely similar to our own, but identical in all respects.[64] Imagine the truly fantastical possibility of a Crusoe-like figure who performs like us in *all* the ways we might expect ourselves to perform, were we stuck on an island as he is. It is not hard to imagine that we might, were we able to observe his actions, form an expectation that we should be able to communicate with him as we do with our peers. In short, despite the fantastical nature of the case, we should treat him not as we treat the tape recorder, but as we treat an able member of our own language community. We would not be able to treat him as merely acting in accordance with rules, we would rather treat him as someone who followed *our* rules. If this argument were to go through, it would still be the case that social practice is essential to the notion of a concept, it would only show that one need not be a participant in that practice to count as following those rules. However, I think one can respond even to this case. It is important to see that the description given of him above, that in acting exactly as we would he must be seen as following rules, is still illegitimate. He cannot be acting just as we do, and he cannot be following rules, because he cannot be using these signs and symbols in the uses that they have for us, because the uses they have for us involve an interaction with others, and

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[64] Julia Tanney, "On the Conceptual, Psychological, and Moral Status of Zombies, Swamp-Beings, and Other "Behaviourally Indistinguishable" Creatures," in *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

Ayer's Crusoe has *never interacted with others*. The simple fact that he has never been trained into our social practice, shows that it is absurd to think he can use those symbols in their meanings. For those meanings involve what *we* do with them, and how can Ayer's Crusoe understand that if he has never participated in our practice?

We can now summarise the apparent plausibility of the descriptions concerning Ayer's Crusoe by saying that we fail to appreciate the difference between acting in accordance with a rule and following a rule upon hearing how Crusoe behaves. We mistake his acting in accordance with our rules as his following those rules. As a result we end up projecting our own conceptualised understandings onto pre-social situations, and we accordingly misdescribe those situations. This distinction can also be used to free me from other, similar accusations of absurdity. It might be said against me, for instance, that animals are obviously aware of their environments, recognise various things as good or bad, have knowledge of where to get their food from and so on. Yet by my arguments this would seem to require that they be participants in complex social practices. In a way I wish to simply swallow this consequence. Animals respond to sensory stimuli in such a way that they can be thought of as acting in accordance with rules, with the consequence that we can and do derivatively describe them as 'knowing there is a dangerous predator in the trees above', or something of the like. Animals can sense they are in danger, they can sense that there is something blocking their path, they can sense the predatory tiger, and so on. However, what they cannot do, to return to the discussion with which I began this chapter, is see things *as* thus-and-so, as particular *sorts* of thing, for this requires a conceptual grasp of one's surroundings, and much has now been said about this. The animal can *sense* the predatory tiger, but it does not *know* that there is a tiger.

VIII - Conclusion

I started this chapter by explicating a conception of knowledge as involving direct awareness of conceptual contents, or conceptually mediated sensations. I suggested that this amounts to the ability to have a private language, and set about showing the impossibility of such a thing. I first of all showed that an awareness of concepts involved a grasp of correct and incorrect applications, and that rules for correctness could not be fixed by either an ostensive definition or a private mental act. In this way the demands of awareness were shown to take us outside our own private experiences; and so the conditions of possibility for being aware of anything at all cannot consist in mere mental acts. What can fix the normativity of concepts is social practice, and our understanding of

concepts consists in a practical grasp of how to be a participant in a language community. Knowledge, as necessarily involving an awareness of its object, and thus a grasp of the concepts required for selectivity, shows itself in this way to depend on a practical grasp of those social practices within which we have been acculturated. We might put this by saying that while awareness of an object has a phenomenology, awareness cannot be reduced to or explained by that phenomenology. Knowledge is an irreducibly social phenomenon.

I then cleared up two misunderstandings which underpinned one of Ayer's criticisms. The first misunderstanding was to see the problematic underlying the argument against private languages as involving an appeal to the fallibility of memory, rather than to the issue of normativity. The second misunderstanding was to see the appeal to social practice as a demand for public objects which could serve as a justification or check on that fallacious memory, rather than as a necessary ground or basis for making normativity possible. I then argued against Ayer's appeal to a Crusoe-like figure: a supposed example of someone who could quite conceivably engage in a private language. I argued that his descriptions of such a character gain plausibility because we mistakenly interpret his acting according to rules that we understand, as his following the rules just as we follow them. Thus, while such descriptions are tempting, they are in fact misplaced.

I consider this to be the end of my transcendental regressions. I have shown the conditions of possibility for having awareness of anything, and therefore direct observational knowledge, to necessarily involve our being participating members of a shared normative practice. I first of all showed that there could be no unmediated awareness of bare sensory particulars; that such awareness required a conceptual grasp of things as thus-and-so. I then showed that a conceptual grasp of things as thus-and-so could not be understood as something immediately given to us, as some kind of psychological phenomena 'in the head', but rather requires a practical grasp of how to perform within a social space, or shared normative practice. Knowledge does not bottom out in some indubitably given piece of representational knowledge, it bottoms out in practical activity.

I have therefore settled the issues that were put forward in chapter 3. I have shown that the picture of knowledge underpinning the objectivist stance cannot be carried through. Furthermore, in showing the objectivist epistemology to succumb to contradiction according to its own terms, we have been led to a positive result, and that positive result is the very position which the objectivist stance opposes. Knowledge is a social phenomenon, and so can only ever be relative. Human beings cannot be understood as rational to the

extent that they have disengaged from the social world, because they depend on that social world for their reason. As such they cannot take an entirely instrumental stance to that world, organising it according to prior, supposedly objective (in the sense of universal) principles. At its limits rational progress must involve something like the picture I outlined in chapter 2. We are now much closer to an account of the human individual which is consonant with the picture I developed in chapter 1. While I argued there that we find our 'function', our properly human ends, within a social whole, I am now at a point where I can argue that the very notion of what is rational or irrational, depends equally on our participation within a social practice.

Chapter 6 - The Ground of Reason and Knowledge

I - Introduction

I want to draw on the conclusions of the last chapter to say a little more about the nature of reason and knowledge. In many ways this is simply an elaboration of the basic conclusion which I came to there, but it is important to offer this extended discussion to avoid my conclusions seeming hasty. There are two key arguments I want to put forward here. First of all, given my previous focus on arguing against immediately given perceptual contents, I want to now offer arguments against the related notion that principles of reason can in any way be immediately given. Second of all, I want to offer a more direct response to the sort of scepticism found in Descartes as I discussed him in chapter 3, and at the same time to respond to the anti-relativist. I have devoted a section to each argument.

II - The ground of reason[1]

I have so far argued that direct observational knowledge, as a paradigm case of the given and a contender for how to justify an absolute conception of 'The Truth', is false theory. However, it might be thought that there are other contenders for what can count as 'given', or for what can count as our immediate contact with 'The True'. My own developing view has been that all conceptions we form of ourselves and the world are and must be mediated through shared social activity, and if there is anything that might count as an 'Archimedean point' upon which to assess those conceptions, then my own view is at risk. The alternative contender for such an Archimedean point I am talking about is reason itself. It is possible for someone to accept that there is no perceptually given content while arguing that certain principles of reason *are* indubitably given. In arguing against this possibility, I will be drawing on resources I have developed in the previous chapter and will also be offering similar forms of argument. Despite these similarities, it is nevertheless important to show how the considerations discussed above can be redirected against principles of reason to fully appreciate the force of my claim that we are socially constituted. Furthermore, the discussion will get us closer to fully justifying the account of

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[1] For an illuminating discussion of the notion of a 'ground', and how such a thing can be found in Wittgenstein and Heidegger, see Lee Braver, *Groundless Grounds* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 2012).

rational development I offered in Chapter 2 while furthering our understanding of what is involved in that account.[2]

The erroneous view of reason I have in mind is explained nicely by Winch: "According to this misconception the rationality of human behaviour comes to it from without: from intellectual functions which operate according to laws of their own and are, in principle, quite independent of the particular form of activity to which they may nevertheless be applied."[3] We see obvious contenders for this role in Descartes' *Meditations*, when he starts introducing principles of reason on the basis of their being perceived clearly and distinctly in the same manner as the cogito,[4] with an example being that every effect must have a cause with at least as much reality as its effect.[5] It is notable that Descartes relies on such rational principles to start rebuilding his system of beliefs and ultimately to vindicate his senses as a reliable source of knowledge concerning the external world; that is to say, he relies on these principles to form an absolute conception of 'The True'. Less contentious examples might be the law of identity or the principle of non-contradiction found in formal logic. These are not generally thought of as rules of thumb or as features internal to specific human practices, like the rules of chess or the highway code. They are rather thought to have an inexorability to them which sets universal limits to what can and cannot be rationally thought about the world. One might also consider the exposition of scientific progress which I elaborated and opposed in chapter 2, where science was understood to be a single unified methodology, common to all scientific eras and paradigms, which enabled us to debunk myth and affirm scientific truth. This scientific methodology was the rational standard deployed independently of practice so as to determine correct practice.

As Winch points out, a classic and enormously influential example of this conception of reason can be found in Hume.[6] For Hume, knowledge is either the product of experience or the result of deductive reasoning. Deductive reason is seen to be a feature of internally

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[2] Chapter 2 involved articulating an account of reason that could do away with any supposed standards of reason or methodological principles brought to bear on our practices from outside, independently of those practices. I argued that we did not need such 'external' principles to regulate our theories and practices. The focus was on arguing against any idea of 'scientific methodology' as such, and to instead see scientific development as something which occurred according to the inner structure of particular historical paradigms, or the principles internal to particular historical practices.

[3] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 54.

[4] I discussed this more fully in chapter 3.

[5] Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy*, 28.

[6] It is, in fact, tempting to think of my thesis as in large part a response to Hume and the history of analytic philosophy that has been directly or indirectly influenced by him.

related ideas,[7] it is that which cannot be denied without contradiction, and it is something that can be understood *a priori*. Consider how deductive reasoning is thought, on the model of mathematics, to be necessarily true in the sense of being true on any planet, at any time, for all creatures and so on. Furthermore, these forms of reason stand independently of the passions which direct us towards particular ends. In this way, reason is inert except for the introduction of our own desires, upon which it can then inform us of the best way to consummate those desires.[8] As Winch argues: "The characteristic activities carried on in human societies spring then, presumably, from this interplay of reason and passion."[9] Here then, the principles of reason exist prior to and independently of our practices, and play some role in our forming the social practices that we do. By contrast, I hold that we can only form principles of reason in virtue of being participating members of a social practice. I will use Gilbert Ryle's terminology, and call adherents of the adversary view 'intellectualists'.[10]

I will focus my criticism on the hard case of deductive inference, though I take my arguments to be universally applicable to any principle of reason. In his paper 'What the Tortoise said to Achilles',[11] Lewis Carroll makes wonderfully perspicuous the apparent paradox of supposing that a rule of inference can exist independently of practice while being able to nevertheless guide that practice. In this paper Achilles and the Tortoise are discussing deductive inference. The Tortoise puts forward three propositions, the third proposition an apparently valid inference from the first two. The propositions are as follows:

> (A) Things that are equal to the same are equal to each other.
>
> (B) The two sides of this triangle are things that are equal to the same.
>
> (Z) The two sides of this triangle are equal to each other.[12]

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[7] His own phrase is 'relations of ideas', which he contrasts with 'matters of fact'.

[8] An enormous amount of Hume's writing aims to support the picture I outline here, but a short and simple statement of his conception of reason can be found in Sections II, III and IV of David Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding*, ed. Peter Millican (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

[9] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 54.

[10] For Ryle's deployment of this term in relation to 'Ryle's regress' which I will be discussing here, see: Gilbert Ryle, *The Concept of Mind* (London: Penguin Books, 2000), 28-32.

[11] Lewis Carroll, "What the Tortoise Said to Achilles," *Mind* 4, no. 14 (1895): 278.

[12] Ibid.

However, the Tortoise supposes that he accepts (A) and (B) while denying (Z), and asks Achilles to demonstrate to him why he should accept (Z). Achilles naturally enough replies that if (A) and (B) are true then (Z) must follow. This becomes the introduction of a new rule (C), or principle of reason, to show that the Tortoise must accept (Z). Yet the Tortoise persists, and supposes that he accepts (A), (B) and (C), yet he does not accept (Z). In response Achilles attempts to introduce a further rule (D), another hypothetical claiming that if (A), (B) and (C) are true, then (Z) must follow. It should be clear that by this point Achilles has conceded too much to the Tortoise, and a regress is inevitable. No matter how many rules (principles, formulas, propositions) get introduced, the Tortoise refuses to be guided by those rules in action, he refuses to make the inference. We cannot indefinitely produce rules in an attempt to have reason guide us, and so clearly the regress needs halting somehow. My claim is that we cannot do this without making practice[13] the basis of reason. However, an easy response might occur to the reader: why can't the intellectualist halt it by claiming that the Tortoise simply hasn't grasped the rule properly in thought? Of course sometimes people can have reason pointed out to them and yet fail to respond, and this is because they have not properly grasped what is being pointed out to them. I will need to spend some time building up to an answer for this.

I will, however, begin by offering a condensed statement of the argument. I will distinguish two senses of 'following a rule': the first is that of consulting a rule as it might be written down or spoken, the second is that of performing appropriately or inappropriately in some particular activity, though no consultation of a rule is involved.[14] The former notion of 'following a rule', in the sense of consulting a rule, takes a developed form in the idea that we can have cognitive contact with a rule, and in this sense consult a rule, though no explicit formulation or rule-representation is involved. If properly grasping a rule in thought is understood to be the consultation of a rule, then this will either involve having a rule-representation before one's mind, or it will involve some sort of cognitive contact with the

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[13] My hope is that when I use the term 'practice' my reader understands the full import of that term on the basis of the preceding discussions. Out of context the term 'practice' might be a misleading characterisation of what I mean. It might be taken, for instance, as simply indicating the need for an individual to act, and in being so taken it would miss out the whole discussion on 'grounding', 'understanding' and 'following a rule' which I aim to evoke with the term 'practice'. In short, by 'practice' I mean a shares social activity, or as Wittgenstein calls it, a shared form of life.

[14] The same distinction was made in chapter 2 when discussing Kuhn and Taylor. Kuhn allows that paradigms are at least partly made up of explicit formulations of rules, but they must also consist in an implicit grasp of how to operate within a given paradigm. This implicit grasp is a grasp of how to perform appropriately, which means that there is normativity and so in some sense rules. But these are not explicitly formulated rules or sets of rules, they are socially grounded standards.

'rule itself' though it be never explicitly formulated. However, my argument will show that any attempt to understand rule-following as founded on that form of activity which involves the consultation of a rule, is open to infinite regress. This applies whether the consultation is of a rule written down in the world somewhere, whether it is represented to oneself in thought, or whether it is a cognitive grasp of an unformulated rule. The reason the regress always gets a grip on this account is because following a rule, in the sense of consulting a rule, is a practice, it is something we do, and for this reason it is something that only makes sense against a background of intelligent performance. We have to have an implicit grasp of the situation or a practical understanding of the context within which the rule plays its role in order for us to apply the rule appropriately when it is consulted. Thus, it is the second sense of 'following a rule', that which involves simply acting appropriately or inappropriately, which should be seen as basic to rule-following, and one can never explain this sense of rule-following in terms of consulting rules for fear of opening the regress again. This is why the intellectualist cannot halt Carroll's regress through the notion of 'grasping the rule in thought', so long as this is thought to involve some sort of consultation of a rule. As soon as one consults a rule, the issue unavoidably arises of what it means to follow the rule correctly in the current context.

Let us start simply by delineating the two different senses in which one might be 'following a rule'.[15] The first sense, as I described above, is the sense in which one is consulting a rule. This might be done in various ways. It might be that someone is consulting rules when learning how to perform a certain activity or settling some dispute about how to perform that activity, such as how to play a board game correctly. It might be that rules are used when teaching somebody how to perform an activity; the rules of grammar often play such a role when being taught a second language. It might even be that consulting rules forms part of a particular activity rather than being a mere preliminary to that activity; one can imagine a sort of table that is consulted in order to determine the outcome of a move in a board game. In all these cases one consults an explicit formulation or a rule-representation. The second sense, however, involves no consultation of rules. Wittgenstein gives us the example of someone learning how to play chess by simply observing others until he can ably partake in the activity himself. Wittgenstein writes: "One learns the game by watching how others play. But we say that it is played according to such-and-such rules because an observer can read these rules off from the practice of the game - like a natural law

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[15] I do not claim to be offering an exhaustive account here of the ways we can understand 'following a rule'.

governing the play.'[16] Tanney, commenting on this section of the investigations says that 'the participants who have mastered the game may know its rules other than by having learned or formulated them: borrowing an expression from Ryle, we can say, in such a case, that they know the rules "by wont."'[17] We can therefore follow a rule by consulting, say, a rule-formulation, or we can follow rules by wont insofar as we simply act correctly or incorrectly in particular circumstances.

The above distinction needs to be augmented with a further detail. In considering how to respond to the Lewis Carroll paradox of deduction, I supposed that my opponent might try to say the Tortoise has simply failed to *grasp* the rule of inference he sees written down before him, and that this really shows the problem to be a failure of the Tortoise rather than of the inexorability of deductive inference. Tanney captures the essence of this sort of response when she writes:

> What is used in the teaching of games, consulted in the course of the game, or read off by an observer, are mere expressions of rules: the real rules are something at which these expressions only gesture. Once grasped, apprehended, or intuited by a participant of the practice there is no rational option but to do as the rule requires: apprehension of the rule is sufficient to determine and thus to explain how the one who grasps it acts as it mandates.[18]

Thus, we might think of the Tortoise as like a child who has not yet learnt maths, and who quite understandably cannot see why one should write the squiggle '4' after the squiggle '2 + 2 ='. We might then think of the various symbols of maths and logical inference, the rules of chess, our behaving according to the rules of football and so on, as mere expressions of the actual rules themselves. On this sort of view, the child's grasping the rules of arithmetic, or the Tortoise's grasping the rules of inference, is construed as something like the mental consultation of the 'rules themselves', and it is this that allows them to understand the various rule-expressions. An account such as this, where rule-following is understood as the mental consultation or grasping of rules, tries even to explain knowledge by wont through a reduction to rule-consultation. The agent who learns how to play chess by observing others has '(somehow) come into cognitive contact with the rules,

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[16] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 23.

[17] Julia Tanney, "Real Rules," in *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 89.

[18] Ibid., 90

unexpressed or unrepresented though they may be, which (somehow) guide them and thus (somehow) explain their ability to act as they mandate.'[19] It is clear here that 'following a rule' in the sense of consulting a rule has been given pride of place in explaining what rule-following consists in: it must consist in grasping the rule through some sort of mental consultation of the rule, even if the rule be unexpressed or unrepresented. This obviously bears more than a mere resemblance to the picture of reason I attributed to Hume, and as I've suggested above, this approach is backwards. It puts the rules prior to practice as something which must be consulted, rather than practice as something prior to rules and essential to making sense of our ability to consult rules.

I will show the problems of putting things this way round by following Tanney's own culinary example of following a recipe for brownies. I will thus start with the simpler case of consulting rules written down rather than the idea that we must mentally consult rules. However, I think that the issues highlighted with this example remain with any form of rule-consultation. Taking a written down recipe for brownies as our consultation-rule for how the practice of baking brownies proceeds, can we in any way make sense of these rules as determining for us what counts as correct or incorrect in this practice? The first point to be made, taking the instruction 'add 3 eggs' as an example, is that there are a variety of ways one might apply this rule correctly. As Tanney notes, we could shake the eggs in or stir the eggs in, when stirring we could do so clockwise or counter-clockwise, we could use all sorts of kinds of bowl and utensil and so on *indefinitely*. It should be clear that the rule-representation itself in no way mandates the particular way we should follow it here. The second point to be made is that what counts as correct or incorrect in this practice is far wider than what the recipe itself encapsulates; 'the rules considered here- recipes - are merely expedients to help replicate the dish'.[20] This point is made clear by the simple fact that people often follow recipes while failing to produce a product that tastes good or is suitable for eating; one has to have broader culinary skills as well. A third point can be made by the introduction of novel circumstances to a given case of baking brownies. Thus 'The recipe-instruction "add 3 eggs"... does not tell us what to do if all the eggs have double-yolks or if only ostrich eggs are available."[21] That is not to say that the notions of correctness and incorrectness break down in these circumstances. Rather, there is (normally) a correct way to proceed in such novel circumstances and anyone with some

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[19] Ibid., 90

[20] Ibid., 93

[21] Ibid., 94

culinary skill will be able to adapt to these contingencies. But it is no rule-representation in the recipe that enables us to do so, it is our wider grasp of the context 'baking brownies', our practical nous, our knowledge of what is important in the rule 'add 3 eggs'. We might, for example, when confronted with double yolks, sift those extra yolks out. But the most forceful realisation is that such practical nous is required even in non-novel situations. When one hears the instruction 'add 3 eggs', one must appreciate that it means crack the eggs open first. One must also appreciate that this means add the contents of the eggs and not the egg shells. If one were in a market the shopping list rule 'add 3 eggs' would need to be applied very differently.[22]

 All of the above can be summarised by saying that when one consults a rule, one must also know how to apply the rule, or we might similarly say that a rule does not contain the principle of its own application. Yet one may disagree here and think this conclusion too hasty. One may argue that the example is well chosen to make my point, yet all that is really needed is for the rules to be more finely grained, more specific, less ambiguous and so on. While a recipe for baking brownies takes it for granted that the cook will interpret the rules appropriately, this does not show that there is not a way of specifying the rules which avoids the need for such interpretation. But this misses the full force of the argument. As Taylor says 'The number of potential misunderstandings is endless... There are an indefinite number of points at which, for a given explanation of a rule and a given run of cases, someone could nevertheless misunderstand.'[23] Thus, any attempt to make clear how one should follow a given rule-representation is itself open to misinterpretation.[24] Tanney argues that 'the concept of following a rule is itself a polymorphous concept in its own right',[25] and though we may construct higher order rules telling us what counts, in particular cases, as 'following the rule', these higher-order rules just offer more rule-representations which are open to misinterpretation. The problem here is one form of Ryle's regress, brilliantly put by Ryle himself in the following way:

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[22] The ideas here come from Tanney's article Real Rules, but have also been widely discussed in her classes run at Kent University.

[23] Charles Taylor, "To Follow a Rule," in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 166.

[24] 'This was our paradox: no course of action could be determined by a rule, because any course of action can be made out to accord with the rule ... What this shews is that there is a way of grasping a rule which is *not* an *interpretation,* but which is exhibited in what we call "obeying the rule" and "going against it" in actual cases... we ought to restrict the term "interpretation" to the substitution of one expression of the rule for another.' See Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 69.

[25] Tanney, *Real Rules*, 96.

The crucial objection to the intellectualist legend is this. The consideration of propositions is itself an operation the execution of which can be more or less intelligent, less or more stupid. But if, for any operation to be intelligently executed, a prior theoretical operation had first to be performed and performed intelligently, it would be a logical impossibility for anyone ever to break into the circle.[26]

Thus, the problem is that any rule which is to be consulted, needs to be consulted intelligently rather than unintelligently, appropriately rather than inappropriately. We must also be careful not to think that the problem here is a simple repetition of the one discussed above, where the Tortoise is thought, like the child, to simply fail to grasp the 'rule itself' or the 'real rule'. The problem here is that no rule which we might consult can ever tell us how to follow it. Thus, if the act of grasping a rule is thought to be something like a mental consultation, or a cognitive grasp of the unexpressed, unformulated 'rule itself', then there is still a gap between the rule and our application of it.[27]

[A rule] doesn't apply itself; it has to be applied, which may involve difficult and finely tuned judgements. This was the point made by Aristotle, as basic to his understanding of the virtue of phronesis. Human situations arise in infinite varieties. Determining what a norm amounts to in any given situation can take a high degree of insightful understanding. Just being able to formulate rules will not be enough. The person of real practical wisdom is less marked by the ability to formulate rules than by knowing how to act in each particular situation. There is a crucial 'phronetic gap' between the formula and its enactment, and this too is neglected by explanations that give precedence to the rule-as-representation.[28]

So long as we think of rule-following as necessarily involving something like an act of consulting a rule, whether that is a rule-representation, or a cognitive grasp of the unformulated, unexpressed 'rule itself', we set up what Taylor has called a phronetic gap between the rule and our application of it. The need to consult instantly raises the issue of whether or not one is consulting correctly or incorrectly. Any attempt to plug this gap with richer and more detailed higher-order consultation-rules simply introduces more and more phronetic gaps.

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[26] Ryle, *The Concept of Mind*, 31.

[27] Ryle applies his regress argument to this sort of case in section III of Gilbert Ryle, "Why are the Calculuses of Logic and Arithmetic Applicable to Reality?" in *Collected Essays 1929-1968*, Second ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2009).

[28] Taylor, *To Follow a Rule*, 177.

This can be used against cases of inference as well. Inference rules or rules of rationality more broadly, are formulated on the basis of good and bad practices, correct and incorrect ways of doing things. However, philosophers then reify those inference rules and think of them as written into the fabric of the world in some way, as having force independently of human activity, in such a way as to determine how that activity must proceed in order to count as rational. Again, this is backwards. By putting it this way around we create a gap between the inference-rule and the application that cannot be bridged via the introduction of more, higher-order inference rules, for every rule introduced requires once again that we explain how that rule is applied in practice. What we get is an infinite regress.

The way to avoid this regress is to turn this erroneous picture back round to its rightful orientation and see rule-following as the practical grasp of a practical activity, or a pre-theoretical understanding. Once we accept that 'obeying a rule' is a practice then we don't need to worry about bridging the gap between inference-rules and the ways we apply them. Furthermore, once we see rules in this way, as embedded in shared practical activity, then rationality cannot be seen as something given to agents, or something an agent can achieve in isolation from a community of people. To be rational is to be socially acculturated. Winch connects these issue back to Carroll's paradox:

> The moral of this, if I may be boring enough to point it, is that the actual process of drawing an inference, which is after all at the heart of logic, is something which cannot be represented as a logical formula; that, moreover, a sufficient justification for inferring a conclusion from a set of premises is to see that the conclusion does in fact follow.[29]

Thus the process of making an inference is something we do, it is a practical grasp, a knowledge by wont, of how to infer correctly and incorrectly, how to reason well or badly. In short, it is the second sense of 'following a rule' which is basic to rule-following. It is knowledge by wont rather than knowledge by rule consultation which underlies the activity of rule-following and *a fortiori* the activity of inference or rationality more broadly. In what way can this second sense of 'following a rule' be explained? As my previous arguments have shown, simple behaviour can never count as following a rule. The only way that a practical grasp can count as the intelligent following of a rule is if we are able performers in social space. This completes the argument and shows that principles of reason must always bottom out in shared ways of doing things. The rule-formulations which we consult are

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[29] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 57.

normally explicit articulations, or crystallisations of a practice which has already set what counts as correct or incorrect.

III - The ground of knowledge

The line of argument pursued over the last 4 chapters has been an attempt to undermine what I, following Rorty, characterised as the objectivist stance, a stance which aims to transcend possibly illusory communal standards and get in touch with 'The True'. This is a task such advocates hope to achieve by forming an absolute conception of the absolute truth, by landing on a special type of knowledge which can count as an Archimedean point, or an indubitable truth, upon which they can build their knowledge claims; in short, it seeks the immediately given. This stance is anti-relativist through and through; there is only one truth of the matter. Scepticism, or at least methodological scepticism, has often been a tool for trying to elaborate and argue for such a view. The attempt is made to throw doubt on the entirety of our received beliefs, or at least on the lack of any real justificatory basis for these beliefs, and to in this way impress on us both the need for some kind of foundational contact with the absolute truth, and to justify our search for this foundation. We saw how this sort of scepticism reared its head in an anti-relativist manner when discussing Kuhn in chapter 2. Lacking any external, foundationally justified standard with which to arbitrate views, scepticism was seen to be the only remaining option. In this section I want to build on the resources I have now developed to show why such projects of methodological scepticism are misconceived, and why the attempt to do away with all relative frameworks so as to reach more certain knowledge is a fundamentally incoherent project.

In offering an answer to philosophical scepticism and sceptical regresses, which undogmatically shows our relative epistemic frameworks to be justified without having to have a justification,[30] and in showing that attempts to do away with such frameworks are fundamentally incoherent, I will in effect be showing our entitlement to socially constituted, relative epistemic practices.

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[30] Note that adherents of the objectivist stance also aim to offer an account where at least some class of beliefs can count as being justified without having to be justified. This is just the role that was meant to be filled by the immediately given. In this way, I accept the need to halt justificatory regresses - which I discussed in Chapter 3 - only I differ on what this response amounts to. I don't seek any sort of basic and indubitable mental state which can give us contact with absolute truths, rather, as shall become clear, I think that practice can ground relative conceptions in a way that halts any justificatory regresses.

In Marie McGinn's *Sense and Certainty,*[31] a text which informs much of the argument I am about to elaborate, she lays out the general progression of thought which leads ultimately to scepticism. Laying out this general form proves useful in making perspicuous the moment at which sceptical arguments get their hold. Importantly, McGinn thinks that the initial movements of thought that eventually and ineluctably lead us to scepticism are perfectly ordinary, and in this lies much of the persuasiveness of scepticism. The sceptic begins by taking up a reflective stance[32] towards his beliefs and notices how often he has been deceived or mistaken. He then proceeds to look for those beliefs which he can be sure of, and in doing so he notices the sort of justifications he tends to rely on for these beliefs. He 'observes that these justifications are actually constructed within a framework of judgements that he accepts without doubt, but which can in principle be questioned.'[33] These implicit judgements involve 'either immediately observed facts, or the fact of something's being (having been) observed, or very familiar general beliefs about the world.'[34] Once the process of reflection has highlighted these framework judgements, it seems unavoidable that we ask whether these in turn are really justified. The sceptic takes a representative example of these framework judgements, such as 'I know I have a hand', and asks what sort of considerations could count as a justification for this claim, or claims of its sort. The problem is that it is hard to imagine anything more certain than a claim such as 'I have a hand'. The attempt to find some sort of evidence more basic than this involves avoiding any of the most basic sorts of claims we would normally make about the objective world. This leads to an interesting and historically disastrous result:

> It is at this point, therefore, that the idea of evidence that is epistemologically prior to any judgements about the external world emerges. Thus, the sceptic is led to construct a conception of the evidence for all his knowledge claims that is, in a crucial sense, purely subjective, that is, its description is allowed to incorporate no assumption that this evidence is revelatory of an objective, independent world.[35]

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[31] Marie McGinn, *Sense and Certainty* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

[32] This notion of a 'reflective stance' is very similar to Williams own characterisation of Descartes' 'project of pure enquiry'. Williams considers Descartes' general project to be justified insofar as he has set aside practical or utilitarian considerations and has become interested in truth as such. With truth as such being the goal, Descartes is fully justified in raising his epistemic standards as high as possible and seeking absolute foundations. Something like this procedure can be seen in McGinn's own general characterisation of the sceptical procedure.

[33] Ibid., 3

[34] Ibid., 3

[35] Ibid., 4

It is this stage which generally involves the introduction of sceptical hypotheses. Our framework judgements rest on the assumption that our subjective experience is in some way a reliable indicator for what is going on in the objective world, but sceptical hypotheses are used to show that subjective experience is no such guarantee because we can, with imagination, conceive of the world being a variety of different ways while our subjective experience remains the same. In this way, perfectly ordinary epistemic considerations seem to have led the sceptic into withholding assent from all knowledge claims. We can see here the beginning of epistemology as a process of studying our ideas in abstraction from the world, of the radical subject/object split, and of the investigation of knowledge understood as a tool or medium separate from the world.

Before pointing out the step in this process at which the sceptical arguments get a grip, I would first like to refer back to the discussion of Descartes which I offered in Chapter 3, seeing as we are finally at a stage to deal with the issues raised there. I distinguished between the form of doubt offered by sceptical hypotheses and those offered by our more ordinary practices of doubting, and noted the unorthodox nature of the former. Ordinary forms of doubt rely on specific contexts of doubt which offer 'objects of comparison', particular concrete reasons to doubt and methods of resolving that doubt. I used the example of a stick that appears bent in water to make the point: we doubt that it is bent because of our wider understanding of the nature of sticks, standard conditions for observation and so on. By contrast, Descartes' unorthodox usage aims to undermine even the reliability of these 'objects of comparison' with a wholesale or universal doubt. In the search for absolute truth, Descartes could rely on no partial or relative standards of assessment, and so deployed a form of doubt which very closely tied it with the notion of contingency. So long as we could imagine things being otherwise, those things were doubtful. Thus, the step away from ordinary notions of doubt and the introduction of sceptical hypotheses are one and the same in trying to avoid partial or relative standards of justification. It is an attempt to step beyond our everyday epistemic framework in order to apply the highest epistemic standards. All of this is done in the name of finding an absolute conception of truth. Beyond merely noting this strange use of the concept of 'doubt' as I did in Chapter 3, I now want to substantiate it as a radically misguided and incoherent use of the concept, and with it the notion of self-reflexive certainty and the viability of a disengaged agent as discussed in chapter 3, are also shown to be incoherent.

We can connect the shift from an ordinary to an unorthodox use of the concept of 'doubt' with a particular step in the sceptical process McGinn outlines. The stage in this process which McGinn thinks is key in terms of the sceptical arguments getting a grip, and therefore the step which needs to be somehow cut off, is where the sceptic reflectively considers the 'framework judgements' and asks if they themselves can be justified. This is the point at which we retreat away from our ordinary, everyday patterns of justification and seek subjective grounds. This is the point at which sceptical hypotheses can get a grip by ignoring all the ordinary limits placed on what can and cannot count as a doubt. In short, this is where we move away from an ordinary to an unorthodox form of doubt; it is when we stop relying on the framework judgements and question the whole framework.

Now, one form of response to the sceptic involves recognising this as the key step, and then in some form or another,[36] simply asserting those framework judgements against the sceptic. This form of response tends to recognise, quite rightly, that taking that step with the sceptic of holding framework judgements before oneself in such a way as to raise the issue of their justification, will always leave one ineluctably caught in the sceptical quagmire. To take that step is to slide into scepticism and never escape. Their response, however, is to refuse to take that step by dogmatically asserting the framework judgements over and against the sceptic. This is most forcefully seen in Moore's paper 'Proof of an External World', where he supposes that the only sort of evidence one needs for an external world is, for example, to raise both one's hands before one's eyes.[37] As McGinn says, 'one begins to feel that either Moore must have misunderstood the sceptic, or we must be misunderstanding Moore.'[38] In fact, McGinn argues, Moore has understood the sceptic well enough, but simply considers question begging the only available response. She quotes Moore on this point: 'Any valid argument which can be brought against

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[36] McGinn covers responses offered by B. Stroud, G.E. Moore, J.L. Austin and S. Cavell which all involve simply asserting common sense knowledge, or the validity of those framework judgements, over and against the sceptics demand for justification. As the responses get subtler moving from Stroud to Cavell, the dogmatic assertion of the validity of those framework judgements gets more and more covert, and McGinn puts a lot of work into drawing out this dogmatism in each successive case. See B. Stroud, *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984).; G. E. Moore, "Proof of an External World," in *Philosophical Papers* (Oxford: Routledge, 2013).; J. L. Austin, *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).; J. L. Austin, "Other Minds," in *Philosophical Papers*, First ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press.; J. L. Austin, "A Plea for Excuses," in *Philosophical Papers*, First ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1961).; S. Cavell, *The Claim of Reason* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979).

[37] Moore, *Proof of an External World*

[38] McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 42.

[scepticism] must be of the nature of a *petitio principii*: it must beg the question at issue.'[39] Now, if I am to show that our relative epistemic frameworks can legitimately - are, in fact, the only legitimate - form of knowledge, then I cannot rely on such dogmatic responses to sceptical worries. I need to give an account of our framework judgements which insulates them from the sceptical manoeuvre of treating them as requiring justification.

Before moving on, it is worth stressing the sheer diversity of things which count as framework judgements across diverse and varying contexts. Thus, the "class of [framework judgements] might be thought of as the mass of both spoken and unspoken judgements which form, in the context, the completely unquestioned background against which all enquiry, description of the world, confirmation and disconfirmation of belief, etc., goes on..."[40] These framework judgements form a larger group than, for instance, simply observational claims. Other claims which might count in appropriate circumstances as framework judgements include 'the most familiar facts of science and common sense as well as propositions describing the speaker's own particular history and immediate surroundings."[41] Thus, 'I was born on Earth', '2 + 2 = 4', 'The sun will rise tomorrow' are all suitable contenders. We should see Kuhn's paradigms as involving at their limits framework judgements which scientists unquestioningly adopt. Nor, it is worth noting, are all observational claims eligible for the status of 'framework judgement'. Though observational claims do, in most ordinary circumstances count as framework judgements, there are counter-examples. Cases where they do not count as such might include instances of self-imposed hallucination, for instance. It is clear then, that framework judgements are often sensitive to context.

In trying to offer an account of these framework judgements that avoids the sceptical demand for justification, we can turn to my arguments above concerning the practical grounding of concepts. I argued there that mastery of concepts did not involve any sort of justificatory appeal to the activities of other people, rather, it is because we shared in a common practical activity, which each of us has mastery in, that I can mean something by what I say and you can understand me. Our shared patterns of response constitute the condition of, or the ground of, correct and incorrect ways of saying things. Now, take the framework judgement 'I have a hand'. By what rights can I use this phrase and mean

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[39] Ibid., 46, quoting G. E. Moore, "Hume's Philosophy," in *Philosophical Studies* (Oxford: Routledge, 2014), 160.

[40] McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 103.

[41] Ibid., 103

something by what I say? I might use it to teach somebody what a hand was; if someone was carrying too many things and asked for help I might declare 'I have a hand'; if someone offered to help me with some trivial task I might declare with prideful irritation that 'I have a hand', or something of the like. In what situations would this phrase be senseless? If someone asked me to give them directions and I declared 'I have a hand'; if every time I saw a tree I said 'I have a hand' and so on. Thus, there are specific practical contexts which allow for what counts as correct and incorrect usages of the phrase 'I have a hand'. If someone holds up their hands for all to see and declares that they don't have any hands, we will not be inclined to think they have failed to find satisfactory justification for thinking they have hands, or that they have made a mistake of inference somewhere in trying to validate the claim that they have hands, rather, we shall think that they do not understand what they are saying or have perhaps gone mad. McGinn quotes two passages from Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* on just this point: 'The *truth* of my statements is the test of my *understanding* of those statements... That is to say: if I make certain false statements, it becomes uncertain whether I understand them.'[42]

The complete argument for this account of what grounds the notions of correct and incorrect in our deployment of concepts has already been laid out above. Being clear about this feature of concept use offers us the key to characterising framework judgements so as to immunise them from sceptical threat. As McGinn puts it, our framework judgements are not epistemic claims at all, they are not claims to know in any appropriate sense. For as soon as one claims to know, the grammar of the concept 'know' invites questions such as 'how do you know?', and this simply doesn't apply to framework judgements. The reason questions like 'How do you know?' do not apply to framework judgements is because they achieve their legitimacy, their status of being justified, not from any sort of prior epistemic justification or evidential warrant, but from their being used correctly, from their being understood.

> The crucial difference between the two cases arises out of a difference between
> criteria for knowledge and criteria for mastery of a practical skill... The original
> sceptical problem turns on the fact that the concept of knowledge incorporates, as a
> condition of being fulfilled, an objective condition: the world must be as one affirms

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[42] See sections 80 and 81 of Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, eds. G. E. M. Anscombe and G. H. Wright (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972).

it to be.... however, when it comes to the criteria for mastery of a practice, the crucial distinction between appearance and reality cannot be made.[43]

The example drawn from Charles Taylor which I introduced in Chapter 3 to set the direction of my argument once again proves useful. If we are concerned with whether or not our picture of a ball matches how the ball really is, then this makes perfect sense. If, however, we want to know whether my playing football corresponds with the ball, this is obviously incoherent. When it comes to the issue of practical success, the distinction between appearance and reality makes no sense, only whether or not one is performing appropriately, and for this reason we cannot treat judgements of the frame epistemically. The key step in which the sceptic asks whether framework judgements can be justified involves trying to illegitimately force non-epistemic claims into an epistemic context.

But this might be thought hasty. Why is the attempt to treat, in epistemic terms, what is ordinarily a judgement assessable under criteria of practical mastery, illegitimate? After all, I have already conceded that a change in context can make what is, on many occasions a framework judgement, suddenly open for epistemic consideration. Why shouldn't we shift all such claims into an epistemic context? This is, of course, exactly what the sceptic tries to do. In focusing on particular judgements of the frame they are concerned only with a representative example. The call for justifications in the particular case is really a call for us to justify the framework as such. Recall how Descartes refuses to rely on anything like ordinary standards of doubt and justification. He is not relying on some aspect of the framework, within a certain context, to criticise another aspect of the framework, he has raised standards of doubt in such a way that the framework as a whole is requiring of justification. Here my argument comes to a head: the reason why we cannot seek to justify the entire framework, the reason why Descartes cannot deploy his unorthodox form of doubt, the reason why we cannot take sceptical hypotheses seriously, and the reason why we are entitled to our given epistemic frameworks, all comes to the same. To doubt the framework as a whole, is to step outside the conditions of possibility for epistemic activity as such and to fall into incoherence, it is to no longer be engaging in the activity of knowing. Consider this quote from Stephen Mulhall, when considering a similar line of thought to be found in Heidegger.

> Knowledge, doubt and faith are relations in which Dasein might stand towards
> specific phenomena in the world, but the world is not a possible object of knowledge

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[43] McGinn, *Sense and Certainty*, 134.

because it is not an object at all, not an entity or set of entities. It is that within which entities appear, a field or horizon ontologically grounded in a totality of assignment-relations; it is the condition for any intra-worldly relation, and so is not analysable in terms of any such relation. What grounds the Cartesian conception of subject and world, and thereby opens the door to scepticism, is an interpretation of the world as a great big object or collection of objects, a totality of possible objects of knowledge, rather than that wherein all possible objects of knowledge are encountered.[44]

Attempts to question the framework judgements as a whole are just one more attempt to do without the requisite implicit background discussed in the previous section. It was argued there that any attempt to understand rational principles in fully explicit terms necessarily undermined the implicit practical background required to make sense of rule-following. The same misguided pattern of argument is occurring here. The framework judgements, insofar as their legitimate deployment depends on that implicit practical background, form the necessary basis for our engaging in any sort of epistemic practice. The attempt to hold all our beliefs before us, including the framework judgements, and to ask for some further justification, is to detach those framework judgements from the implicit background which gives them their sense, and which enables to engage in any kind of epistemic activity. It is to detach ourselves as thinking, rationalising, knowing agents, from the social background which makes all of these things possible.

Let me give an example to help make this point. As I have said before, ordinary contexts of doubt require 'objects of comparison', not just to determine when something is doubtful, but also to help clear up doubts and mistaken beliefs. To judge of something requires standards of judgement. But to doubt everything leaves no standards left with which to judge. This is a senseless form of doubt; a refusal to play the 'knowledge game'. If I want to know how many apples are in a basket, then I have to be able to make a judgement about apples and about number, I have to grasp the concepts of each before I can make this discovery. Any claim to know relies on some standards or criteria in this sense. Consider the following objection to Descartes, made against his claim to have proven the existence of his own thought:

> From the fact that we are thinking it does not seem to be entirely certain that we exist. For in order to be certain that you are thinking you must know what thought or thinking is, and what your existence is; but since you do not yet know what these

[44] Stephen Mulhall, *Heidegger and being and Time* (London: Routledge, 1996), 96.

things are, how can you know that you are thinking or that you exist? Thus neither

when you say 'I am thinking' nor when you add 'therefore, I exist' do you really

know what you are saying.[45]

The point here is that If Descartes has really doubted everything, then by what rights can he deploy the concepts of 'thought' and 'existence' in making judgements about what is the case? The same problem exists for sense-date theorists: one cannot judge of something that it is red without first grasping the concept 'red'. Similarly, to doubt something is to make a judgement, and so will always presuppose some standard. Every judgement involves presuppositions in this way. Every knowledge claim relies on taking something for granted, and what we take for granted at the very limits of enquiry, i.e. the framework, is justified on the basis of mastering a practice and knowing how to participate therein. To attempt to do away with any such presupposition is step outside of the activity of knowledge, it is to undercut the conditions of possibility for our knowing anything at all.

This brings us back to the 'epistemological dilemma' as I outlined it in chapter 3. In trying to bring the entire framework before himself as an object of possible knowledge requiring proper justification, Descartes has lost any basis with which to make the sought after judgements to start asserting certain knowledge. He has too radically split ourselves as knowing agents from the world as object of knowledge. We can now see how it is not simply that the attempt to conceive of knowledge as a tool or medium distinct from the world leads to scepticism, it is rather that the attempt to conceive of knowledge apart from the world, specifically practical engagement within concrete social practices, is to render the notion of 'knowledge' incoherent. By attempting to carry out the objectivist project, to formulate an absolute conception by stepping outside our relative frameworks, we do not find a higher standard, we instead find ourselves left without any standards, and both knowledge and doubt become senseless.

IV - Conclusion

This section has drawn on the notion of an implicit practical background, or ground, in order show that both knowledge and rationality cannot be made sense of without this ground being in place. Attempts to do away with this ground, or to render the implicit background fully explicit as an object of theoretical investigation, is to render each of these

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[45] René Descartes, "Objections and Replies," in *Meditations on First Philosophy*, ed. John Cottingham, Second ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 96.

things incoherent. Social practice is essential to each of these things, and they cannot be understood in abstraction from it. Similarly, to understand the agent as distinct from the social practices that make him a subject of reason and knowledge, is to form an incoherent notion of such an agent. The disengaged agent is a myth of abstraction.

Chapter 7: Identity and Self-Determination

I - Introduction

I want to open this chapter with a somewhat lengthy introduction, and this for two reasons. First of all, it has been several chapters since I have dealt directly with the issue of the human individual and it is important to connect the threads of argument I have just finished developing with the initial concerns over the nature of the individual that gave rise to them. I want the reader to be clear on the relevance of my recent arguments to the issues that I began with in chapters 1 and 2. Second of all, this chapter aims to be something of a "pay off" insofar as it brings together some of the key issues and ideas developed across the whole Thesis to start saying something substantial about the human individual and self-determination in relation to social practices. I want, therefore, to at least highlight these issues and key ideas before going on.

In chapter 1 I set up the distinction between an atomistic conception of the individual and a holistic conception of the individual, where the former understood the individual to be in some sense self-sufficient and prior to social relations, and the latter conceived the individual to be constitutively dependent on social relations, so that outside of those relations there could be no (at least properly human) individuality. The holistic account holds that all of our properly human ends are really social ends, and exist only in social worlds. I then moved on to directly argue against one of the objections to the holistic view. This objection took the form of a *reductio*, and supposed that if my whole self, including my mastery of concepts, the forms of thought and belief I may have, my principles of reason, my values and so on, are all constituted by the social practices within which I am a participant, then what resources do I have to stand apart from those social practices and adopt a critical stance? I called this the issue of 'critical distance'. This problem involves two related criticisms. The first problem is concerned with issues of critical stagnation and dogmatism: It might be thought that to properly criticise a social practice one would have to find an independent standard with which to judge it, and there seemed to be no room for such a standard on my account. The second problem is concerned with personal freedom. So long as one thinks of freedom as requiring that the individual draw all of their resources for thinking, reasoning, evaluating and so on, 'from within', without reliance on social norms or practices, then once again it might be thought that there is little room for freedom of the individual on my account. The charge would be that a holistic account of the individual involves our thinking, feeling and judging as the community thinks, feels and

judges, in such a way that we cannot freely define ourselves apart from that community, nor criticise that community according to an independent standard.

My initial response to the issue of 'critical distance' was offered in chapter 2, where I argued for an account of both theoretical and practical reasoning that was, broadly speaking, dialectical. I argued that there was room for a notion of critical development which did not depend on finding a standard external to or independent of the object of criticism. We could find tensions, conflicts or anomalies within our theoretical or practical stances such that any new account which helped resolve those conflicts might be seen as a gain in understanding. I followed Charles Taylor's terminology in calling this form of argument a transitional argument, since the emphasis is on an asymmetrical gain in understanding when moving from one stance to another, rather than an appeal to a firm or indubitable external standard.

However, I didn't take the elaboration of this position to be a full refutation of my potential critic. The advocate of an 'external standard' might still hold on to the hope of an Archimedean point of assessment, and see this as an ideal of rationality. Furthermore, in chapter 3 I highlighted some important connections between advocates of an 'external standard' and atomistic conceptions of the self. Advocates of the immediately given as the sought after 'external standard' tend to run together the ideals of disengaged reason and personal freedom. I am my own person insofar as I can understand myself, think, reason and evaluate apart from the chains of social convention. In this way, issues of epistemology and the individual ran together, and I embarked on an extended refutation of the ideal of disengaged reason, or the possibility of the immediately given. In the course of showing the very notion of 'immediacy' to be recoverable only as 'mediated immediacy' - a form of immediacy that is really dependent on social practices - I have come to show that our entire conceptual grasp is grounded on social practice. There is no way to understand ourselves or the world apart from the normative grounding offered us by social practice. The possibility of a theory of oxygen, or of considering ourselves to be honourable, depends on particular shared patterns of interaction. These epistemological issues have given the account of transitional arguments offered in chapter 2 a firmer basis: lacking any truly external standard, radical criticism must at its limits involve dialectical development. Already this is to say a lot against atomist conceptions of identity, and in favour of holistic conceptions.

In this chapter I want to bring those arguments concerning the possibility of conceptual mastery to bear more directly on what is involved in a holistic account of identity, and I want to try and say something more about the two issues of critical distance, pertaining to the freedom of the individual, and his ability to critically engage with himself and his socio-ethical world.

In terms of bringing the notions of conceptual mastery to directly bear on issues concerning the human individual, I want to start talking about facets of the individual that are uniquely human, or which we tend to think of as central to our own conception of what it is to be a human person, and to then show how these facets only make sense when understood socially. I want to show that these facets of the human individual depend on our having a conceptual grasp, and given that our having a conceptual grasp depends on our being participants in a social practice, I will have then demonstrated that the most essential features of the human individual depend on social practice. In this way my epistemological concerns will have fully come together with my general account of the individual.

In terms of resolving the issues of 'critical distance', I will be offering an account of what it looks like to take ownership of ourselves and to develop ourselves within the conceptual resources offered us by our social practices. I want to do justice to the sense that we can explore and develop ourselves in a way that is both bounded by social practice, but also leaves room for a creative or inventive element. I will also briefly discuss the importance of changing social structures for the purpose of making available new possibilities of self-exploration. In this way social criticism often becomes an important precursor to personal development. Individuals can only critically develop themselves within the scope offered by social structures, but fortunately those social structures themselves are also open to critical development. The idea of a transitional argument obviously plays a key role in both these interconnected issues of critical distance.

In section II I shall introduce the ineliminable facet of human identity which I take to be entirely dependent on human practice - what Taylor calls 'strong evaluation' - though I shall not yet argue for this dependence. In section III I explore the notion that human action is meaningful action insofar as the subjects of action are able to grasp the concepts involved in what they are doing. This idea forms the basis of the rest of my arguments in this chapter. In sections IV and V I build on the notion of meaningful action in order to explore what is involved in the process of self-discovery and self-creation, with an important role being given to the activity of bringing our own actions under various descriptions. In section

VI I return to the issue of strong evaluation and argue that it cannot be made sense of outside of our being subjects who live in a world of meaningful activity, who can understand themselves and the world through concepts. Finally, in section VII I want to offer some suggestive comments concerning the way in which we might critically develop our practical or theoretical frameworks in such a way as to open up new possibilities for our own identities. I also want in this section to bring the conclusions of this chapter to bear on some of the arguments made back in chapter 1, concerning the nature of self-realisation.

II - Strong evaluations: identity and moral maps

I shall start by discussing a feature of our personal identities as human beings which we should think of as ineliminable. Charles Taylor calls the feature I wish to discuss 'strong evaluation', and I shall be following his arguments in showing how strong evaluations are tied to what he calls 'subject-referring feelings', or feelings which cannot be explicated or understood outside of the meanings things have for us *qua* human agents. I wish then to emphasise that the notion of 'meanings' which things may have for us, depends on our having mastery of certain concepts, which in turn, as I have argued, depends on our being participants in a normative practice. The purpose here is to show how this ineliminable feature of human individuals depends on, and can only be made sense of, on the grounds of our being acculturated members of a social community. In this section, I am focussing only on an explication of strong evaluation. In section VI I will deal more directly with their dependence on subject-referring feelings and social practice.

In order to be clear, while I argue that all strong evaluations depend on subject-referring feelings, I do not argue that all subject-referring feelings are strong evaluations. Similarly, while I argue that subject-referring feelings require conceptual mastery, I do not think they are the only feature of our ourselves which requires conceptual mastery or social practice. For instance, I take myself to have already shown that our identity *qua* knowing agents depends on social practice, that we can have no conception of ourselves or the world around us, nor even the capacity to reason consciously, without the conceptual mastery afforded us by being members of a normative practice. I also think that insofar as being, say, a Lawyer is a part of my identity, this cannot be so without social practice, though there is no recourse to subject-referring feelings here.[1] I only wish to focus on strong

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[1] However, I think that our attitudes towards what may seem like less essential parts of our identity such as the jobs we hold, the hobbies we are involved with, the genres of music we like and so on, are

evaluation because it is a particularly essential and distinctive aspect of the human self, and I want to trace a line from this feature to my account of social or normative practices, to show that the socially grounded descriptions we offer of ourselves are internally related to those evaluations. In tracing this line, however, it will become apparent that the descriptions we offer of ourselves are also constitutive of features of our identity other than our tendency to strongly evaluate.

Taylor elaborates his notion of strong evaluation on the basis of Frankfurt's[2] distinction between first- and second-order desires. When we think about desires, we tend first of all to think of our desiring some object or other: food, entertainment, a particular career and so on. What we have in mind here is a first-order desire. It doesn't take much reflection to notice that we often have desires who's object is our having certain sorts of first-order desire, that is to say we evaluate our very desires and claim some to be better than others. One may think of their desire to sleep in tomorrow as a bad one because it will hamper the day's productivity. One may hope to form ambitious desires because it will help them to be more secure in later life. In cases such as these we are having a second-order desire towards our first-order desires. While both Taylor and Frankfurt think of this ability to self-evaluate as distinctive of human beings, Taylor thinks that more can be said to capture what this ability to self-evaluate consists in. As such, he offers a new distinction within the category of second-order desires, between weak and strong evaluation.

For an example of weak evaluation, consider my previous example concerning the desire to both sleep in and the desire to be productive the following day. I may value the second desire more strongly even though the former desire is at present prepotent. The reason I value the desire to be productive more than the other one is because I am aware that my week will go badly for me if I do not reach a certain level of productivity. However, in this example the desires I am evaluating might both be thought of as *prima facie* goods simply because they *are* things I desire. In an ideal world I would consummate both of these desires and feel better for it. It's just that in this instance I cannot satisfy both and so need to decide which I value more. While such examples are perfectly plausible, they miss a further feature which is regularly involved in cases of self-evaluation.

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unavoidably coloured by the strong evaluations we make and the forms of life we place higher than others. The reason someone can feel like they have lost part of their identity when they have lost their job is because that job played some role in helping them be the sort of person they wanted to be, in helping them fill out the pattern of life which meets their positive strong evaluations.

[2] H. Frankfurt, "Freedom of the Will and the Concept of a Person," *Journal of Philosophy* 67, no. 1 (1971): 5-20.

> What is missing... is a qualitative evaluation of my desires; the kind of thing we
> have, for instance, when I refrain from acting on a given motive - say, spite, or envy
> - because I consider it base or unworthy. In this kind of case our desires are
> classified in such categories as higher and lower, virtuous and vicious, more and less
> fulfilling, more and less refined, profound and superficial, noble and base. They are
> judged as belonging to qualitatively different modes of life: fragmented or
> integrated, alienated or free, saintly, or merely human, courageous or pusillanimous
> and so on.[3]

Unlike the previous case of weak evaluation, where we are weighing up two desires which in themselves constitute goods, Taylor is now putting emphasis on the fact that we do very often evaluate our desires according to their intrinsic qualitative worth. We say that a certain desire is spiteful and for *that reason* it is in itself bad. In cases such as this we are dealing with strong evaluation rather than weak evaluation. The reader should note that we are here once again roughly in the territory of Mill's higher and lower pleasures, though I aim to avoid his incoherent formulation.

Let us get clearer on the difference by looking at one circumstance under each type of evaluation. Consider the case of someone under immense pressure to cheat in an exam. If they fail the exam they will be removed from college, face the disappointment of their overbearing family, and risk being excluded from the career path they have always hoped to embark on. In such cases one might see the desire to cheat as offering this person a *prima facie* good. He has desires not to cheat, of course, but only because he is aware of the disciplinary consequences he might face. Seeing the situation in this way is to engage only in weak evaluation. Looked at in this light it is very much like the case of my having desires to both sleep in tomorrow and be productive. Just as I would ideally satisfy both the desire to sleep in and the desire to be productive if possible, so too would the student cheat if he could be sure he would get away with it, because the *prima facie* good offered to him in cheating would lack any evaluative obstacle. Just because he has the desire to cheat and because there is no longer any other desire conflicting with it, cheating would count for this agent as a good. If the story involves the cheater only weakly evaluating this situation, then we probably can't help but see him as lacking an important moral compass, and this is because we *do* strongly evaluate situations such as this. What is obviously missing in this story is any sense that cheating is formed of desires which are in themselves

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[3] Charles Taylor, "What is Human Agency?" in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers Vol.1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 16.

dishonest, base, selfish and so on. If our cheating student had these strong evaluations concerning his desire to cheat, it would no longer count as a *prima facie* good for him, and the fact that he could get away with cheating would make no difference to his critical evaluation.

Taylor accounts for the difference between weak and strong evaluation by noting two criteria. The first I have already touched on: in weak evaluation a desire counts as a *prima facie* good, 'whereas in strong evaluation there is also a use of "good" or some other evaluative term for which being desired is not sufficient',[4] as when the student's desire to cheat does not render cheating a good, because cheating is dishonest, base, selfish and so on. The second criteria follows on from the first, and notes that in weak evaluation desires are only set aside on the basis of a contingent incompatibility with some other desire, whereas in strong evaluation 'some desired consummation may be eschewed not because it is incompatible with another, or if because of incompatibility this will not be contingent.'[5] Again, this can be seen in the example above: though the contingent incompatibility of disciplinary measures had been ruled out, the desire to cheat remained non-contingently dishonest, base, selfish and so on. There is no situation where this particular desire to cheat could be seen otherwise by such a strong evaluator, but the desire to sleep in is only contingently undesirable.

It might be that specific circumstances are required for an act to fall under a particular strongly evaluated characterisation. For example, running away is only cowardly if the situation calls for you to stand your ground bravely, if for example your reputation is at stake, or you are to stand up for your younger sibling. But given our sense of what is cowardly, running away in these sorts of circumstances can only ever count as such. Moreover, there is room to understand strong evaluation as involving incompatibility, but only if we think of those desires which we negatively evaluate as conflicting with the sort of person I want to be or the pattern of life I want to live. Taylor argues that such incompatibility is not, however, contingent in the manner of weakly evaluated desires: 'It is not just a matter of circumstances which makes it impossible to give in to the impulse to flee and still cleave to a courageous, upright mode of life. Such a mode of life *consists* among other things in withstanding such craven impulses.'[6] Thus, given the sort of person I

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[4] Ibid., 18

[5] Ibid., 18

[6] Ibid., 19

want to be or the pattern of life I want to fit into, certain desires or motivations are non-contingently evaluated as higher or lower.

Another way to appreciate the non-contingent evaluations as to intrinsic qualitative worth that we find in strong evaluations, is to note the contrastive language that such evaluations necessarily involve. When we consider my weakly evaluating between the desire to sleep in and the desire to be productive, each of these things and the value afforded them can be understood independently of the other. I can appreciate the value of resting, and the value of getting certain things done without reference to the other. It is for this reason that the two desires can only contingently clash. With strong evaluation, however, things are different. To understand the act of cheating as dishonest, base, selfish and so on, I have to have some sense of what these things contrast with, I have to appreciate what it means to be honest, noble, selfless and other things beside. An act's being dishonest is essentially related to the notion of honesty. The sense in which cheating is incompatible with being an honest person, with my living up to the mode of life that I value and aspire to, is absolute rather than contingent.

We should note the introduction here of the idea of a mode or pattern of life that we are trying, or perhaps failing to live up to. One cannot strongly evaluate desires without relating them to the actions or motivations which characterise them and vice versa. For a desire to count as cowardly, it has to be aimed at a certain motivation or embodied in a particular kind of action. Consider how the same desire to run away may on one occasion count as cowardly and on another occasion count as wise. What differentiates the desire is the character it takes on in virtue of the particular circumstances in which it is felt or consummated. When we evaluate our desires we are therefore also evaluating certain patterns of action or motivations, as higher or lower; we are giving expression to the modes or patterns of life that we value more and less highly, we are making claims about who we as persons aspire to be.

It is important to stress the connection between the contrastive nature of our strong evaluations and those patterns or modes of life which we are endorsing, because this gives us our first step towards seeing why strong evaluation is so central to the human identity. Consider first the case of simple desiring, which does not involve this close connection to an endorsement of certain patterns or modes of life. Let's take an animal's desire as an example. According to my previous arguments, it is not obvious that an animal can be *aware* of its desire for rest *qua* desire for rest, because it lacks the requisite conceptual

grasp. However, this is not to deny that the animal has desires, and those desires are clearly independent of its involvement in or endorsement of a pattern of life as higher over against lower modes of life. But can such an animal feel shame? Or if it can feel shame, can it do so in the same way that we can? This is not so clear. I can only evaluate a desire, motivation or action as shameful by contrasting it with notions of, say, dignity. My wanting to live a dignified life rather than a shameful life involves some sense of a mode or pattern of life that I want to live up to or which imposes obligations on me. There has to be something that contrastively counts as the dignified life over against the shameful life. Animals, however, do not participate in the complex forms of life that could ground such concepts as shame and dignity, and so it is hard to imagine how an animal could distinguish differing complex patterns of life as higher or lower, dignified or shameful. This is one of the claims I want to work out more thoroughly as the argument proceeds. For now, this should serve as an embryonic statement as to why strong evaluations are distinctive of the human identity: to strongly evaluate is to endorse a particular form of life which one identifies with and aspires to live in accordance to.

Strong evaluations require our identification with particular patterns of life. But must human identity involve strong evaluation? Taylor argues that strong evaluations constitute an 'inescapable framework'[7] or horizon for our having human identities;[8] to have an identity is to have a particular orientation towards the good.

> The claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood... To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand. My identity is defined by the commitments and identifications which provide the frame or horizon within which I can try to determine from case to case what is good, or valuable, or what ought to be done, or what

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[7] See Chapter 1.1, 'Inescapable Frameworks', in Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[8] I think that a line can be drawn between Taylor's frameworks, Kuhn's paradigms, Heidegger's notion of a 'world', and my own elaborations on the idea of a normative practice. I think that each of these ideas can be understood through my own arguments about the requisite grounding of our conceptual grasp in social or normative practices. They can all be characterised as involving the implicit/explicit distinction which I argued for in the last chapter. Frameworks, much like 'paradigms' and 'worlds', are grounded in shared social activity, they partially involve explicit articulations but also all rely on an inescapable implicit element. This was clearly argued for in the case of Kuhn's paradigms in chapter 2. I will be deploying the distinction here when making sense of Taylor's inescapable frameworks of strong evaluation.

I endorse or oppose. In other words, it is the horizon within which I am capable of taking a stand.[9]

Thus, Taylor takes the intuitive idea that to have an identity is to be able to offer an answer to the question 'Who am I?' by telling a story about the kind of person one is, or to say where one stands or where one is coming from, along with the metaphor of a moral map, to give credence to the idea that our identities are unavoidably bound with an orientation towards the good. Our identity consists in having some sense of the moral topography - or an inescapable horizon - as well as a grasp of roughly where we are within this landscape. Without that moral topography, there would be no sense to the idea of our identities consisting in occupying a certain stance or coming from a certain place. To stand in a certain space is to stand relative to other things. That inescapable horizon or moral topography, consists in those strong evaluations we make. Now, as hinted at in the paragraph above, it is hard to understand how we could conceive such moral maps if we were not conceptually articulate, if we were incapable of grasping and participating in complex forms of life.

If one isn't convinced by metaphors, consider the following argument. If we take it as an uncontroversial fact about human identities that they are the sorts of thing we can succeed in or fail to live up to in varying respects and to differing degrees, then we have to have some way of making sense of this fact. We have to be able to understand this idea that we are in some way failing to live up to who we really are. But even here, in this minimal feature of identity, the notion of orientation gets an essential grip, and we must then ask what constitutes the space within which this orientation takes place. These are not, therefore, mere metaphors. If all we consisted in was *de facto* desires or even weakly evaluated desires, we could only make sense of ourselves as failing to consummate the particular desires we had. But failing to consummate particular desires is not, by itself, a failure to live up to who we really are. It only becomes such a failure if the desire we are failing to live up to is a strongly evaluated one, because then it represents a mode or pattern of life that we aspire to live, or a person we feel we ought to be.[10]

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[9] Ibid., 27

[10] Ibid., 30

III - Meaningful action and action under a description

The role of our conceptual grasp or of our being participating members in complex social practices has already been strongly suggested in the preceding section. I want now to begin exploring this thought, and to argue that our identities are in an important sense not independent of the self-interpretations we offer of ourselves through the socially grounded descriptions available to us. I have previously argued that we can have no awareness, no knowledge, of anything outside of the conceptual mastery afforded us by our social practices. However, there is an important difference between the language we use to talk about objects in the world and the language we use to talk about ourselves. Though the particular language we speak certainly gives shape to, or characterises the objects in the world in a certain way, those objects are also importantly independent of the descriptions any individual gives.[11] With our own identities, however, the case is different. Here, the language we use to talk about ourselves is 'internal to, or constitutive of the "object" studied'.[12] It is this which allows Taylor to talk of the descriptions we give of ourselves as more than simple misidentifications: 'To be in error here is thus not just to make a misdescription, as when I describe a motor-vehicle as a car when it is really a truck. We think of misidentification ... as distorting the reality concerned'.[13] Over the next two sections I wish to explore in detail this internal relationship between the language we use to describe ourselves and our identities before returning to the issue of strong evaluation.

The point I want to argue for in this section is that for a person's behaviour to count as an action they have to be open to certain descriptions being legitimately applicable to them - I call this 'action under a description'. Part of what needs to be legitimately ascribable to the individual is their grasp of those concepts relevant to the action being described. I take this

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[11] The details of this distinction are perhaps much harder to be clear on then I make it seem here. Given that I have spent so much time arguing that our social practices shape our conceptual grasp and so too our awareness of things, one could push that objects do not have so much independence from language in contrast to our identities. The difference here might be a matter of the varying degrees of rigidity in the applicability of concepts between objects in the world and ourselves. As I argue later, the indeterminacy in concepts concerning our identities allows for us to authoritatively and creatively describe ourselves, and insofar as this shapes the way we behave it is this that allows for a constitutive element. Objects have less independence insofar as the rules for application are far more rigid, and any indeterminacy in the application does not attach authority to any one individual's choice about which concepts to apply. When scientific investigation faces such indeterminacy it is not normally a single individual who has authority over the matter. Even if one person did decide to apply concepts in a certain way, it is not clear that this would shape the situation in the same way as it does when a self-reflexive individual makes a choice about what concepts to apply to themselves. Beyond all this there are clear realist issues running in the background here which I consider to be beyond the scope of this Thesis.

[12] Ibid., 34

[13] Taylor, *What is Human Agency?*, 22.

point to follow from the core arguments I offered in chapter 5 concerning rule-following, and I shall show that this is so through Peter Winch's notion of 'meaningful behaviour'.[14] Though my arguments in the last chapter were focused on what grounded our conceptual grasp of things, the notion of meaningful behaviour was unavoidably wound through the discussion. Meaningful behaviour should be contrasted with behaviour which is merely reactive or habitual.[15] The example I used in the previous chapter of someone writing a diary is a good example of meaningful behaviour. Recall that for the individual's behaviour to count as writing a diary, there had to be both a practice of writing diaries which grounded the rules involved in such an activity, and they had to understand that this was what they were doing, they had to grasp the rules involved and be following those rules. Another individual could exhibit exactly the same behaviour but if they did not grasp what they were doing then their behaviour could not be that of writing a diary.

Winch captures this feature when he talks of meaningful behaviour as that which, following the terminology of Max Weber, can have a subjective sense ascribed to it. Though he warns us against reading 'subjective sense' as 'introspective experience' or something like what is psychologically given to the individual. By 'subjective sense' he simply means that the agent to whom we are attributing meaningful behaviour must themselves be able to grasp the concepts, i.e. the sense, involved in what they are doing. It should be clear now from my previous arguments that grasping concepts is not ultimately grounded in our having some sort of 'inner experience'.

Winch has introduced a new element to this account, where he specified that the agent must be *capable* of grasping the relevant concepts in order for the subjective sense to be attributable. The agent need not be conscious of what they are doing. Consider how some individual might not be entirely aware of the reasons why they act as they do. Their lack of awareness does not stop their behaviour being meaningful.

> Even explanations of the Freudian type, if they are to be acceptable, must be in terms of concepts which are familiar to the agent as well as to the observer. It would make no sense to say that *N*'s omission to post a letter to *X* (in settlement, say, of a debt) was an expression of N's unconscious resentment against *X* for having been promoted over his

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[14] See chapter 2 of Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*

[15] This needs qualifying. As Winch himself discusses, we might read 'habit' in two different ways. In one sense habit can be blind insofar as it does not embody any principle or rule for action. In another sense, we may form a habit which we do unthinkingly, but not blindly. We may, for instance, directly foster a habit in ourselves for some specific goal or purpose. In the former case the habit falls outside the realm of meaningful behaviour, but the latter case is indeed meaningful.

head, if *N* did not himself understand what was meant by 'obtaining promotion over somebody's head'.[16]

If in cases such as this we are to be able to give an account of the individual's reasons for action and perhaps bring them round to seeing that this account is a correct account, we must attribute to them motives involving concepts that they themselves ultimately grasp. If they do not grasp the concepts involved in our account of their actions, then it is not a viable candidate as an explanation of their action. But it is written into the example that their grasping the concepts involved in the correct account of their actions is not something that they are introspectively aware of at the time of the action. Indeed, they need not ever be aware of the reasons for the action in order for it to count as that action. This is an important point to bear in mind for my developing arguments.

It is clear then, that an action's being meaningful, in that it has a subjective sense, has close connections to the practice of following a rule, and little to do with 'inner experience'. And it is clear that the agent need not be consciously aware of the rules that their actions embody, for that action to be legitimately ascribable.

> Action with a sense is symbolic: it goes together with certain other actions in the sense that it *commits* the agent to behaving in one way rather than another in the future. This notion of 'being committed' is most obviously appropriate where we are dealing with actions which have an immediate social significance, like economic exchange or promise keeping. But it applies also to meaningful behaviour of a more 'private' nature ... if *N* places a slip of paper between the leaves of a book he can be said to be 'using a bookmark' only if he acts with the idea of using the slip to determine where he shall start re-reading. This does not mean that he must necessarily *actually* so use it in the future (though that is the paradigm case); the point is that if he does not, some special explanation will be called for, such as that he forgot, changed his mind, or got tired of the book.[17]

As Winch points out, this idea of 'being committed' if one is acting a certain way, is just another case of 'going on the same way' when one is following a rule.[18] If my behaviour is to count as 'using a book mark', then it has to embody the right rules or principles, and this

[16] Ibid., 48

[17] Ibid., 50

[18] Ibid., 50

is not something that can be achieved in a moment.[19] Furthermore, some of those rules or principles that my activity has to embody for it to count as 'using a book mark' are those which constitute a grasp of the relevant concepts. If I regularly put bits of paper inside books but show no understanding of what a book is, then I cannot be said to be using a bookmark. The most important point to stress is that an activities' embodying principles is entirely dependent on the wider pattern of behaviour exhibited by the individual, on things done before and after the event, and on the social context within which all this takes place. It should be clear then, that meaningful behaviour is social behaviour.

I embarked on this discussion of meaningful behaviour so as to introduce the idea of 'action under a description' and the internal connection between the descriptions we give of ourselves and our identities. Now, it is clear that we do not necessarily need a language in the sense of, say, written and spoken English or French to follow a rule, which is to say, it is clear that action does not *have* to be brought under a description to count as an action. But this point should not be too hastily used to dismiss the idea of 'action under a description'. For behaviour to count as an action it has to be the product of following (not just conforming) to a rule, and this means that the action has to embody a principle and so have the potential to be brought under a description. Offering a description is simply an attempt to make explicit in verbal or written language, the principle or rule that the action necessarily embodies in order to count as an action. Now, it just so happens (perhaps unsurprisingly, or even unavoidably) that our symbolic activity[20] is made discursive through our symbolic language, and that our language then plays a key role in our symbolic activities. This is to say that we come to speak about the actions we perform, and our ways of speaking also form an essential role in the carrying out of those very actions. It is very hard to imagine symbolic activity - which is, remember, essentially social activity - without some sort of discursive element, and it should always be remembered that such discursive elements are of a piece with symbolic activity generally.

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[19] Though I use the phrase 'rules or principles', I might have also used the more clumsy phrase 'the right implicit and socially grounded normative standards'. I don't want the reader to think that in using the phrase 'rules and principles' I am reverting back to the notion of a rule as an explicit formulation. When I talk of a person having to embody the right rules or principles to count as using a book mark, or feeling shame, this involves an enormously wide and never fully articulable set of commitments.

[20] This is just another term for meaningful behaviour, i.e. behaviour embodying concepts which the agent himself grasps.

I wish to extend the notions deployed in the above discussion of 'meaningful action' and 'action under a description' to wider features of identity.[21] The phrase 'action under a description' is a term introduced by G. E. M. Anscombe[22] and is narrowly concerned with *action* and the related concept of intention. As discussed above, for certain behaviours to count as an action they have to be open to the right sorts of description. I want to keep these important ideas in sight. However, my interest here is not just descriptions of action, but also of feelings, desires, motivations, and so on. It was also made clear in the first section that I am concerned with characterising those feelings, desires, motivations and so on under certain value-descriptions, as in the case of strong evaluations.[23] For this reason, I might better talk of 'identity under a description' to capture this broader range of things. I think that we can describe an animal as scared in a way that does not permit room for Winch's notion of 'meaningfulness' because the animal does not grasp the concepts involved in what it feels. In contrast, I think that a human who does grasp certain relevant concepts when they are feeling scared can be thought of as meaningfully scared. In this way we can start talking about an individual's actions, feelings, evaluations and so on as meaningful, and there is now room for those descriptions we form of ourselves to play a similar role across the whole of our identities, just as they do in the case of action.[24]

What do I mean by this? A difference here that I want to suggest is that in the case of the agent who grasps the concept, and so is conscious of themselves as 'scared', the action becomes meaningful in a way that it is not for animals. It is now open, for instance, to being given a place in a wider meaningful practice: it can now connect to concepts of courage and

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[21] Ian Hacking, who I shall discuss later, makes a similar move: 'It is a common theme in the theory of human action that to perform an intentional act is to do something "under a description". As human kinds are made and moulded, the field of descriptions changes and so do the actions that I can perform, i.e. the field of human kinds affects the field of possible intentional actions. Yet intentional action falls short of the mark. There are more possible ways to see oneself, more roles to adopt. I do not believe that multiple personalities intentionally choose their disorder, or that they are trained by their therapists. However, if this way of being were not available at the moment, hardly anyone would be that way.' See Ian Hacking, "The Looping Effect of Human Kinds," in *Causal Cognition: A Multi-Disciplinary Debate*, eds. Dan Sperber and David Premack (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 1995), 368.

[22] G. E. M. Anscombe, *Intention*, Second ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2000).

[23] It is also worth nothing that I do not think we can ascribe a particular action to a person without also ascribing certain intentions or motives, nor do I think we can understand a person as having certain feelings or desires without their being embodied in certain behaviours (this is a clear consequence of the rule-following considerations). Furthermore, to describe an action as spiteful is to characterise the desires, motivations and behaviour of an individual as being of a certain sort.

[24] The upshot of all this would be that for action to count as such, the agent must grasp the concepts relevant to that action. However, to feel certain things one does not have to grasp the relevant concepts. However, to feel things meaningfully, one would have to grasp those concepts.

the like, it can receive a finer conceptual grain in being considered rational or irrational fear, ordinary fear or objectless fear, an instinctive fear or a childish fear, and so on. A further, and very important consequence of this conscious grasp is the possibility of a state being ascribed incorrectly, and in such a way that opens up room for a lack of self-understanding. An animal cannot misunderstand their fear in the way that humans can, if only because they cannot understand their fear in the way humans can. In these ways there is a difference between the meaningful action of running away in fear, and the stimulus-response reaction of running away in fear. This is a very important point to keep in mind for my arguments, because I want our feelings, as embodied in actions, to fall within the purview of meaningful action, constituted and shaped by the descriptions we can give of ourselves. In this way, a description of my fear as childish fear, may alter my motivations and so too my future actions, in a way that alters the sense of the feeling itself. In forming this description, what was once comparable to a genuine fear of personal harm may now come to feel more trivial, or be grounds for shame and so on. This is a process of meaningful self-exploration and development that an animal lacking a conceptual grasp could not engage in. This is the line of thought I want to pursue in the next section.

IV - Personal knowledge: authority and objectivity

In this section I want to start talking about the human activity of self-exploration; that activity through which we try by reflection to know ourselves as we really are, to overcome self-deception, delusion, lack of perspicuous self-awareness or other forms of opacity, and to use this knowledge to form appropriate plans about our future, to redirect our efforts into shaping ourselves anew and realising ourselves as we feel we ought to be or want to be. This section will therefore be touching on one of those two issues of critical distance I mentioned in the introduction to this chapter: the issue of personal freedom, or our ability to explore and develop our own identities. It should be clear, however, that whatever form this freedom of exploring and developing our identities consists in, it has to be a freedom in some sense grounded in that social practice that makes our rule-governed activity possible. I want to build on the ideas developed in the last section and to follow Tanney in arguing that this process involves a mixture of authority, objectivity, discovery and invention. The notions of authority and invention give sense to the idea of freedom, while the notions of objectivity and discovery give sense to the idea that this freedom is bounded and constituted by social practice.

I will start by exploring the notions of authority and objectivity. In talking about authority I am concerned with the fact that those claims we make about ourselves very often hold more weight than those claims made by others, and in such a way that we do not need to justify our claims through appeal to evidence or argument. When it comes to understanding those things that some person feels, believes or intends, what better person to ask than that very person whom we are trying to understand? In talking about objectivity, I am concerned with the fact that there are clear normative limits on the sorts of self-avowals one can make about oneself. There are clear occasions where the story someone offers about their feelings, beliefs or intentions is untenable, where we call their story into question and suppose them to be confused, lying or the like. There would seem to be a tension here. How can we admit that people have a form of authority over their own mental states which does not call for evidence or justification, while also committing them to objective standards and allowing for personal confusion, delusion, self-deception and so on? This tension needs exploring.[25]

One might try to explain the sort of authority I am concerned with here on the Cartesian model I have spent the majority of this Thesis working against, or more broadly on what Tanney calls a 'realist view about the mind and the mental'.[26] On this view, the mental states of an individual would be something privately available to them upon introspection, a 'determinate fact of the matter about the state the individual is in - a state which is somehow cognized by the ascriber.'[27] I am tempted to think theories such as this are partly put forward on the basis of the clear fact of authority afforded to first-person avowals concerning mental states, and on the phenomenological experiences we tend to have when, in a flash, we grasp what we are feeling or decide what we intend to do.[28] While it is easy to see these two facts as at least strongly suggestive of the Cartesian model, I have argued extensively that this approach is misguided.[29] There is no such thing as unmediated

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[25] Tanney also raises the issue of this tension, but sees it as a problem her account needs to make sense of. I think it poses far greater problems and confusions for the Cartesian model, and it is a virtue of her account that it can avoid the problem from even arising. See Julia Tanney, "Some Constructivist Thoughts about Self-Knowledge," in *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 290.

[26] Julia Tanney, "Self-Knowledge, Normativity, and Construction," in *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 300.

[27] Ibid., 300

[28] I have also argued elsewhere that there are certain notions of freedom and disengaged reason which encourage this picture, as well as particular ideas about personal identity which arise out of it. It is fair to say that this general model has been one of the central targets of my Thesis. See chapter 3.

[29] See chapters 3 to 6

private access to determinate mental states. Any such awareness depends on mediation through, or mastery of certain social practices. Furthermore, it is this very model which seems most readily to cause tension with the other clear fact under discussion, the fact of objective standards for self-ascription. How does one succeed or fail in appropriately cognising their supposedly private determinate mental contents? What are the standards of correctness here? When one person undermines another's self-ascription, it is certainly not by peering into their private space of mental contents and somehow achieving a better vision of the situation. And, so I argue, when someone comes on the basis of introspection, reflection, or deliberation to see themselves more clearly, it should not be thought of as a sort of sifting through their own inner photo album of determinate mental contents. Indeed, if it is clear that outside observers do not need to peer into another's 'inner world' to understand them, why should we expect it to be so in the case of the introspective individual? Tanney rightly thinks that anyone who disagrees with this model in the way that I do, owes an alternative explanation of the authority afforded to first-person self-avowals,[30] but it should be noted that the alternative account offered also avoids the sort of tension highlighted here.

The answer to this issue lies in understanding the authority given to individuals concerning their own mental states as being parasitic on those objective or normative standards which ground our conceptual grasp of things. In this way self-avowals have their source and find their limit in those objective standards rather than standing against them. I take this to be the insight which leads Tanney to argue as follows:

> The fact that we often self-ascribe directly and without appeal to evidence is recoverable on a view that takes thought content to be self-ascribable as part of an imaginative or creative skill whose standards can be extracted from looking at what we do when the attribution requires reflection or justification.[31]

Thus, in ordinary cases of self-avowal, what is said is taken with authority. In most circumstances, my saying I intend to travel to London tomorrow will be taken as a clear expression of my intentions. When I say this I do not need to engage in any introspection, reflection or deliberation before informing my friend of this information, and nor does my friend ask for any evidence or justification for this claim. Sometimes, however, because I recognise myself as confused or lacking in insight, or because someone has pointed out an

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[30] Tanney, *Some Constructivist Thoughts about Self-Knowledge*, 279.

[31] Ibid., 280

inconsistency in my self-avowals, I do need to reflect or deliberate, I need to form some sort of explanation of my actions, thoughts, and feelings, and I need to justify to myself or others why I have settled on such an explanation. It is the latter sort of case which affords us the insight we need. In cases such as these we engage in what Tanney calls 'context-placing explanations',[32] or explanations which enable us to make sense of a situation by bringing it under some appropriate description.[33]

Tanney starts with an uncontroversial example to show what she means by a context-placing explanation. A student leaves a chemistry class early and is puzzled by the teacher's seemingly writing 'cat' on the board as they walk out of the room. This puzzlement persists until later in the day, when a student who remained in attendance says that the teacher had simply begun to write 'catalyst' as the student left.[34] This explanation counts as successful because it brings the pattern of activity into a context that makes it understandable. The explanation brings together the various features of the situation, including what the teacher was doing, that the teacher was doing it in a chemistry lesson, that concepts such as 'catalyst' are relevant to chemistry lessons and so on, and brings them under rules and principles that the student understands to be appropriate. Note that certain explanations simply wouldn't wash because the situation could not be plausibly held to embody the rules and principles involved in such faulty explanations. To suggest that the teacher continued to write 'cat' over and over again in an attempt to improve their spelling abilities would be met with great puzzlement. Such an explanation would only work if combined with, perhaps, a claim that the teacher was going mad, and this would need some plausibility brought to it on the basis of preceding events or other features of the wider context. Though this further claim itself comes with certain of Winch's so-called conceptual commitments.[35] If the teacher returns the following day in fine health, our friend shall be dubbed a trickster. As Tanney puts it: 'The response will succeed in

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[32] One should note the return of 'context' here, and recall how Winch previously equivocated on 'context' and 'rule'. I followed Winch in arguing that to understand a context is to understand the rules involved in the situation. See the section on ostensive definition in chapter 5.

[33] Julia Tanney, "Reasons as Non-Causal, Context-Placing Explanations," in *Rules, Reason, and Self-Knowledge* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

[34] Ibid., 156

[35] A parallel idea to this notion of 'commitments' can be found in the work of Gilbert Ryle under the term 'implication threads'. The idea is, once again, that attributing certain concepts to a situation involves our commitment to the various logical consequences of that concept, where those logical consequences are understood to be grounded in the social norms governing its correct use across shifting contexts. See Gilbert Ryle, "Abstractions," in *Collected Essays 1929-1968*, Second ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2009), 456-457.; Gilbert Ryle, "Philosophical Arguments," in *Collected Essays 1929-1968*, Second ed. (Oxford: Routledge, 2009).

explaining the [performance] ... only to the extent that a description that puts it into this context is more understandable than a description that leaves it out.'[36]

When puzzled about ourselves we are engaging in the same sort of context-placing explanations. When we engage in reflection or deliberation we are often introspecting on things we feel or memories we have, sifting through various features of the situation past and present, near and far, and trying to form an explanation which shows the situation to embody rules or principles which make sense, to put it all into a context which, according to our conceptual grasp we can understand. It is an attempt to make explicit in our symbolic language the rules and principles that the activity embodies, so as to make sense of the situation and enable us to proceed or act appropriately. Consider the following example from Taylor which he uses to make a similar point.

> Let us imagine that we are very drawn to someone, we have a kind of love-fascination-attraction to him - but precisely the right term is hard, because we are dealing with an emotion that has not yet become fixed. Then we come, perhaps under his influence, to think very highly of certain qualities or causes or achievements; and these are qualities which he exhibits, causes he has espoused, achievements he has realized. Our feeling now takes shape as admiration. And we come to be able to apply this term to it.[37]

This story begins with an inchoate and puzzling emotion in need of a context-placing explanation. Taylor then suggests that the move to self-clarity involves two stages. In the first stage we come, under this person's influence, to recognise certain qualities, achievements or causes in positive terms, and this may well involve learning new forms of life or discovering a new sense to some terms in our vocabulary, or indeed some completely new terms. Having learnt this, we then come to *see* this person in a new light, we notice that *these* terms apply to him. In this way we are afforded new insight into the situation which enables us to explain our feelings for him as admiration; this explanation makes sense of the situation in light of the new discoveries. Admiration is particularly apt because this individual is opening our eyes to new values and new life goods we feel we should aspire to. Interestingly, Taylor argues that 'to deny an essential, constitutive role for language, one would have to be able to envisage a non-conceptual analogue for such

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[36] Tanney, *Reasons as Non-Causal, Context-Placing Explanations*, 160.

[37] Charles Taylor, "Self-Interpreting Animals," in *Human Agency and Language: Philosophical Papers Vol.1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 70.

changes in outlook',[38] which is exactly what the Cartesian model cannot do. As I argued earlier, what are the standards of correctness for succeeding or failing to cognise accurately one's determinate inner states? I argue instead that it is our ability to bring phenomenological experiences as well as features of our situation under a context-placing explanation which opens the door to the requisite (social) standards of correctness.

Notice that I am allowing phenomenological experiences to play a role insofar as our context-placing explanations need to take them into account, or insofar as they may suggest a potential explanation to us, but they are not the decisive or determinate contents of mind which the Cartesian model hopes for. In discussing phenomenological details Tanney quotes Wittgenstein: 'These details are not irrelevant in the sense in which other circumstances which I can remember equally well are irrelevant'.[39] She then seems to concede that while 'nothing in consciousness *determines* that a certain (content) concept has application this is not to say that nothing in consciousness might *intimate* or *anticipate* the applicability of such a concept; as Wittgenstein suggests, these details are not *irrelevant*.'[40]

It is an interesting point of parallel that insofar as I subordinate phenomenological experiences to the conceptual structures of normative or social practices without denying their existence or refusing them any role at all, my own position bears a happy resemblance to certain features of Hegel's system. Consider the following quotes, both taken from the same section of the *Philosophy of Mind*.

> *Everything is in sensation* (feeling): if you will, everything that emerges in conscious intelligence and in reason has its source and origin in sensation; for source and origin just means the first immediate manner in which a thing appears ... but feeling and heart is not the form by which anything is legitimated as religious, moral, true, just, etc. and an appeal to heart either means nothing or means something bad.[41]

> Being placed in this subjectivity every content becomes contingent and receives determinations which belong only to this particular subject. For this reason, it is quite inadmissible for anyone to appeal simply to his feelings. He who does so

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[38] Ibid., 70

[39] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 138. See also passages 635,636 and the surrounding discussion.

[40] Tanney, *Some Constructivist Thoughts about Self-Knowledge*, 284.

[41] G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*, trans. William Wallace and A. V. Miller (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971), 73.

withdraws from the sphere, common to all, of reasoned argument, of thought, of the matter in hand, into his particular subjectivity which, since it is essentially passive, is just as receptive of the worst and most irrational as it is of the reasonable and the good. It is evident from all this that feeling is the worst form of a mental or spiritual content and that it can spoil the best content.[42]

In the progression of his dialectic Hegel gives sensation an essential and early role in the logical development of mind, and by sensation he means the raw indeterminate basis of all thought, reason, consciousness and so on. Its role, however, is not foundational and it is certainly not normative. Sensation must first of all, as he argued in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and as I followed his arguments in Chapter 4, be mediated through concepts. Furthermore it must ultimately be mediated by complex and rational social structures, a point I argued in chapters 6 and 7. In this respect I differ from others influenced by Wittgenstein, who tend to deny anything like a private, inner something. I allow that there is something,[43] I just argue that it has to be mediated through concepts to be anything like an object of awareness, to become part of rational discourse and thought.[44] Pointing out this connection is not arbitrary, since the views of Bradley which I propounded in chapter 1 are directly influenced by the ethical strand of Hegel visible in the above quotes. To be clear, in those passages Hegel is somewhat running together epistemological issues revolving around sensation and its development into consciousness, and issues of morality requiring the unity of feeling and reason within ethical life. I do not think that running these together is illegitimate however, since my own arguments are making a similar move, from epistemological considerations to considerations of self-realisation within a socially grounded ethical sphere. The issues of self-realisation in relation to ethical life first raised in chapter 1 will be returned to later in this chapter.

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[42] Ibid., 73

[43] Such interpreters of Wittgenstein would no doubt take issue even with my use of the phrase 'something' since they will ask 'what thing?' and so catch me in the business of conceptual discourse which this 'something' is supposed to be prior to. If I try to call this something 'sensation', they will tell me, rightly, that the term 'sensation' is a concept that is normatively governed and so charge me with misusing the term. These issues were discussed in relation to Hegel and sense-certainty in Chapter 4 and I do not want to rehash them here. They are, however, both interesting and difficult. My minimal claim is that I do not think to have proven this 'something', though nor do I think anyone to have shown it false. I also think most people know well enough what I am gesturing at. I think that Sellars approaches this issue with promise when he talks of sense-contents not as immediate items of knowledge that can serve a foundational role in our epistemological enterprises, but rather as theoretical entities, or things which we posit as part of an explanatory project.

[44] "It is vital to see that these arguments show only that nothing specific - no particular data, no concrete and determinate content - is given purely directly and immediately in experience, which can serve as a basis for knowledge." Sayers, *Reality and Reason*, 114.

Insofar as the formation of context-placing explanations is a matter of showing a situation to embody certain rules or principles, to be brought under a context or subsumable under some description, it involves the use of concepts. Given my arguments in the previous chapter, therefore, it is our training into a social practice, into the use of psychological, ethical and other concepts which forms the basis of this activity. As the earlier quote by Tanney suggested, it is the nature and role of these norms in context-placing explanations which offers us the key to understanding those cases of authoritative self-avowal. Though these normative standards become conspicuous when considering those cases in which we have to form context-placing explanations, they are also operative in those cases involving authoritative self-avowals, and what is more, our training in those standards is what makes authoritative self-avowals possible. This is made apparent by the fact that it is those standards which have been breached and to which we turn when a self-avowal breaks down, and so it is those standards which are ultimately the basis of authoritative self-avowals. This claim takes us a long way from the Cartesian model and its attendant notions of self-reflection and self-exploration. We are not here perceiving any determinate inner states, we are rather trying to fit the features of the situation – including suggestive phenomenology, patterns of behaviour, facts known about the people involved etc. - into a normatively credible narrative.[45]

> These standards, the violation of which allows us to challenge another's self-ascription, ought to be ones to which the subject is held accountable when she self-ascribes. But now an explanation of our practice of granting authority to first-person ascriptions will be parasitic on an explanation why they by and large adhere to (and are not defeasible in the light of) these standards.[46]

Thus, Tanney proposes an explanation of our practice of granting authority to self-avowals as a matter of recognising the achievement in individuals of an ability to ably engage in our psychological practices. Given that the Cartesian model is untenable, that we have to accept some room for normative social standards, and given that we have a tension to resolve, this proposed explanation would seem to be a good one.

The tension I spoke of previously is resolved by understanding those standards involved in cases of self-avowal as operative without playing the role of anything like evidence or justification. Recall how in the previous chapter I drew a distinction between normative

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[45] Tanney, *Some Constructivist Thoughts about Self-Knowledge*, 307.

[46] Ibid., 287

grounds on the one hand and justifications on the other. Those normative grounds did not, at bottom, serve the role of justifications for our use of concepts; their normative status was not of an epistemic sort. I argue that the same distinction is at work here. In cases of authoritative self-avowal the normative standards have sunk into the background as what grounds the activity rather than as something one needs to appeal to. Things change in those cases where we have to offer up context-placing explanations. Here the context has shifted to an epistemological one within which we have to draw up that implicit normative background and form explicit explanations on the basis of those standards. The tension is therefore only apparent. The objective standards are always present, and whether or not they are explicitly called for depends on the context.

We afford individuals authority insofar as we recognise them to be masters of the practice of psychological ascription. We are not affording them an innate access to given determinate states, we are rather recognising an achievement gained through gradual acculturation, an ability to discern the mental activity of themselves and others. This acculturation could not take place were those standards not already existent in the social practice and available for our being trained into an understanding of them. We revoke or question that authority in cases where their ability to self-ascribe lapses or falls short of its aim, as can happen in any skill one has acquired. So much for authority and objectivity.

V - Personal knowledge: discovery and invention

Once we accept this practice of granting authority to self-avowals, it opens up room for an inventive and self-constituting aspect to our authoritative self-avowals

> Our self-ascriptive practices lean towards the creative end of the spectrum where the constraints on what counts as an acceptable move in the practice allow more inventiveness or choice on the part of an individual participant. In this weak sense, while operating within substantial explanatory constraints, a person might be said partially to constitute her thought in the act of avowing it.[47]

Thus, the interplay of authority and indeterminacy in the act of self-ascription allows room for a creative or inventive element. I would like now to explore the interplay of discovery and invention.

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[47] Ibid., 297

Tanney uses an excellent example to make the point,[48] drawing on several scenes from Goncharov's *Oblomov*.[49] In the first scene, Oblomov has just declared his love for Olga, only for her to become flustered. Seeing how flustered she is, Oblomov attempts to retract his declaration and proclaims it was a mistake - he does not really love her. However, this causes Olga great vexation as she snaps a lilac twig from its tree, bites down on a leaf and then throws the twig to the floor before rapidly leaving to return home, clearly upset. Importantly, this scene gives us access to Olga's thoughts - or her own account of the situation as it unfolds - and at no point does she consider herself in love with Oblomov. On the contrary, she says to herself that his retraction is a good thing, that she need not be angry anymore, and that they can now return to how they were before.

This scene provides an excellent example of how authority and objectivity can come apart in such a way that context-placing explanations are called for, and one must *discover* how one feels instead of having anything like a transparent access. Olga is in this scene clearly lacking a degree of self-awareness. As the story unfolds it is Oblomov who first comes to realise, or forms an explanation as to Olga's peculiar behaviour. By understanding her to be in love with him, he is able to best make sense of the situation, to bring it under rules and principles which the situation plausibly embodies. It is only through a later interaction between Oblomov and Olga, in which he approaches her with the same lilac twig that she previously threw away, and talks suggestively with her about the twig in connection to her previous vexation, that Olga herself comes to realise what *he* is thinking and in turn realises or discovers that *she* is herself in love with him. Her own prior avowals made inadequate sense of her initial anger, her subsequent vexation over his retracted statement, and the curious interaction with the lilac twig. It was only through having these features pointed out to her, and through engaging in a moment of deliberation or introspection, that she came to an adequate description of her feelings.

Notice that it is the existence of objective standards in our deployment of concepts that allows for such moments of discovery. However, the moment Olga discovers, or comes to form the particular account of herself that she does, involves more than a mere discovery in the usual sense. By forming this explanation and genuinely endorsing it, the description plays a constitutive role in how she feels, it shapes her identity. In this way it is unlike a mere description of the tables, chairs and other ordinary objects we may find around us.

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[48] Tanney, *Self-Knowledge, Normativity, and Construction*

[49] Ivan Goncharov, *Oblomov*, trans. David Magarshack (London: Penguin Books, 1954).

> Olga is transformed from someone who was (arguably) in love into someone who
> now acts in self-conscious awareness of her love, or rather in accordance with her
> own conception of how a woman in love should act ... The idea would be not merely
> that her love for Oblomov causes her transformation into a "woman" or even that her
> *awareness* of it does, but rather that her awareness and her endorsement of it
> somehow affect the love or the shape of the love itself.[50]

The emphasis here on Olga's endorsement[51] affecting the shape of the love rather than *causing* Olga to change into a woman is best understood as drawing attention to the fact that this is a constitutive rather than a causal relationship, as well as the fact that this is an articulation of a previously inchoate or confused feeling into a feeling that is clear and perspicuous.[52] Understanding exactly what it means to see the endorsed description as constitutive requires us to recall my previous arguments involving meaningful behaviour or symbolic activity, and its explicit formulation in a symbolic language. The rule-governed behaviour of Olga was meaningful activity in Winch's understanding of the phrase because it had a subjective sense: Olga grasped or had mastery of the concepts involved in what she was doing and could for this reason potentially achieve *awareness* of herself. Put otherwise: Olga's initial behaviour's were symbolic activities because they embodied rules or principles, and though she and Oblomov initially lacked awareness of the relevant rules or principles, they did have mastery of the relevant concepts, and for this reason the rules and principles which the situation embodied could be made explicit as they were by Oblomov initially and Olga later. Olga's coming to be aware of herself through making explicit the rules or principles which her behaviour embodied, involved reaching a formulation of the situation in a description or a symbolic language, where that symbolic language is itself a form of meaningful or symbolic behaviour, and so the description itself came with certain normative commitments. This particular endorsement thus entails

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[50] Tanney, *Self-Knowledge, Normativity, and Construction*, 310.

[51] The qualification concerning endorsement is an important one. As I am about to argue, the constitutive relationship between the explanation we form and the shape of our thoughts, feelings and identity, depends on the fact that our behaviour *qua* symbolic activity changes with the endorsement, (indeed, what counts as an endorsement can be reasonably held to mean just such a change in behaviour) and so embodies new rules or principles, i.e. new descriptions. Were Olga to not truly endorse her explanation then her symbolic activity would not transform in the requisite way for her to count as 'a woman in love'.

[52] "We can say therefore that our self-interpretations are partly constitutive of our experience. For an altered description of our motivation can be inseparable from a change in this motivation. But to assert this connection is not to put forward a causal hypothesis ... rather, it is that certain modes of experience of our predicament are not possible without certain self-descriptions." Taylor, *What is Human Agency?*, 37.

behavioural commitments according to the normative standards which ground the concept 'love'. Indeed, we might even say that what it means to endorse a new description of oneself *is* to change one's behaviour. Both the implicit and the explicit are grounded in social norms, and so the interplay of each is deeply connected to this idea of commitment. We cannot form an explicit formulation of ourselves on the basis of our implicit activity, without in turn shaping that implicit activity. The greater articulation of Olga's feeling involves an articulation of the rules involved, a commitment to those rules, and so a change in behaviour. Given that one's behaviour has changed as a result of this awareness, one is now potentially open to new descriptions. Consider how Olga might now meet the standards for someone who is 'clearly in love' or 'a woman in love' rather than someone who is 'in love but unaware' or 'confusedly in love', and consider how different these *feelings* of love are, though they are for Olga one and the same love - the love for Oblomov.[53]

> This explanation of her behaviour (that she is in love with Oblomov), its endorsement by Olga, and its role in an ongoing narrative give shape to, or articulate, a pattern or a possibility which in turn (retrospectively, as it were) supports the original description of Olga as a woman in love.[54]

Concerning the idea that our awareness of feelings can transform or shape those feelings, emphasis should be placed on the fact that our feelings are not privately available determinate mental states. Holding on to this view encourages us to think that any description we form of our feelings is either correct or incorrect depending on whether or not it accurately picks out that state. The description can in no way alter that state, only report it. However, our mental states are not given to us in this way. They are constitutively dependent on those normative practices we participate in. Feeling love involves embodying a rule or principle which is socially structured; it is the social structure which grounds the

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[53] Tanney captures this idea in a less technical way via analogy with the gestalt duck-rabbit: "Think about a duck-rabbit design, which, although ambiguous between being either the head of a duck or the head of a rabbit, is arguably not the head of a cow or pig. Now, imagine that when the figure is drawn with more detail (a body is added) it becomes a duck and not a rabbit. The analogy would be that Olga's pattern of behaviour before her reflections was in certain ways indeterminate (though certain interpretations of her behaviour could be ruled out) just as the duck-rabbit design is ambiguous (though certain descriptions of the design can be dismissed). After her reflections and her endorsement of one pattern (on our analogy she recognizes the pattern as a duck), she behaves in a way that is consistent with that recognition. Her endorsement of it (as a duck) and her subsequent behaviour allow the pattern to develop in such a way (say, it develops a beak, webbed feet, feathers, etc.) that renders the other interpretations no longer viable." See Tanney, *Self-Knowledge, Normativity, and Construction*, 311.

[54] Ibid., 310

possibility of our feelings being determinate. If our awareness of ourselves can affect the rules and principles we embody, then our awareness of ourselves can affect the way we feel. What we have here is a technical-philosophical account of how and why coming to self-awareness necessarily involves a change in oneself, including potentially what one feels, thinks, believes, intends and so on, and it grounds this possibility in the existence of social practices that we are participating members of.

A creative or inventive aspect can find its way in here when we notice that the descriptions we form of ourselves are sometimes underdetermined. If multiple descriptions are available then we have room to choose the account we give of ourselves and that account will be, in line with the previous arguments, partly constitutive of who we are. I think there are two related ways to understand such indeterminacy in the sorts of context-placing explanations we can offer of ourselves.

The first way, and the way Tanney seems to focus on, relies on this easily recognisable feature of all explanations: sometimes there simply isn't enough information available to us to decide between alternative accounts. Tanney argues that where alternative accounts are not available 'this may be because the subsequent commitments to which an ascription or avowal is answerable have been largely fulfilled or because it involves relatively little by way of such commitments'.[55] Certain explanations involve commitments that are simple and few in number, others involve very complex and varied commitments. If I see that my friend has packed a travel bag, and there is a ticket on top with his name and tomorrow's date on it, then there is very little room given the concepts involved in 'my friend plans to travel tomorrow' (including their commitments and implications) for alternative context-placing explanations. A particularly anomalous feature would have to become salient for any other explanation to be plausible. With a concept such as 'love' however, the implications or commitments of the concept are complex and varied, and so its applicability more questionable or indeterminate; though to be sure, this indeterminacy should not be taken to mean that there are no standards or limits on the applicability of the concept 'love' - quite the opposite.

The second way indeterminacy can enter the picture, and a way that Tanney does not seem to consider, relies on Wittgenstein's rule-following paradox which I discussed in the last chapter. Recall how we are trained to follow certain rules, and that this means knowing

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[55] Ibid., 319

how to go on in cases where we have not received explicit instruction. I am taught to count without being taught every particular move in counting; a young student might be able to count to 6000 and beyond though he has only directly been shown how to count to 800. Furthermore, there are numbers no one has ever counted to, yet this does not mean that someone who understands how to count could not in principle count to such numbers. It is, therefore, a clear feature of what is involved in grasping a rule, that this grasp often enables us to work out how to apply the rule in novel or never before seen circumstances, and that there be right and wrong ways to do this. This applies equally to concepts relating to our lives as persons, such as 'love' or 'shame'. In being trained in the use of the concept we need not be directly taught all of the standards, all of the commitments or implications involved in the applicability of this concept. Indeed, the very idea is nonsensical. This does not stop there being right or wrong applications, nor does it stop us from being able to figure out how to apply the concept 'love' in novel or unforeseen circumstances.

We certainly have far more rigid and explicitly drawn rules with which we are less likely to confront such novel or difficult circumstances, but it is clear that we also have many rules which are not drawn so rigidly or explicitly. Winch draws a distinction between the rules of grammar and the rules of literary style to make this point; though there is much room for interpretation and a certain malleability in the rules of style, they are still for all that *rules*.[56] A very extensive training in the rules of style will not avoid very regularly occurring situations of novelty. It is important to see that in such situations we are not breaking with the old rule, we are rather finding ways to apply the old rule in the new situation. The following quote from Winch when discussing the historical development of cultures might be helpful.

> But what is ruinous to a settled mode of behaviour, of whatever kind, is an unstable environment. The only mode of life which can undergo a meaningful development in response to environmental changes is one which contains within itself the means of assessing the significance of the behaviour which it prescribes. Habits too may of course change in response to changing conditions. But human history is not just an account of changing habits: it is the story of how men have tried to carry over what they regard as important in their modes of behaviour into the new situations which they have had to face.[57]

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[56] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 53.

[57] Ibid., 64

We might also consider the nature of paradigms as I discussed them in chapter 2. A paradigm was a rule-governed activity which attracted enough adherents to constitute a united research program of very high productivity. The partly implicit, partly explicit rule-governed activity involved, amongst other things, a collection of concepts which determined what sorts of things there were in the world and how they could be expected to behave, what would count as data and what would count as an explanation of that data, and so on. However, paradigms are not complete systems. The concepts involved in the paradigm required further articulation in terms of incorporating a wide variety of novel phenomena into its scheme. The work of normal science can be seen as an attempt to further specify a system of concepts so as to cope with novel circumstances. Consider this passage from Kuhn: "In a science ... a paradigm is rarely an object for replication. Instead, like an accepted judicial decision in the common law, it is an object for further articulation and specification under new or more stringent conditions."[58] Again, the pattern here is one of articulation and specification of a rule or principle, rather than a bold leap into a new understanding, this is development rather than mere change.[59] It is not unreasonable to suppose that there is indeterminacy in this development; multiple applications might be made to 'fit' the rule as it is understood, while being open to later correction.

My arguments in the last chapter have shown that there is no such thing as a system of fully explicit or entirely rigid rules; there is always an implicit background in social practice required for those more explicit and rigid rules to have sense, and this implicit background

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[58] Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 23.

[59] Kuhn has offered similarly illuminating accounts of what I am here trying to describe in his paper 'Second Thoughts on Paradigms'. In this paper Kuhn argues that scientists are often educated into the use of exemplars for the purposes of learning how to articulate certain formulas for specific purposes. When learning a scientific formula it is very general and demands specification for use in concrete cases. However, the formula is meant to inform us how to make sense of concrete cases we may confront in the future but have not yet produced specifications for, and the formula itself does not involve rules for specification. Nothing in the formula itself can tell us how to specify it for a given novel concrete case. Instead, what we must turn to are the exemplars; those classic cases where the formula has been specified, and by some form of tacit comparison we discover how to specify the rule in the new cases. The example he gives is that of moving from the known specification of a formula used to make sense of a ball rolling down one side of a hill and up another, to help specify the formula for an analogous case of the swinging pendulum. As Kuhn argues: 'No conjunction of particular symbolic forms would exhaust what the members of a scientific community can properly be said to know about how to apply symbolic generalizations. Confronted with a new problem, they can often agree on the particular symbolic expression appropriate to it, even though none of them has seen that particular expression before.' (Thomas S. Kuhn, "Second Thoughts on Paradigms," in *The Essential Tension* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1977), 301.) Note that though no explicit formulation, nor any past performance can tell us exactly how to go on, there are nevertheless right and wrong ways of going on - the fact that so many scientists do go on the same way shows this. Exemplars for the applicability of a concept like 'shame' might come from such cultural artefacts as the films we watch, or the novels and poems that we read. For more on tacit inference, see Michael Polanyi, "The Logic of Tacit Inference," *Philosophy* 41, no. 155 (1966): 1-18.

means that there is always room to draw on that social and practical background when grounding applications in new or novel circumstances. We can see this at work in the example of paradigms above. Winch uses the example of statute law and case law, where the former involves more rigid and explicitly drawn rules and the latter necessarily involves more malleability to work. Consider how, even though new cases will often be importantly different, we still manage to find what principle we were working under in the precedent cases, to understand what was important in that principle, and to apply it to new cases. To not see this possibility is to make nonsense of case law.[60] It is in those situations where we are deploying concepts that are less explicitly drawn or rigid, and thus more open to a certain form of malleability, that we find more room for indeterminacy in the context-placing explanations we form about ourselves. I would count 'love' as one such concept, and 'shame' as another. It should be noted, however, that our application to the novel circumstance may always be shown at a later date to be misguided.

We might say that the freedom of the scientist partly consists in articulating the social practice in which he is an acculturated practitioner in the same way that an individual's free self-realisation consists in the articulation of that social practice into which they have been acculturated. I say "partly" because, just as paradigms themselves can be developed, so too can the social worlds that form the basis of self-realisation, and in this consists a further form of freedom. I will discuss this later.

There is a final nuance to add to this account of self-discovery and self-invention. Tanney relays a later scene in the novel, by which time Olga and Oblomov's engagement has come to an end, and Olga has started developing uncertain feelings for her friend Stolz. This causes a dilemma for Olga in terms of - as Tanney calls it - her 'practical identity'. It is part of Olga's conceptual understanding that a 'woman only loves once', and this is cutting off the possibility for her of forming a context-placing explanation concerning her interactions with Stolz as being in any way romantic. Olga is forced to interpret the feelings as sisterly love. It takes some convincing on Stolz's part to show that Olga never loved Oblomov, by appeal to a letter which Oblomov wrote to Olga explaining that her feelings were mistaken, in combination with her current uncertain feelings and previous failed relationship.[61] Only

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[60] Winch, *The Idea of a Social Science*, 61.

[61] It is a shame that in this story Olga's coming to self-realisation is in both cases dependent on the influence of men encouraging particular self-descriptions. This is not, of course, how things have to be. While it is often the case that our own self-development is the result of others helping us to realise things about ourselves, most of us are quite capable of independent self-exploration.

by endorsing this account can she then interpret her feelings for Stolz as romantic love. What allows this context-explanation to take hold and constitutively shape Olga's feelings is that it not only makes sense of her present situation, but it does so in such a way as to make sense of why her old interpretation - that she loved Oblomov - was false. We see here the pattern of reasoning I outlined in Chapter 2 which Taylor calls 'transitional argument'. Interpretation Y counts as a gain in understanding over interpretation X because it can make sense of new information as well as explain why the old interpretation was mistaken. [62]

I hope now that when I offer the following summation of the preceding sections that my meaning is clear. The normative practices which ground our use of concepts mean that there are objective standards involved in self-ascription. However, insofar as we are masters of the practice of psychological ascription and there are no defeating conditions, our own self-avowals are authoritative. When the accounts we form of ourselves breach those standards or we acknowledge that we are confused in some way about ourselves, we must seek to find via a process of deliberation and introspection a context-placing explanation which makes sense of ourselves. This opens up the possibility of our making discoveries about ourselves, in contrast to our being completely transparent to ourselves. When there is indeterminacy in what counts as a viable context-placing explanation, our authority can make a choice between them where that choice is partly constitutive of who we are. It is only partly constitutive because of those ever present objective standards grounded in our social practice, both limiting the choices we can make and also liable to intrude on our chosen conception at a later date, forcing us to reconceive ourselves once again. Those new conceptions we form are liable to be implicated in explaining why we were misguided about ourselves in the prior conceptions, indeed, this can be a condition of accepting the new self-conception. In this way, we do justice to the idea that our identities are things to be explored and discovered as well as created, involving a mixture of authority, invention, objectivity and discovery, and this in a way which is entirely dependent on social practice.

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[62] Alistair MacIntyre discusses the nature of narrative re-descriptions of past events, including past interpretations, and he does so in a manner which parallels (indeed, influenced) Taylor's notion of a transitional argument. Furthermore, MacIntyre applies these ideas to both personal and scientific development. See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *The Tasks of Philosophy: Selected Essays, Volume 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

Tanney parallels my earlier claims concerning the difference between fear as a stimulus-response and meaningful fear, where the latter results from becoming involved in meaningful action, action within which the subject is capable of being aware of the fear as fear. She argues:

> Patterns of animal behaviour can be identified in and rationalized by intentional psychological terms. But although animals can act in accordance with some rational norms ... they lack the meta-ability to understand what the norms commit them to. This will involve an ability to see ways in which a pattern might continue consistently with certain identification but inconsistently with others. And this ability to recognize patterns and to act in accordance with them because they have been endorsed will introduce a complexity to the patterns that would have been inconceivable for non-self-reflective being.[63]

As should be clear by now, being a self-reflective being involves our following rules and also our attempts to form explicit articulations of those rules which we are following. Each of these in turn depends on our being an acculturated member of a social practice.

VI - Subject referring feelings and a world of meanings

I now want to come back to the ideas I developed at the start of this chapter concerning strong evaluations. My claim there was that strong evaluations were an essential feature of the human identity, and a feature that was intimately connected with the social practices we are acculturated into, and so cannot be understood apart from them. The arguments concerning meaningful self-exploration which I have just covered bring us to a place where I can make good this claim.

It became apparent in the above discussion that human behaviour is meaningful behaviour because our social acculturation affords us a grasp of concepts with which to understand ourselves. This grasp of our own meaningful behaviour opens the door for our feelings to be interpreted and understood, or articulated and developed in ways that are not available to animals lacking a grasp of concepts. Nevertheless, I allowed that animals clearly feel such things as, say, fear. There is an objective, i.e. 'non-subject relative' or non-meaningful form of fear which we legitimately ascribe to animals without their having grasped the concept 'fear'. While our own meaningful understanding of fear can constitutively shape or

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[63] Tanney, *Self-Knowledge, Normativity, and Construction*, 320.

develop that feeling, this understanding is not required for ascriptions of the feeling to get off the ground. Things are different when we consider a feeling like shame, or what Taylor calls a subject-referring feeling. According to Taylor, emotions like shame depend on the subject's grasp of certain meanings things have for us *qua* subjects. There is no shame without an understanding of these meanings, and so a conceptual grasp is required for such ascriptions to get off the ground. Furthermore, strong evaluations depend on these subject-referring feelings. In this way the 'world' of strong evaluation, unlike feelings of fear, has no existence outside of the normative practices that ground it. I will now pick up some of the strands in Taylor's own arguments concerning our nature as 'self-interpreting animals' to try and make this initial thought more plausible.[64]

Taylor argues that 'many of our feelings, emotions, desires, in short much of our experienced motivation, are such that saying properly what they are like involves expressing or making explicit a judgement about the object they bear on'.[65] The idea here is that certain of those things we feel can't be felt without involving a sense of our situation as being of a certain sort. To feel fear is to have a sense of one's situation as fearful; to feel shame is to have a sense of one's situation as shameful and so on. Taylor refers to adjectives such as 'fearful' and 'shameful' as 'imports' because they describe a situation as being of a certain sort, and in such a way that we cannot be indifferent to it: when a situation is shameful to us it is because it commands our attention in a very specific way.

> Experiencing a given emotion involves experiencing our situation as bearing a certain import, where for the ascription of the import it is not sufficient just that I feel this way, but rather the import gives the grounds or basis for the feeling. And that is why saying what an emotion is like involves making explicit the sense of the situation it incorporates, or, in our present terms, the import of the situation as we experience it.[66]

The introduction of imports comes with its own interesting complexities which I will only cover in a cursory way here. To feel shame essentially involves a sense of the situation as being shameful in some way, though this sense may be inchoate or inarticulate. We can make the feelings clearer to ourselves by better articulating the sense of the situation that the feeling incorporates, that is to say, by spelling out in language those features of the

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[64] Taylor, *Self-Interpreting Animals*

[65] Ibid., 47

[66] Ibid., 49

situation that the feeling necessarily involves. Furthermore, our feelings essentially involving a sense of a situation and our ability to make clear in language what that sense is, is entirely consistent with our withholding judgement that the situation really is the way that the feeling purports it to be. We must leave room, for example, to say that while one feels a situation to be shameful, it is not really so, or that one is irrationally afraid because the situation is not really menacing or dangerous, and so on. Furthermore, we should not think that noticing an import is identical with having the relevant feeling. To notice a situation as shameful does not require that one be feeling shame, and conversely, just because one feels shame it does not follow that one is entirely aware of why one feels this, of what exactly it is that is shameful to oneself. None of this should detract from the idea that to feel shame essentially involves a sense of our situation as a shameful one.

Note that the imports for certain feelings can be explained in terms which might be called 'objective' in the sense that they are available equally to animals and ourselves. The import for 'fear', might be cashed out in terms of potential bodily harm and the need to run away. As Taylor argues, following a functionalist line of thought, one might construct a machine with sensory inputs, data banks, and a locomotive mechanism which could quite easily recognise 'menacing' situations and run away from them accordingly.[67] In this way, though an animal might not conceptually grasp the imports involved in feeling fear, it can nevertheless have an appropriate emotional response to them. Both the animal and ourselves can share a situation as menacing in the above way and so appropriately feel fear.

Things seem different, however, for the feeling of shame. It is not so easy to imagine an objective explication of a situation as a 'shameful' one. Feelings such as 'shame' are what Taylor calls subject-referring feelings, because they are reflexively related to our lives *qua* subjects, or the particular sorts of subjects we are, and are not related to the objective world in the way that 'fear' can be.

> Shame is an emotion that a subject experiences in relation to a dimension of his existence as a subject. What we can be ashamed of are properties which are essentially properties of a subject. This may not be immediately evident, because I may be ashamed of my shrill voice, or my effeminate hands. But of course it only

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[67] Ibid., 52

makes sense to see these as objects of shame if they have for me or my culture an expressive dimension.[68]

While both ourselves and animals can share a situation as being a menacing one, we cannot both share a situation as being shameful due to our having effeminate hands. The animal simply does not live in a world of things that has a place for 'effeminate hands', which is to say hands just don't have the same expressive dimension for animals because, first and foremost, the notion of effeminacy has no meaning for them. If it turns out to be impossible ever to explicate the imports for feelings such as 'shame' without recourse to such subject-referring feelings, then it makes no sense to ascribe such feelings to animals. A situation cannot be 'shameful' outside of things having certain meanings for us; 'shameful' cannot be made good as part of the furniture of the world. As such, an animal cannot have a sense of their situation as being shameful if the world does not involve certain meanings for them, and if a situation cannot be shameful then they cannot feel shame.[69] This is why I would like to say that there are feelings which both animals and ourselves can feel, that by becoming part of our meaningful activities those feelings are shaped for us in ways that they cannot be for animals, and that certain feelings cannot be understood or felt *apart* from certain meaningful activities, and so they cannot be felt at all by animals.

My next claim is, following Taylor, that strong evaluations depend on an affective awareness of the world which involves those subject-referring feelings discussed above, and which are dependent on the world having certain meanings for us, on our being conceptually able participants in social or normative practices. Recall how I argued that strong evaluation involves our ordering or ranking motivations according to our notion of the good life; how we characterise some desires or some actions as spiteful or dishonest because those things non-contingently clash with the form of life I aspire to live or the sort of person I wish to be. I earlier gave the following embryonic statement as to why this dimension of our existence as properly human subjects could not be conceived apart from social practice.

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[68] Ibid., 53

[69] Taylor himself endorses this claim. However, he argues that even if we allow animals some sort of proto-sense of shame (and one might push that there has to be some embryonic feeling of this sort for it to ever develop into our notion of 'shame') it will be entirely different to ours, simply because our sense of shame is so shaped and dependent on the meanings things have for us. As an example to help make the case he points out the radical communication gap between different cultures concerning what counts as 'shameful'. See Ibid., 69

My wanting to live a dignified life rather than a shameful life involves some sense of a mode or pattern of life that I want to live up to or which imposes obligations on me. There has to be something that contrastively counts as the dignified life over against the shameful life. Animals, however, do not participate in the complex forms of life that could ground such concepts as shame and dignity, and so it is hard to imagine how an animal could distinguish differing complex patterns of life as higher or lower, dignified or shameful.[70]

With the notion of subject-referring feelings and their dependence on a world of meanings opened up to us by social practice, I am now in a position to state the case more fully. Our strongly evaluating involves characterising our emotions as higher or lower in particular respects, it involves appealing to a standard higher than those feelings being evaluated. This is not to say we exit the realm of feeling all together in making these higher order assessments, only that we appeal to an articulated conception of our emotional life which orders our feelings as part of a larger conception of the good life. To use an earlier phrase, it is to draw up a moral map within which we orient ourselves, and have a sense of who we are. We feel one desire to be higher than another, and this is because the other desire is shameful, and it is shameful because it shows me to be controlled by my own petty resentments, rather than what is better for our business, or something of the like. But these articulations of the feelings involved in our strongly evaluating shows those feelings to be subject-referring feelings.

And this is where we connect with the topic of subject-referring feelings. Strong evaluations involve subject-referring imports because they involve discriminating our motivations as higher or lower, or intrinsically good or bad. They are thus, one might say, inherently reflexive, and explicating the imports concerned involves referring to the life of the subject. It involves, one might say, attributing to different motivations their place in the life of the subjcet.[71]

It should now be clear that our having a sense of what patterns of life are shameful and what patterns of life are dignified depends on an affective awareness of the world which we could not have without our also grasping certain meanings. A pattern of life cannot be objectively shameful, and nor can a simple feeling, apart from things having certain meanings for us, characterise a pattern of life as shameful. So much of what is important to

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[70] See the last paragraph of the first section in this chapter.

[71] Ibid., 67

us, of what gives us a sense of being a certain person coming from a certain place, with particular aspirations that define our life goals, depends on a world which is opened up to us by, and deeply dependent on, complex social practices. Outside of those practices, strong evaluations have no place.

VII - Changing frameworks, changing possibilities

I wanted to cover two broad points in this chapter. The first was to show how my epistemological concerns could be used to say something about certain essential facets of human identity. The second point was the issue of critical distance, involving both the individual's ability to stand apart from the community and develop himself freely, and also the individual's ability to be sufficiently independent of that community to critically engage with it and to encourage its development. In the above sections I have dealt with the first issue as well as with the first part of the critical distance problem, the issue concerning the individual's ability to freely develop himself. The second aspect of the critical distance problem I attempted to solve in chapter 2 through a dialectical account of theoretical and practical reason. I now briefly want to suggest a connection between these two issues of critical distance. While this builds on everything I have discussed, I can only offer suggestive remarks in the space available.

As I briefly intimated above, the individual's freedom to develop himself only partly consists in articulating social practice and determining one's place within it, because there is also room to understand our freedom as involving an ability to shape that very social practice and to open up new possibilities for our own self-exploration and personal development. Using the language of frameworks, our own free activity involves articulating that framework and finding our place within it, but we might also, through critically engaging with that framework, alter the space of possibilities for our own self-descriptions. The way to understand such developments of framework, and so also the development of our own space of possibilities, is through the notion of a transitional argument as I outlined it in chapter 2, and for which Kuhn's paradigm shifts served as a model.

The frameworks we develop might be either practical or theoretical frameworks. Consider the situation concerning Olga and Stoltz as a potential example of practical or ethical development. Olga faced the possibility of inconsistency in her practical identity due to her present understanding of herself as a woman who loved Oblomov, as someone who has uncertain feelings for Stolz, and as someone who endorses the ethical claim 'a woman only

loves once'. Olga finds a new description of herself that enables her to make sense of these various elements and to proceed with a developed practical identity, that is to say, she then knows how to go on. But what if such a description were not forthcoming? What if her love for Oblomov were too plain to be dismissed and her feelings for Stolz forever confused as a result. Such a situation can cause great psychological pain and uncertainty, and Olga might struggle in knowing how to go on. However, if the evaluative framework involved here could be rationally developed through some form of transitional argument, such that the principle 'a woman only loves once' is jettisoned,[72] then Olga would have room to recognise she loved both Oblomov and Stolz. We might even see the development of this evaluative framework being encouraged by the fact that it causes such great problems for people's practical identities. As in the case of Olga, it might cause great frustration amongst women who are unable to readily make sense of their feelings. They might remain in painful confusion over their feelings, or otherwise accept two loves and face the painful possibility that they are failing to live up to their identities as women. If such unrest is widespread we might imagine it to start putting pressure on the current ethical framework, as anomalies do for paradigms.

Ian Hacking offers us a nice example of how development in our theoretical frameworks might open up new possibilities for self-description through his notion of a 'human kind'. By 'human kind' Hacking intends to point out kinds of person 'about which we would like to have systematic, general, and accurate knowledge; formulations that could be used to formulate general truths about people; generalisations sufficiently strong that they seem like laws about people, their actions, or their sentiments.'[73] He has in mind a wide range of kinds including 'drunkard', 'proletariat', 'victim of child abuse', 'multiple personality disorder', 'homosexual' and so on. Hacking argues that such kinds may grow out of our more particular and concerned dealings with the world in such a way that they become objects of scientific investigation. This investigation can in turn affect the shape of the human kind, what counts as that kind and what can be expected of that kind, or how the world should treat that kind in varying respects (moral, practical, legal and so on). He gives

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[72] Such a re-evaluation would involve a change in our strong evaluations, or the imports of our subject-referring feelings, it would involve a development in the meanings things have for us, and in the ways we feel.

[73] 'When I speak of human kinds I mean (i) kinds that are relevant to some of us, (ii) kinds that primarily sort people, their actions, and behaviour, and (iii) kinds that are studied in the human and social science, i.e. kinds about which we have knowledge. I add (iv) that kinds of people are paramount' I want to include kinds of human behaviour, action, tendency, etc. only when that are projected to form the idea of a kind of person.' Hacking, *The Looping Effect of Human Kinds*, 354.

the example of 'suicide' which was originally thought of as a bad act, and so was tabulated and recorded, or investigated as a kind. These investigations over time led us to see suicide in a new way: 'A body of knowledge about suicide changed beliefs about what kind of deed it was, and hence its moral evaluation: "an attempted suicide is a cry for help". Your attitude to a friend who attempts suicide will be different from that which your great-grandparents would have had'.[74] The role of 'suicide' in our self-descriptions has changed. In this way, the scientific development of a kind can affect the available descriptions open to ourselves and others, it can change the range of potential narratives or identities that we can develop.[75]

Hacking himself notes how the introduction of a human kind can quite literally change a person's biography and so too their sense of self: Human kinds have (what could be presented as) an even more amazing power than that of opening possibilities for future action. They enable us to redescribe our past to the extent that people can come to experience *new* pasts. A striking number of adults come to see themselves as having been abused as children.'[76] Importantly, the idea here is not simply that these people recover forgotten memories, it is that new forms of self-understanding are made available, new descriptions of old patterns, the endorsement of which constitute new forms of relationship between individuals and their families, or individuals and wider society.

Just as we saw above in the case of Olga, where problems in self-description may motivate developments of our ethical frameworks, it is likely that problems individuals face in their self-descriptions form part of the motivation to develop human kinds.[77] Though I do not have space to consider it in more detail here, it is worth mentioning Hacking's idea of a self-ascriptive human kind. Normally there are those members of a kind who are the known, and the investigator of a kind who are the knowers. However, members of a kind can

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[74] Ibid., 355

[75] Interestingly, the 'looping' in Hacking's 'looping human kinds' involves the idea that once members of a kind come to see themselves as such, their behaviour changes accordingly, and since the behaviour of those in a kind has changed, so too has the kind. In this way there is an interplay between the scientific investigation of a kind and the members of that kind understanding themselves as such. This parallels my discussion above concerning the endorsement of a description, its subsequent effect on behaviour, and so too the applicability of future descriptions. See in particular Ibid., 369

[76] Ibid., 368

[77] Daniel Bell has some useful material on the notion of "damaged human personhood" as a result of society not providing the necessary structures for particular identities to adequately realise themselves. See Daniel Bell, "A Discussion about the Value of Language-Based Communities, the Gay Community, and the Family," in *Communitarianism and its Critics* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993).

sometimes take ownership of that kind and claim some authority over the nature of that kind, shaping themselves in the process. Hacking gives the example of 'homosexuality' to make the case. We have here a nice example of how a certain group of people, suffering the limitations of self-description available to them, take ownership of a kind as part of an attempt to more ably realise themselves.[78] In light of the case of Olga above, we might think of the change in ethical frameworks in connection to women taking hold of their own self-ascriptive kind.[79]

Let me end by connecting these thoughts with the account of Bradley I offered in chapter 1, and the issues of freedom raised there. Bradley argued that the ultimate human end was self-realisation within a social whole.[80] To be fully realised within a social whole is to be fully free. Following him I argued that the higher ends of human life could not be reduced to pleasure as our ultimate end, but had to consist in ends that were social. I have now more fully justified this claim by showing that those strong evaluations which are so central to the identity of human individuals depend on our grasp of socially grounded concepts. We cannot understand ourselves as creatures of mere *de facto* desire, we also evaluate our desires as higher or lower, according to evaluative standards which are fundamentally social. As such we cannot be understood in abstraction from the social world that grounds these evaluations. Thus, we can in many ways identify Bradley's 'social self' with the strongly evaluating self. In attempting to fully realise ourselves, we are realising aspects of

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[78] Hacking, *The Looping Effect of Human Kinds*, 380.

[79] I think one can read Sartre's *Huis Clos* as an exploration of this basic idea: our unavoidable dependence on the recognition of others, and the painful experience we have when the recognition we receive is not confirming of our identities, or conducive to our realising ourselves in the world in a unified way. Though Sartre's play does not highlight the social dimension as I am trying to do here, but rather the more personal level at which these conflicts can play out, I do not think the two dimensions are in fact easily separable. A literary example which does highlight the social dimension can be found in Fante's *Ask the Dust*. This story explores the struggling life of an Italian American living during the Great Depression-era of Los Angeles, and is in many ways an exploration of the tensions within the Italian American identity at that time. An important background to this story is the racism of the era, which supplies much of the social dimension in how the lead character struggles to ably realise himself. For example, the main character identifies with both American values and Italian values, and the result is a character who dreams the American Dream, while facing constant limitation from American discrimination. He internalises some of this discrimination against himself and his Italian background, which conflicts with the Italian pride he has found within his family life. The result is an untenable and mercurial mix of love and hatred for both America and himself, an emotional mixture of both arrogance and self-loathing. He overcomes the tensions in his identity through finding the success in American life which he so desired. However, his successful self-realisation is contrasted with that of Camilla Lopez, a person facing similar racial tensions, but who could not realise herself in the world in the same way, and who ultimately disappears into the desert. See Jean-Paul Sartre, "Huis Clos," in *Huis Clos and Other Plays* (London: Penguin Books, 1982).; John Fante, "Ask the Dust," in *The Bandini Quartet* (Edinburgh: Canongate Books, 2004).

[80] For more on this sort of idea, see Alasdair MacIntyre, "The Virtues, the Unity of a Human Life and the Concept of a Tradition," in *After Virtue*, Second ed. (London: Duckworth, 1985).

a social world within which we have been acculturated, and within which things become intelligible to us.

However, we should not take the 'social self' to be realised as something unproblematically present in current social conditions. The task is to realise ourselves as a unified whole, and the social world is supposed to provide us with the requisite ends for that task, but it does not necessarily do this as adequately as it might. Because the social conditions which ground our identities are fragmented, contradictory, inchoate, and so on, so too are our identities. The development of ourselves often demands the development of our social conditions in such a way as to open new possibilities for self-discovery or self-realisation. The social world must be a unified whole for us to be able to realise ourselves as a whole within that social world. Full freedom and full self-realisation depends upon and animates this complex interaction between individual and social development. The social self to be realised is often the self of a future social world, and demands the development of our current circumstances. When Bradley argues that the self to be realised is an infinite whole, insofar as it seeks a unity that embraces all difference within it as an essential moment, he is arguing that the individual must overcome all contradiction and difference. This is what I take to be happening when someone faces a crisis in practical identity as I've discussed it above. In these examples people's identities are not properly unified, they contain external differences that cannot be brought together as part of a coherent whole. The example of Olga makes this especially clear. Her own identity and the social world within which she is a participant, are creating conditions within which she does not have a clear sense of who she is or how she can proceed in adequately realising herself. Insofar as this is limiting for her, she is not free. In order for Olga to feel properly autonomous, she has to form a new, more adequate conception of herself, and this task may involve a critical engagement with the social world so as to open new possibilities of self-realisation. The aim is to find a practical identity which is consistent, and so can be adequately realised. In achieving this Olga will no longer feel limited, but free.

The interplay of individual and social development is made apparent here, and in such a way that we can now see room for great conflict in our own individual attempts at self-realisation. If our own individual development is frustrated by the current shape of our social world and there seems to be no way to develop that world to accommodate our own development, the result will be a form of alienation, an inability to autonomously realise oneself. I want to discuss this in the final chapter.

Chapter 8: Hegel and Mental Illness

I - Introduction

In this chapter I wish to argue for a way of understanding certain mental illnesses as having a basis in the individual's constitutive connection to their social world, and in their attempts to form a coherent conception of themselves and the world within which to direct their actions. Where scientific methodology generally tries to naturalise and remove the element of contingent human practice from its method and object of study, it fails to get a grip on the reality of mental illness as irreducibly tied to the normative practices which are born out of our social relations, and the necessity of these social relations for the structure of our mental life: for the way we understand the world around us, our place in it, and our own selves. My contention is that the social context within which the patient, and ourselves are embedded plays a key role in their coming to be 'ill' and must play a central role in our explaining and coming to understand their condition.[1]

To this end I wish to draw on Hegel's philosophy of freedom, in particular his outlining of the structure of the will and the will's social realization, and also how our nature as social beings can lead to alienation. I also wish to draw briefly on the existential-phenomenological work of psychiatrist R.D. Laing, and his outlining of the defensive schizoid manoeuvres which in fact further their crisis and ultimately lead to schizophrenia. I will argue that Hegel's account of freedom can help achieve a fuller understanding of Laing's own arguments, as well as fill in some areas that are left under-explained. Using this synthesis of Laing and Hegel, I hope to make clear that the conditions which leave persons open to mental crises of various sorts are in fact conditions we all share in, and can therefore readily comprehend. There are close connections between our daily attempts at furthering our self-knowledge, revising our world views, or developing ourselves as persons, and the painful experiences of those suffering mental crisis. So while the mentally ill may seem at a great distance from us, the conditions which ground their suffering are a

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[1] Szasz is an excellent critic of traditional approaches to mental ailments, in particular the attempt to understand them on the traditional medicinal model, or the treatment of biological ailments. However, his critique is too one sided, seemingly denying any reality to the notion of 'mental illness'. While Laing is similarly critical of such practices insofar as they fail to treat their patients sufficiently as persons, and as failing to see their problems as problems of personhood, he is much more sympathetic to the reality of mental illness, and as such offers illuminating positive contributions. See Thomas Szasz, *The Myth of Mental Illness* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1974).; Thomas Szasz, *Psychiatry: The Science of Lies* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2008).

basic component of the human condition as a whole, and here lies the bridge to our being able to explain, understand, and possibly even better help them.

II - Hegel's structure of the will

Let me begin by giving a sketchy account of Hegel's structure of the will. Hegel takes the will to be a freely self-determining agency, that is to say an agency which wills *itself* in its act of determination. When I choose to do work in philosophy, this is my will realising its own self in the world as a particular thing. For this reason Hegel argues for two aspects to the will, where each taken on its own fails to capture the character of the will as self-determining agency, but taken together as a unity offers us an adequate account of the will as an individual entity, an entity which realizes its own free development in its act of determination. The two aspects are the universal aspect and the particular aspect, with the individual will being the unity of both. Let me take each in turn.

The universal aspect is one of absolute indeterminacy or the withdrawal from any particular content. This aspect of the will is negative freedom in its strongest sense; it is freedom from anything determinate, particular or limited which might count as a restriction on its universality. The will in its universal aspect is never bound by choice, but is always free to change its mind, to choose something else; as freedom it has no commitments to anything outside itself in order to sustain itself. It just *is*, in the form of a capacity common to all people, the absolute liberty of choice. We need the universal aspect of the will in order to avoid its being wholly determined by any particular external ends. If it were only external ends which determined my will, then it would lack the 'self' in self-determining, and be externally determined instead.

However, taken on its own the universal aspect is not enough, for in order to be self-determining it must actually determine something. This is to say that an understanding of the will as a mere capacity, whose character is entirely given prior to its act of self-determination is to give a one sided account. It is contradictory for the will to be a self-determining agency, and yet not achieve its character in its act of determination. And so here we have the particular aspect: in order to be a will, it must will some particular content. 'In so doing' to quote Winfield 'the will does not lose its universal character and become something other than itself. Rather, because the will must will to be what it is, and to will it must will something, the willing of a specific content does not cancel the will's

autonomy, but realizes it instead'.[2] Because of the particular aspect the will cannot be taken as a mere capacity, it is rather something performative, something which realizes itself in self-determined acts of particularisation. Freedom is thoroughgoing activity.

III - Freedom and personal identity are socially realized

Thus the will is the unity of universality and particularity; it is actual only insofar as it is individual, insofar as it determines its *own self* through determinate acts of particularisation. The next important insight of Hegel's is that the particular aspect can only take place within a wider social whole. This is the position I have spent most of this Thesis arguing for. Our ends are social ends, and our freedom depends on particular social structures being in place, within which we can act and so realise ourselves. As I have argued, our very ability to form a conception of the world, or to reflectively form a conception of ourselves, even the depths of emotional feeling and evaluative articulation of which we are capable, depends on social norms within which we have been trained to the point of some mastery. It is therefore only through identification with concrete forms of life, sustained by the ongoing shared activity of a large number of people, that we are able to be free, to realise ourselves in the world. I become free by identifying my will with the will of others. Isaiah Berlin gives a nice example of this identification of my will with the will of others or with social norms when he describes the musician learning a piece of music for the first time. Initially the laws of the song, the structure and the notes are external to his agency and a frustration of his freedom as he struggles to learn them, but 'after he has assimilated the pattern of the composer's score, and has made the composer's ends his own, [he has], by understanding it, identified himself with it, has changed it from an impediment to free activity into an element in that activity itself'[3] This is what Hegel means when he talks of the social world as the 'substance' of individuals.

The important point to take away from this is that the will is only real or realized, through social activity. To return to the structure of freedom, Hegel goes so far as to characterise the universal aspect taken on its own, prior to any social determination as 'the freedom of the void', which, if it tries to realize itself as negativity in the world, 'becomes in both the realm of politics and religion the fanaticism of destruction, demolishing the whole existing

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[2] Richard D. Winfield, "Freedom as Interaction: Hegel's Resolution to the Dilemma of Liberal Theory," in *Hegel's Philosophy of Action*, eds. Lawrence S. Stepelevich and David Lamb (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1983), 174.

[3] Berlin, *Two Concepts of Liberty*, 188.

social order... only in destroying something does this negative will have a feeling of its own existence.'[4] Hegel intriguingly argues that the Reign of Terror caused by the French Revolution was just this sort of destructive event, where the universal aspect of the will is taken as the whole of what constitutes freedom, and this pure negation was realized in the world through the destructive levelling of all things particular or differentiated. By showing a disregard for the social practices within which people already identified themselves and found their free activity, the result was not liberation, but the complete opposite. The take home message then is this: elevating the universal aspect of freedom can actually be detrimental to freedom, because in ignoring the particular aspect it does not take into account the whole structure of freedom. This is made especially clear when the particular aspect can only be achieved within a historical social order that we are born into, and within which we grow and develop ourselves in our social activity. We cannot wholesale deny the existing social world as part of an attempt to realise this supposedly universal capacity without undermining not just our freedom, but also our own identity and self-understanding.

Freedom as activity then, is the ability to identify one's own will, with the combined will of others or the social whole, and to then realize one's own will within that social whole, to find within the shared normative practices of the community at large, which one recognises and respects, a place for one's own activity according to one's own self-conception. This is the world I endorse, this is how I conceive myself to be, and here I am realizing that conception in communal space without hindrance or confusion.

IV - Autonomy and alienation

I would like, at last, to start connecting our argument so far with the problem of mental crisis. Authors have, of course, found room in the above account I have given for notions of personal alienation. For alienation is simply a failure to see oneself as part of the world, to recognise one's own activity as a part of the wider human reality or social practice. Insofar as my ability to freely realize myself within a social world that I identify with is frustrated, I am alienated. Thus, alienation is a form of unfreedom. If we conceive of social practice and community in terms of normative practices, then there is an enormous amount of room for incoherency and contradiction in the social norms I am trying to identify with, and to direct my actions within. For someone with drastically confused communal identifications, the

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[4] Hegel, *Elements of the Philosophy of Right*, 38.

moral map they use to orient themselves is a very confused one indeed, and the consequence may be of someone lost at sea, or in the grip of a severe identity crisis.[5]

My argument here can be condensed into the following: Given that the normative practices or social communities we are a part of constitute our identity, and given that such combined practices are numerous, unavoidably complex, often inarticulate, contradictory and fragmented, it follows that the same can be said of our identities. Consider the experience one has of growing up within the family circle, and the early values and aspirations one gains from this environment. Consider next, the familiar experience of first going to school and finding within this environment an influx of new aspirations and values. Our school peer groups here place new demands on us, set new standards, and it is often the case that people start to feel a conflicting pull between the aspirations of family life, and those of school life. Even within the school environment one may be involved in different and similarly conflicted normative spheres. As life moves on people tend to get involved in further communal practices: perhaps a church, various social groups, cultural or hobbyist demographics, sports clubs, work placements and so on, all of which bestow us with categories of understanding that interact. That is to say, we are not simply involved in each of these normative communities in an isolated way, rather, in our engagement with each community we also bring to bear all the categories of understanding which we have developed through our other normative communities, and amongst them try to form a coherent realization of ourselves.[6]

With our theory of self-realization in mind, we can imagine that a unified, homogenous social order with strict hierarchies of place involving set roles in the larger social system, would entail an easy identification and consequently untroubled process of realizing oneself in activity. I would have an untroubled sense of my identity and freedom, and the tasks that face me for a successful life. In a world such as this, there would be little room or need for any kind of radical social development, because self-realisation would unproblematically occur in such a world. I would lack any sense of inadequacy on my part aside perhaps from the fear that I will not be able to live up to the form of life bestowed upon me. I would never question that form of life itself or my own identity. A picture such

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[5] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 27.

[6] Laing charts in some detail the conflicted and confused interpersonal relationships that often exist within the family life alone, and which give rise to painful conceptions and self-conceptions, via an exploration of numerous patient and patient-family interviews. See R. D. Laing and A. Esterson, *Sanity, Madness and the Family* (London: Penguin Books, 1990).

as this also leaves little room for social criticism or self-development of a radical sort. As I argued in the last chapter, the critical development of self and society are an attempt to bring about conditions of free self-realisation, if those conditions are already present, then there is little need for radical criticism. However, a homogenous and unitary social order of the sort mentioned is a fantasy that never has existed, and is even less conceivable in our contemporary world. This is what Charles Taylor means when he claims that identity is an issue for us in a way that it never was before.[7] It is precisely because our social world is heterogeneous and fragmented that we are all to some degree engaged in an ongoing process of immanent critique, trying to critically engage with our social frameworks in a process of dialectical development to minimise alienation, and maximise free self-realization. Alienation is common to us all, and a driving force behind personal and social development.[8]

The reader should notice the connection between the issues I am discussing here, and those opened up at the end of the last chapter. I argued there that self-realisation involves forming a conception of ourselves which is realisable, which we can actualise within the social world of which we are members. To form a conception of ourselves which we cannot in fact bring into existence, is to forever fail to realise oneself in the world, or what amounts to the same, to always feels some degree of alienation or a lack of autonomy. However, this means that our self-conception must be internally coherent, and coherent with the conceptual space available in the social world. Consider Olga again, who faced the internal inconsistency of loving both Oblomov and Stolz. Olga held onto the belief that a woman could only love once, and so had to form a conception of herself that showed her to love only Stolz. However, we might imagine that she decided instead to drop her ethical belief that a woman can only love once. This then raises issues of external consistency. If the social world of which she is a member did not allow this as a legitimate conception of womanhood, then Olga's attempt to realise herself under that conception would be met with repeated frustrations. The force of these points should be recognised if the reader recalls how deeply embedded these conceptions are with the wider social activity and my own engagement within that activity.[9]

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[7] Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 28.

[8] Freud, Sigmund. *Civilization and its Discontents* . Translated by David McLintock. London: Penguin Books, 2004.

[9] It should go without saying that the details of real life attempts at forming self-conceptions are far more complex then I give expression to here (or indeed could give expression to here). Laing has

V - Laing's Account of Schizophrenic Breakdown

I have so far tried to stress two key points. First of all, any one-sided focus on the asocial indeterminate aspect of the will as mere capacity is to not do justice to the social dimension of freedom and the self, and to have a distortive or one-sided focus on freedom's universal aspect may in fact be destructive of freedom. Second of all, our attempts to freely realize ourselves within the social world often lead to varying degrees of alienation, though I have tried to suggest that this is a key part of the human condition, and a prime source of our own personal and social development.

Laing can be seen as sharing common ground with my preceding arguments. In his work 'The Divided Self', Laing defines the individual in Heideggerian terms as a being-in-the-world, as someone who experiences themselves as fundamentally embodied. Laing often uses this term just to mean 'in a body' but he also acknowledges that the body is the locus of our social activity. He writes 'The body clearly occupies an ambiguous transitional position between 'me' and the world; it is, on the one hand, the core and centre of my world, and on the other, it is an object in the world of the others'.[10] In this way Laing acknowledge the deep involvement of the human individual within the world of others. He also introduces the idea of someone who is ontologically insecure, meaning someone who feels uncertain in their being-in-the-world status, in their identity through inter-subjective relationships. Laing argues that 'the [ontologically insecure] individual in the ordinary circumstances of living may feel more unreal than real; in a literal sense, more dead than alive; precariously differentiated from the rest of the world, so that his identity and autonomy are always in question.'[11] In short, the ontologically insecure person does not have a firm experiential grasp on their own autonomous existence, they cannot see themselves as both independent and related to others in a manner that secures for them a clear sense of themselves, of where they end and others begin.

> We can say that in the individual whose own being is secure in this primary
> experiential sense, relatedness with others is potentially gratifying; whereas the

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written a series of "poems" which try to give expression to the various knots we tie ourselves into when trying to form conceptions of a situation and of ourselves within those situations. See R. D. Laing, *Knots* (London: Penguin Books, 1972).

[10] R. D. Laing, *The Divided Self* (London: Penguin Books, 1965), 131.

[11] Ibid., 42

ontologically insecure person is preoccupied with preserving rather than gratifying
himself: the ordinary circumstances of living threaten his *low threshold* of security.[12]

Thus, Laing give the example of a patient who, during the course of an argument with a
fellow patient, exclaimed aloud that they could not go on because their opponent was
arguing simply for the pleasure of triumph. The patient felt that while his opponent at best
won the argument, and at worse lost the argument, he himself was arguing in order to
preserve his very existence.[13] Laing gives the similar example of what he calls 'petrification',
where an ontologically insecure individual feels themselves so subject to the gaze of
another as to be reduced to an object, a non-self. This fear is so great that the insecure
individual engages in a defensive process of depersonalising every person they meet, of
treating them as non-persons; for ontologically insecure individual cannot be reduced to an
object by the gaze of a mere automaton - or so the defensive reasoning goes. Thus, 'if the
individual cannot take the realness, aliveness, autonomy, and identity of himself and others
for granted, then he has to become absorbed in contriving ways of trying to be real, of
keeping himself or others alive, of preserving his identity, in efforts, as he will often put it,
to prevent himself losing his self.'[14] However, it is these very attempts at defence, at
preserving one's autonomy in the face of an uneasy relationship with the world and others,
that the 'schizoid' patient in fact does great harm to their autonomous identity, and risks a
complete schizophrenic turn.

For Laing, ontological insecurity provides the basis for schizophrenic breakdown. When
someone is suffering the painful experience of ontological insecurity, where their social life
is not something gratifying but persecutory and painful, the schizoid patient attempts a
retreat from their embodied status. They try to set up an internal relationship with
themselves, where their body and everything that the body engages with, from social
relationships to felt sensation, comes to be seen more and more as inessential to their own
autonomous being. For the schizoid, they do not feel themselves to be real through their
activity within the world, or in social relationships – because these are painful and
confusing – rather, they try to identify more with something purely imaginary, or inner – an
unembodied self. They affect a split between what they take to be their outer 'false self' or
mere personality, and their inner 'true self'. Laing charts in impressive detail some of the

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[12] Ibid., 42

[13] Ibid., 43

[14] Ibid., 42

damages that this schizoid splitting entails, but I don't have time to work through them here. His basic argument though, is that the schizoid patient affects this disembodied manoeuvre because they feel that the outside world of bodies and social relationships is not a realization of their autonomous identity, but a threat to it. The disembodied manoeuvre is an attempt to secure ones autonomous identity against the threat of the outside world, but in actual fact, only serves to increase this sense of threat and further diminish the patients' autonomous identity. I will come back to this point.

Given that Laing takes ontological insecurity as the initial condition which grounds the onset of schizophrenia, it is a shame that he gives such a limited account of what it actually is, and how someone comes to have it. He settles for a phenomenological description of the experience of ontological insecurity, and suggests that its cause may be in genetic factors, or infantile development through parental relationships. Here is where my preceding account of alienation can offer us a better explanation. If someone achieves their own sense of autonomous identity through self-realization in the wider social order, and if this process fails to run smoothly or if they fail on an extreme level to find a coherent identification with which to guide their activity, then the resulting alienation is going to be so strong as to feel like an attack on their identity rather than a realization. Every action they make will feel uncertain and conflicted; the social norms which others operate under will feel foreign and distant. One can imagine that the world would take on a persecutory and painful quality. Here then, we can make sense of Laing's account of schizophrenia as an attempted measure of defence to secure one's own autonomous identity. The early schizoid stage will involve a sort of phenomenological trick in trying to conceive one's inner, unembodied self as the true self. However, given that our necessary ontology as human beings is to be socially embodied, such a phenomenological move can only be a sort of trick. It can only be a trick because, as has been argued extensively above, my very ability to conceive of myself and the world at all, is grounded on social practice and my participation therein. The attempt to maintain oneself through such withdrawal is only ever going to be a frustrated in practice.

We now need to make sense of why this phenomenological trick, as a defensive measure, is in fact self-destructive. We need to account for why, as Laing argues, such a move is not a way of securing one's autonomous identity, but actually a dangerous process that suffocates and shrinks one's identity, and only increases the sense of persecution from the outside world. This is where our discussion on the Hegelian structure of the will can offer us

some insight. Remember, because of the structure of the will, autonomous self-realization is only achieved socially. I think that a parallel can be drawn between Laing's account of the schizoid splitting of the self into a false 'outer self', and a real 'inner self', and Hegel's structure of the will. In this parallel the normal individual is embodied insofar as they determine themselves socially, and the schizoid's attempt to understand themselves in a disembodied way is nothing other than an attempt to identify one's own autonomous identity wholly with the universal aspect of the will, the aspect of absolute indeterminacy. In the same way that Hegel argued for the destructive influence of absolute indeterminacy on the socio-political sphere during the French revolution, as the levelling of the whole existing social order, so I would like to argue that to identify oneself with the universal aspect of freedom is to reign nothing but destruction on the self. To deny all social particularity, all of my socially embedded nature, to retreat into an inner citadel of non-content, is not to be a self at all; it is an attempt at being nothing. Laing phrases this as an attempt to avoid non-being, by playing at being nothing.

Three of the more prominent destructive elements involved in this ultimately impossible, schizoid manoeuvre are the following: 1) because one is never disembodied, but must always face the intrusion of the real, social world, the attempt to uncouple oneself is met with persistent despair and hopelessness; 2) in rejecting any connection with the outside world as constitutive of oneself, the schizoid comes to feel more and more like a vacuum, unable to be enriched by genuine creative relationships; 3) lacking the constant reality checks that we all face living in the social world, the phantasy-self of the schizoid runs free, he becomes everything and nothing at the same time. These and other difficulties that Laing details eventually result in schizophrenic break down. This primarily occurs when the chaotic vacuum of absolute indeterminacy, or the schizophrenics true 'inner self' tries to make contact with the world again. In its isolation it has ceased to operate like a normal person, and now confronts the world in madness.[15]

Laing quotes a particularly wise recovering schizophrenic, 'Peter', as saying the following about his condition: 'I've been sort of dead in a way. I cut myself off from other people and became shut up in myself. And I can see that you become dead in a way when you do this. You have to live in the world *with* other people. If you don't something dies inside. It

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[15] Ibid., 139

sounds silly. I don't really understand it, but something like that seems to happen. It's funny.'[16] I hope that my argument has shed some light on the experience here described.

VI - Conclusion

Hopefully I have shown that the underlying ground of mental illness as social alienation is something common to us all. It follows from the structure of freedom as social activity, and the consequent nature of the human individual as socially realised. To this end, personal and social development as the overcoming of alienation and the achievement of freedom is one point at the end of a long line. As we move down this line we have people who are despondent and frustrated in their social life, perhaps with a feeling of emptiness, then those suffering serious identity crises, followed by those who are progressively more and more mentally troubled, and at the extreme schizophrenia.

My tentative suggestion is that by failing to see certain sorts of mental illness in this way, that is to say, by distancing their predicament from that of our own, and seeing their condition as divorced from issues of personhood, we not only deprive them of the sort of understanding and possibly even treatment that may better help them achieve mental unity and happiness, but we also deprive ourselves of a potential critical tool. I have argued that at least some mental illnesses should be understood as the product of inadequate or incoherent social forms. A minimal number of people in mental crises might not be a sign of bad social forms, but given the rising concern for mental health in the modern world, we might want to view this as a sign of faulty or inadequate elements in our social practice. Dealing with the mentally ill may not simply be a matter of treating patients in isolation, but also in dealing with the ills of society that we all face.

The harder question is then detailing those aspects of our social order which hinder people's ability for coherent self-realization. Given that a homogenous or unitary society is not just improbable, but also arguably undesirable, it seems that we need a way of making coherent realization possible in a heterogeneous and multicultural world.

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[16] Ibid., 133

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