

The World Well Lost

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lucky accident—an empirical fact incapable of further explanation—or could more stringent requirements show this to be the *uniquely* legitimate solution, or one of a much smaller class than presently allowed? If so, could such requirements be derived within GMD, or would they require some higher perspective? The answer may be related to possible breakdown in GMD of the distinction between laws and boundary conditions, and the corresponding influence of cosmology. GMD may correctly imply a monistic ontology without its present laws providing a fully adequate account of it. Earman is correct that GMD excludes Mach's philosophical position, but Wheeler is simply trying to re-express in GMD language what Einstein found valuable in that position. Earman's ideas indicate further ways in which classical GMD itself points to a need for quantum supplementation.

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THE WORLD WELL LOST *

THE notion of alternative conceptual frameworks has been a commonplace of our culture since Hegel. Hegel's historicism gave us a sense of how there might be genuine novelty in the development of thought and of society. Such a historicist conception of thought and morals was, we may see by hindsight, rendered possible by Kant, himself the least historicist of philosophers. For Kant perfected and codified the two distinctions that are necessary to develop the notion of an "alternative conceptual framework"—the distinction between spontaneity and receptivity and the distinction between necessary and contingent truth. Since Kant, we find it almost impossible not to think of the mind as divided into active and passive faculties, the former using concepts to "interpret" what "the world" imposes on the latter. We also find it difficult not to distinguish between those concepts which the mind could hardly get along without and those which it can take or leave alone—and we think of truths about the former concepts as "necessary" in the most proper and paradigmatic sense of the term. But as soon as we have this picture of the

* To be presented in an APA symposium on The Possibility of Alternative Conceptual Frameworks, December 29, 1972. Commentators will be Bruce Aune and Milton Fisk; see this JOURNAL, this issue, 665-667 and 667-669, respectively.

mind in focus, it occurs to us, as it did to Hegel, that those all-important a priori concepts, those which determine what our experience or our morals will be, might have been different. We cannot, of course, imagine what an experience or a practice *that* different would be like, but we can abstractly suggest that the men of the Golden Age, or the inhabitants of the Fortunate Isles, or the mad, might shape the intuitions that are our common property in different molds, and might thus be conscious of a different "world."

Various attacks on the contrast between the observed and the theoretical (in, e.g., Kuhn, Feyerabend, and Sellars) have led recently to a new appreciation of Kant's point that to change one's concepts would be to change what one experiences, to change one's "phenomenal world." But this appreciation leads us to question the familiar distinction between spontaneity and receptivity. The possibility of different conceptual schemes highlights the fact that a Kantian unsynthesized intuition can exert no influence on how it is to be synthesized—or, at best, can exert only an influence we shall have to describe in a way as relative to a chosen conceptual scheme as our description of everything else. Insofar as a Kantian intuition is effable, it is just a perceptual judgment, and thus not *merely* "intuitive." Insofar as it is ineffable, it is incapable of having an explanatory function. This dilemma—a parallel to that which Hegelians raised concerning the thing-in-itself—casts doubt on the notion of a faculty of "receptivity." There seems no need to postulate an intermediary between the physical thrust of the stimulus upon the organ and the full-fledged conscious judgment that the properly programmed organism forms in consequence. Thus there is no need to split the organism up into a receptive wax tablet on the one hand and an "active" interpreter of what nature has there imprinted on the other. So the Kantian point that different a priori concepts would, if there could be such things, give a different phenomenal world gives place either to the straightforward but paradoxical claim that different concepts give us different worlds, or to dropping the notion of "conceptual framework" altogether. 'Phenomenal' can no longer be given a sense, once Kantian "intuitions" drop out. For the suggestion that our concepts shape neutral material no longer makes sense once there is nothing to serve as this material. The physical stimuli themselves are not a useful substitute, for the contrast between the "positives" which the inventive mind constructs to predict and con-

trol stimuli, and the stimuli themselves, can be no more than a contrast between the effable world and its ineffable cause.¹

The notion of *alternative* conceptual frameworks thus contains the seeds of doubt about the root notion of "conceptual framework," and so of its own destruction. For once the faculty of receptivity and, more generally, the notion of neutral material, become dubious, doubt spreads easily to the notion of conceptual thought as "shaping" and thus to the notion of the World-Spirit moving from one set of a priori concepts to the next.

But the doubts about the Hegelian picture produced by an attack on the given/interpretation distinction are vague and diffuse by comparison with those which result from attacking the necessary/contingent distinction. Quine's suggestion that the difference between a priori and empirical truth is merely that between the relatively difficult to give up and the relatively easy brings in its train the notion that there is no clear distinction to be drawn between questions of meaning and questions of fact. This, in turn, leaves us (as Quine has pointed out in criticizing Carnap) with no distinction between questions about alternative "theories" and questions about alternative "frameworks."² The philosophical notion of "meaning," against which Quine is protesting is, as he says, the latest version of the "idea idea"—a philosophical tradition one of whose incarnations was the Kantian notion of "concept"; and the notion of a choice among "meaning postulates" is the latest version of the notion of a choice among alternative conceptual schemes. Once the necessary is identified with the analytic and the analytic is explicated in terms of meaning, an attack on the notion of what Harman has called the "philosophical" sense of 'meaning' becomes an attack on the notion of "conceptual framework" in

¹ T. S. Kuhn, "Reflections on My Critics," in I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave, eds., *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (New York: Cambridge, 1970), p. 276, says that "the stimuli to which the participants in a communication breakdown respond are, under pain of solipsism, the same" and then continues by saying that their "programming" must be so also, since men "share a history . . . a language, an every day world, and most of a scientific one." On the view I should like to support, the *whole* anti-solipsist burden is borne by the "programming," and the "stimuli" (like the noumenal unsynthesized intuitions) drop out. If a stimulus is thought of as somehow "neutral" in respect to different conceptual schemes, it can be so only, I would argue, by becoming "a wheel that can be turned though nothing else moves with it."

² See W. V. Quine, "On Carnap's View on Ontology," in *The Ways of Paradox* (New York: Random House, 1966), pp. 126-134.

any sense that assumes a distinction of kind between this notion and that of "empirical theory."³

So far we have seen how criticisms of givenness and of analyticity both serve to dismantle the Kantian notion of "conceptual framework"—the notion of "concepts necessary for the constitution of experience, as opposed to concepts whose application is necessary to control or predict experience." I have been arguing that without the notions of "the given" and of "the a priori" there can be no notion of "the constitution of experience." Thus there can be no notion of alternative experiences, or alternative worlds, to be constituted by the adoption of new a priori concepts. But there is a simpler and more direct objection to the notion of "alternative conceptual framework," to which I now wish to turn. This objection has recently been put forward, in connection with Quine's thesis of indeterminacy, by Davidson and by Stroud.⁴ This argument is verificationist, and turns on the unrecognizability of persons using a conceptual framework different from our own (or, to put it another way, the unrecognizability as a *language* of anything that is not translatable into English). The connection between Quine's attack on "conventionalist" notions of meaning and this verificationist argument is supposed to be as follows: if one thinks of "meaning" in terms of the discovery of the speech dispositions of foreigners rather than in terms of mental essences (ideas, concepts, chunks of the crystalline structure of thought), then one will not be able to draw a clear distinction between the foreigner's using words different in meaning from any words in our language and the foreigner's having many false beliefs. We can and must play off awkward translations against ascriptions of quaint beliefs, and vice versa, but we will never

³ See Gilbert Harman, "Quine on Meaning and Existence, I," *Review of Metaphysics*, xxi, 1 (September 1967): 124–151, p. 142.

⁴ I first became aware of this argument, and of the importance of the issues I am here discussing, on reading the sixth of the Locke Lectures which Davidson gave at Oxford in 1970. These lectures are at present still unpublished, and I am most grateful to Davidson for permission to see the manuscript, and also the manuscript of his 1971 University of London Lectures on "Conceptual Relativism"—the more especially as I want to turn Davidson's argument to purposes for which he would have slim sympathy. After reading Davidson's unpublished material, I read Barry Stroud's presentation of a partially similar argument in "Conventionalism and the Indeterminacy of Translation," in Davidson and J. Hintikka, eds., *Words and Objections: Essays on the Work of W. V. Quine* (Dordrecht: Reidel, 1969), esp. pp. 89–96. Stroud and Davidson concur in rejecting the notion of "alternative conceptual frameworks," but Davidson goes on to draw explicitly the radical conclusion that "most of our beliefs must be true." It is this latter conclusion on which I shall be focusing in this paper.

reach the limiting case of a foreigner all or most of whose beliefs must be viewed as false according to a translating scheme that pairs off all or most of his terms as identical in meaning with some terms of English. We will not reach this case (so the Davidsonian argument goes) because any such translation scheme would merely show that we had not succeeded in finding a translation at all.

But (to extend Davidson's argument a bit) if we can never find a translation, why should we think that we are faced with language users at all? It is, of course, possible to imagine humanoid organisms making sounds of great variety at one another in very various circumstances with what appear to be various effects upon the interlocutors' behavior. But suppose that repeated attempts systematically to correlate these sounds with the organisms' environment and behavior fail. What should we say? One suggestion might be that the analytic hypotheses we are using in our tentative translation schemes use concepts that we do not share with the natives—because the natives “carve up the world” differently, or have different “quality spaces” or something of the sort. But could there be a way of deciding between this suggestion and the possibility that the organisms' sounds are *just* sounds? Once we imagine different ways of carving up the world, nothing could stop us from attributing “untranslatable languages” to *anything* that emits a variety of signals. But, so this verificationist argument concludes, this degree of open-endedness shows us that the purported notion of an untranslatable language is as fanciful as that of an invisible color.

It is important to note that Quinean arguments against analyticity and for the indeterminacy of translation are not necessary for this argument. The argument stands on its own feet—Quine's only contribution to it being to disparage the possibility that ‘meaning’ can mean something more than what is contextually defined in the process of predicting the foreigner's behavior. To adopt this view of meaning is all that is required to suggest that the notion of “people who speak our language but believe nothing that we believe” is incoherent.⁵ To *show* that it is incoherent, however—to complete the argument—one would have to show in detail that no amount of nonlinguistic behavior by the foreigner could

⁵ I have argued elsewhere (“Indeterminacy of Translation and of Truth” forthcoming in *Synthese*) that Quine's doctrine that there is no “matter of fact” for translations to be right or wrong about, is philosophical overkill, and that the “idea idea” is adequately discredited by attacks on the Kantian distinctions discussed above.

be sufficient to underwrite a translation that made all or most of his beliefs false.⁶ For it might be the case, for example, that the way in which the foreigner dealt with trees while making certain sounds made it clear that we had to translate some of his utterances as "These are not trees," and so on for everything else with which he had dealings. Some of his utterances might be translated as: "I am not a person," "These are not words," "One should never use *modus ponens* if one wishes valid arguments," "Even if I were thinking, which I am not, that would not show that I exist." We might ratify these translations by showing that his non-linguistic ways of handling himself and others showed that he actually did hold such paradoxical beliefs. The only way to show that this suggestion cannot work, would be actually to tell the whole story about this hypothetical foreigner. It might be that a story could be told to show the coherence of these false beliefs with each other and with his actions, or it might not. To show that Davidson and Stroud were right would be to show that, indeed, no such story was tellable.

There is, I think no briefer way to decide on the soundness of this a priori argument against the possibility of alternative conceptual frameworks than to run over such possible stories. But this inconclusiveness is a feature this argument has in common with all interesting verificationist anti-skeptical arguments. It conforms to the following pattern: (1) the skeptic suggests that our own beliefs (about, e.g., other minds, tables and chairs, or how to translate French) have viable alternatives which unfortunately can never be known to hold but which justify the suspension of judgment; (2) the anti-skeptic replies that the very meaning of the terms used shows that the alternatives suggested are not merely dubious but in principle unverifiable, and thus not reasonable alternatives at all; (3) the skeptic rejoins that verificationism confuses the *ordo essendi* with the *ordo cognoscendi* and that it may well be that some alternative is true even though we shall never know that it is; (4) the anti-skeptic replies that the matter is not worth debating until the skeptic spells out the suggested alternative in full detail, and insinuates that this cannot be done; (5) the controversy degenerates into a dispute about assuming the burden of proof, with the skeptic claiming that it is not up to him to build up a coherent story around his suggested alternative but rather up to the anti-skeptic to show a priori that this cannot be

⁶ The importance of this point was shown me by Michael Friedman. I am grateful also to Michael Williams for criticisms of my general line of argument.

done. In the case at hand, the skeptic is the fan of "alternative conceptual frameworks," practicing his skepticism on a global scale by insinuating that our entire belief structure might dissolve, leaving not a wrack behind, to be replaced by a complete but utterly dissimilar alternative. The Davidsonian anti-skeptic is in the position of asking how one could come to call any pattern of behavior evidence for such an alternative. The skeptic replies that perhaps we could *never* come to do so, but this merely shows how complete our egocentric predicament is. And so it goes.⁷

In this case, however (unlike the case of limited skepticism about whether, e.g., 'pain' or 'red' means to me what it does to you) the skeptic's global approach gives him a significant dialectical advantage. For he can here sketch what might bring about the actualization of his suggested alternative without being caught up in disagreement about how to interpret concrete experimental results. He can simply refer us to ordinary scientific and cultural progress extrapolated just beyond the range of science fiction. Consider, he will say, the following view of man's history and prospects. Our views about matter and motion, the good life for man, and much else have changed in subtle and complicated ways since the days of the Greeks. Many of the planks in Neurath's boat have been torn up and relaid differently. But since (1) we can describe why it was "rational" for each such change to have occurred, and (2) *many* more of our beliefs are the same as Greek beliefs than are different (e.g., our belief that barley is better than nettles and freedom than slavery, that red is a color, and that lightning often precedes thunder), we should not yet wish to talk about "an alternative conceptual framework." And yet we must admit that even the relatively slight refurbishings of the boat which have occupied the past two thousand years are enough to give us considerable difficulty in knowing just *how* to translate some Greek sentences, and just *how* to explain the "rationality" of the changes that have intervened. Again, the various shifts that have taken place in our understanding of the subject matter of the beliefs we purportedly "share" with the Greeks (resulting from, e.g., the development of new strains of nettles, new forms of slavery, new ways of producing color perceptions, and new explanations of the sound of the thunder and the look of the lightning) make us a little dubious about

⁷ I have tried to develop this view of the course of the argument between verificationists and skeptics in "Verificationism and Transcendental Arguments," *Noûs*, v, 1 (February 1971): 3-14, and in "Criteria and Necessity" (forthcoming in *Noûs*).

the claim to shared belief. They create the feeling that here too we may be imposing on history rather than describing it. Let us now extrapolate from ourselves to the Galactic civilization of the future, which we may assume to have moved and reshaped 10^{60} planks in the boat we are in, whereas since Aristotle we have managed to shift only about 10^{20} . Here the suggestion that we interpret these changes as a sequence of rational changes in views about a common matter seems a bit forced, and the fear that even the most empathic Galactic historians of science "won't really understand us properly" quite appropriate. So, our skeptic concludes, the Davidson-Stroud point that to describe in detail the Galactic civilization's beliefs is automatically to make them merely alternative theories within a common framework is not enough. Granting this point, we can still see that it is rational to expect that the incommunicably and unintelligibly novel will occur, even though, *ex hypothesi*, we can neither write nor read a science-fiction story that describes Galactic civilization. Here, then, we have a case in which there really is a difference between the *ordo cognoscendi* and the *ordo essendi*, and no verificationist argument can apply.

To intensify the antinomy we confront here, let us agree for the sake of argument that it is a necessary condition for an entity to be a person that it have or once have had the potentiality for articulating beliefs and desires comparable in quantity and complexity to our own. This latter clause is required if we are to include (for example) infants and the insane while excluding dogs and the simpler sort of robots. But this clause will, of course, give trouble when we come to cases where it is not clear whether we are educating a person by developing his latent potentialities (as by teaching a child a language) or transforming a thing into a person (as by clamping some additional memory units onto the robot). Bating this difficulty for the moment, however, let us simply note that this formulation has the consequence that ascribing personhood, ascribing a language, and ascribing beliefs and desires go hand in hand. So, if Davidson is right, ascribing personhood and ascribing mostly the *right* beliefs and mostly the *appropriate* desires go hand in hand. This means that we shall never be able to have evidence that there exist persons who speak languages in principle untranslatable into English or hold beliefs all or most of which are incompatible with our own.

Despite this, however, we can extrapolate to a story about how just such persons might come into existence. So it seems that the world may come to be full of persons whom we could never con-

ceivably recognize as such. A Galactic time-traveler come among us, we now realize, would eventually be forced to abandon his original presumption that we were persons when he failed to correlate our utterances with our environment in any way that enabled him to construct an English-Galactic lexicon. Our initial assumption that the Galactic emissary was a person would be frustrated by the same sort of discovery. How sad that two cultures who have so much to offer each other should fail to recognize each other's existence! What pathos in the thought that we, time-traveling among our Neanderthal ancestors, should stand to them as the Galactic stands to us! But the situation is even worse than that, for reasons I hinted at earlier. We can now see that, for all we know, our *contemporary* world is filled with unrecognizable persons. Why should we ignore the possibility that the trees and the bats and the butterflies and the stars all have their various untranslatable languages in which they are busily expressing their beliefs and desires to one another? Since their organs suit them to receive such different stimuli and to respond in such different ways, it is hardly surprising that the syntax and the primitive predicates of their languages bear no relation to our own.

The inclusion of this last possibility may suggest that something has gone wrong. Perhaps we should not have been so ready to admit the possibility of extrapolation. Perhaps we were too hasty in thinking that attributions of personhood and of articulate belief went hand in hand—for surely we know in advance that butterflies are not persons and therefore know in advance that they will have no beliefs to express. For myself, however, I see nothing wrong with the proposed extrapolation, and I do not see what 'known in advance not to be a person' could mean when applied to the butterfly save that the butterfly doesn't seem human. But there is no particular reason to think that our remote ancestors or descendants would seem human right off the bat either. Let the notion of a person be as complex and multiply criterioned as you please, still I do not think that it will come unstuck from that of a complex interlocked set of beliefs and desires, nor that the latter notion can be separated from that of the potentiality for translatable speech. So I think that to rule the butterflies out is to rule out the Galactics and the Neanderthals, and that to allow extrapolation to the latter is to allow for the possibility that the very same beliefs and desires which our Galactic descendants will hold are being held even now by the butterflies. We can dig in our heels and say that terms like 'person', 'belief', 'desire', and 'language' are

ultimately as token-reflexive as 'here' and 'now' or 'morally right', so that in each case essential reference is made to where *we* are. But that will be the *only* way of ruling out the Galactic, and thus the *only* way of ruling out the butterfly.

If this seems puzzling, I think it will seem less so if we consider some parallels. Suppose we say that there is no poetry among the Patagonians, no astronomy among the aborigines, and no morality among the inhabitants of the planet Mongo. And suppose a native of each locale, protesting against our parochial view, explains that what they have is a *different* sort of poetry, astronomy, or morals, as the case may be. For the Patagonian, neither Homer nor Shelley nor Mallarmé nor Dryden look in the least like poets. He admits, however, that Milton and Swinburne are both faintly reminiscent, in the same only vaguely describable respect, of the paradigms of Patagonian poesy. Those paradigms strike him as clearly fulfilling some of the roles in his culture which our poets fulfill in ours, though not all. The aborigine knows nothing of the equinoxes and the solstices, but he does distinguish planets from stars. However, he uses the same term to refer to planets, meteors, comets, and the sun. The stories he tells about the movements of these latter bodies are bound up with a complicated set of stories about divine providence and cure of diseases, whereas the stories told about the stars have to do exclusively with sex. The inhabitants of the planet Mongo appear shocked when people tell the truth to social equals, and surprised and amused when people refrain from torturing helpless wanderers. They seem to have no taboos at all about sex, but a great many about food. Their social organizations seem held together half by a sort of lottery, and half by brute force. The inhabitants of Mongo, however, profess to be revolted by the Earthlings' failure to grasp the moral point of view, and by our apparent confusion of morality with etiquette and with expedients for ensuring social order.

In the three cases just cited the question, Is it a *different sort* of poetry (or astronomy, or morality), or do they simply have *none*? is obviously not the sort of question it is very important to answer. I suggest that the question, Are the Galactics, or the butterflies, different sorts of persons than ourselves or not persons at all? is also not very important. In the three cases mentioned, one can extend the argument indefinitely by pressing for further details. In the global case, where *ex hypothesi* no translation scheme will work, we cannot. But in the global case (having beliefs *tout court*), as in the particular cases of having beliefs about astronomy

or about right and wrong, what is in question is just the best way of predicting, controlling, and generally coping with the entities in question. In the course of figuring this out, we encounter some of the same hard questions I referred to above—the questions that arise when coping with such borderline cases as fetuses, pre-linguistic infants, computers, and the insane—Do they have civil rights? Must we try to justify ourselves to them? Are they thinking or acting on instinct? Are they holding beliefs or merely responding to stimuli? Is that a word to which they assign a sense, or are they just sounding off on cue? I doubt that many philosophers believe any longer that procedures for answering such questions are built into “our language” waiting to be discovered by “conceptual analysis.” But if we do not believe this, perhaps we can be content to say, in the global case, that the question, Might there be alternative conceptual frameworks to our own, held by persons whom we could never recognize as persons? is in the same case. I doubt that we can ever adumbrate general ways of answering questions like, Is it a conceptual framework very different from our own, or is it a mistake to think of it as a language at all? Is it a person with utterly different organs, responses, and beliefs, with whom communication is thus forever impossible, or rather just a complexly behaving thing?

This “don’t-care” conclusion is all I have to offer concerning the antinomy created by the Davidson-Stroud argument on the one hand and the skeptic’s extrapolation on the other. But this should not be thought of as denigrating the importance of what Davidson and Stroud are saying. On the contrary, I think that, having seen through this antinomy and having noticed the relevance of the original argument to our application of the notion of “person”, we are now in a better position to see the importance that it has. This importance can be brought out by (a) looking at the standard objection to the coherence theory of truth (“it cuts truth off from the world”) and (b) recurring to our previous discussion of the Kantian roots of the notion of “conceptual framework.”

Consider first the traditional objection to coherence theories of truth which says that, although our only *test* of truth must be the coherence of our beliefs with one another, still the *nature* of truth must be “correspondence to reality.” It is thought a sufficient argument for this view that Truth is One, whereas alternative equally coherent sets of beliefs are Many.⁸ In reply to this argument, de-

⁸ For a recent formulation of this objection, see John L. Pollock, “Perceptual Knowledge,” *Philosophical Review*, LXXX, 3 (July 1971): 290-292.

fenders of coherence and pragmatic theories of truth have argued that our so-called "intuition" that Truth is One is simply the expectation that, if all perceptual reports were in, there would be one optimal way of selecting among them and all other possible statements so as to have one ideally proportioned system of true beliefs. To this reply, the standard rebuttal is that there would clearly be many such possible systems, among which we could choose only on aesthetic grounds. A further, and more deeply felt, rebuttal is that it is the *world* that determines the truth. The accident of which glimpses of the world our sense organs have vouchsafed us, and the further accidents of the predicates we have entrenched or the theories whose proportions please us, may determine what we have a right to believe. But how could they determine the *truth*?⁹

Now the Davidson-Stroud argument supplies a simple, if temporizing, answer to this standard objection to the coherence theory. Since most of our beliefs (though not any particular one) simply *must* be true—for what could count as evidence that the vast majority of them were not?—the specter of alternative conceptual frameworks shrinks to the possibility that there might be a number of equally good ways to modify slightly our present set of beliefs in the interest of greater predictive power, charm, or what have you. The Davidson-Stroud point makes us remember, among other things, what a very small proportion of our beliefs are changed when our paradigms of physics, or poetry, or morals, change—and makes us realize how few of them *could* change. It makes us realize that the number of beliefs that changed among the educated classes of Europe between the thirteenth and the nineteenth centuries is ridiculously small compared to the number that survived intact. So this argument permits us to say: it is just not the case that there are "alternative" coherent global sets of beliefs. It is perfectly true that there will always be areas of inquiry in which alternative incompatible sets of beliefs are "tied." But the fact that we shall *always* be holding mostly true beliefs and, thus, presumably be "in touch with the world" the vast majority of the time makes this point seem philosophically innocuous. In particular, the claim that, since truth is One and, therefore, is "correspondence,"

⁹ This sort of question is at the root of the attempt to distinguish between a "theory of truth" and a "theory of evidence" in reply to such truth-as-assertibility theorists as Sellars—see Harman's criticism of Sellars on this point in "Sellars' Semantics," *Philosophical Review*, LXXIX, 3 (July 1970): 404–419, pp. 409ff., 417ff.

we must resurrect a foundationalist epistemology to explain "how knowledge is possible" becomes otiose.¹⁰ We shall automatically be "in touch with the world" (most of the time) whether or not we have any incorrigible, or basic, or otherwise privileged or foundational statements to make.

But this way of dealing with the claim that "it is the *world* that determines what is true" may easily seem a fraud. For, as I have been using it, the Davidson-Stroud view seems to perform the conjuring trick of substituting the notion of "the unquestioned vast majority of our beliefs" for the notion of "the world." It reminds us of such coherence theorists as Royce, who claim that our notion of "the world" is just the notion of the ideally coherent contents of an ideally large mind, or of the pragmatists' notion of "funded experience"—those beliefs which are not at the moment being challenged, because they present no problems and no one has bothered to think of alternatives to them. In all these cases—Davidson and Stroud, Royce, Dewey—it may well seem that the issue about truth is just being ducked. For our notion of the world—it will be said—is not a notion of unquestioned beliefs, or unquestionable beliefs, or ideally coherent beliefs, but rather of a hard, unyielding, rigid, *être-en-soi* which stands aloof, sublimely indifferent to the attentions we lavish upon it. The true realistic believer will view idealisms and pragmatisms with the same suspicion with which the true believer in the God of our Fathers will view, for example, Tillich's talk of an "object of ultimate concern."¹¹

Now, to put my cards on the table, I think that the realistic true believer's notion of the world is an obsession rather than an intuition. I also think that Dewey was right in thinking that the only intuition we have of the world as determining truth is just the intuition that we must make our new beliefs conform with a vast body of platitudes, unquestioned perceptual reports, and the like. So I am happy to interpret the upshot of the Davidson-Stroud argument in a Deweyan way.

¹⁰ See Pollock, *op. cit.*, for a defense of the claim that, once we reject a coherence theory of justification, such an explanation in foundationalist terms becomes necessary.

¹¹ For examples of the programmatic passion that realism can inspire, see the "Platform of the Association for Realistic Philosophy" in John Wild, ed., *The Return to Reason* (Chicago: Henry Regnery, 1953); and the "Program and First Platform of Six Realists," in Edwin B. Holt, *et al.*, *The New Realism* (New York: Macmillan, 1912), pp. 471ff.

But I have no arguments against the true believer's description of our so-called "intuitions." All that can be done with the claim that "only the *world* determines truth" is to point out the equivocation in the realists' own use of 'world'. In the sense in which "the world" is just whatever that vast majority of our beliefs not currently in question are currently thought to be about, there is of course no argument.¹² If one accepts the Davidson-Stroud position, then "the world" will just be the stars, the people, the tables, and the grass—all those things which nobody except the occasional "scientific realist" philosopher thinks might not exist. The fact that the vast majority of our beliefs must be true will, on this view, guarantee the existence of the vast majority of the things we now think we are talking about. So in one sense of 'world'—the sense in which (except for a few fringe cases like gods, neutrinos, and natural rights) we now know perfectly well what the world is like and could not possibly be wrong about it—there is no argument about the point that it is the world that determines truth. All that "determination" comes to is that our belief that snow is white is true because snow is white, that our beliefs about the stars are true because of the way the stars are laid out, and so on.

But this trivial sense in which "truth" is "correspondence to reality" and "depends upon a reality independent of our knowledge" is, of course, not enough for the realist.¹³ What he wants is

¹² I say "are currently thought to be about" rather than "are about" in order to skirt an issue that might be raised by proponents of a "causal theory of reference." Such a theory might suggest that we are in fact now talking about (referring to) what the Galactics will be referring to, but that the Galactics might know what this was and we might not. (The relevance of such theories of reference was pointed out to me by Michael Friedman and by Fred Dretske.) My own view, which I cannot develop here, is that an attempt to clarify epistemological questions by reference to "reference" will always be explaining the obscure by the more obscure—explicating notions ("knowledge," "truth") which have some basis in common speech in terms of a contrived and perpetually controversial philosophical notion.

¹³ I do not wish to be taken as suggesting the triviality of Tarski's semantic theory, which seems to me not a theory relevant to epistemology (except perhaps, as Davidson has suggested, to the epistemology of language learning). I should regard Tarski as founding a new subject, not as solving an old problem. I think that Davidson is right in saying that, in the sense in which Tarski's theory is a correspondence theory, "it may be the case that no battle is won, or even joined between correspondence theories and others" ["True to the Facts," this JOURNAL, LXVI, 21 (Nov. 6, 1969): 748-764, p. 761]. The philosophically controversial "correspondence theory of truth" to which coherence and pragmatic theories were supposed alternatives is not the theory Strawson (quoted by Davidson, *op. cit.*, p. 763) identifies as "to say that a statement is true is to say that a certain speech-episode is related in a certain conventional

precisely what the Davidson-Stroud argument prevents him from having—the notion of a world so “independent of our knowledge” that it might, for all we know, prove to contain none of the things we have always thought we were talking about. He wants to go from, say, “we might be wrong about what the stars are” to “none of the things we talk about might be anything like what we think they are.” Given this projection from, as Kant would say, the “conditioned” to the “unconditioned,” it is no wonder that antinomies are easily generated.

The notion of “the world” as used in a phrase like ‘different conceptual schemes carve up the world differently’ must be the notion of something *completely* unspecified and unspecifiable—the thing-in-itself, in fact. As soon as we start thinking of “the world” as atoms and the void, or sense data and awareness of them, or “stimuli” of a certain sort brought to bear upon organs of a certain sort, we have changed the name of the game. For we are now well within some particular theory about how the world is. But for purposes of developing a controversial and nontrivial doctrine of truth as correspondence, only an utterly vague characterization in some such terms as ‘cause of the impacts upon our receptivity and goal of our faculty of spontaneity’ will do. “Truth” in the sense of “truth taken apart from any theory” and “world” taken as “what determines such truth” are notions that were (like the terms ‘subject’ and ‘object’, ‘given’ and ‘consciousness’) made for each other. Neither can survive apart from the other.

To sum up this point, I want to claim that “the world” is either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone: those planks in the boat which are at the moment not being moved about. It seems to me that epistemology since Kant has shuttled back and forth between these two meanings of the term ‘world’, just as moral philosophy since Plato has shuttled back and forth between ‘the Good’ as a name for an ineffable touchstone of inquiry which might lead to the rejection of *all* our present moral views, and as a name for the ideally coherent synthesis of as many of those views as possible. This equivocation seems to me essential to the position of those philosophers who see “realism” or “the correspondence theory of truth” as controversial or exciting theses.

way to something in the world exclusive of itself.” For this latter view should, as far as it goes, be perfectly acceptable to, e.g., Blanshard or Dewey.

To remove altogether the "realistic" temptation to use the word 'world' in the former vacuous sense, we should need to eschew once and for all a whole galaxy of philosophical notions that have encouraged this use—in particular, the Kantian distinctions I discussed at the outset. For suppose we have a simple theory of the eye of the mind either getting, or failing to get, a clear view of the natures of kinds of things—the sort of theory we get, say, in parts of Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*. Then the notion of alternative sets of concepts will make no clear sense. *Nous* cannot err. It is only when we have some form of the notion that the mind is split between "simple ideas" or "passively received intuitions" on the one hand and a range of complex ideas (some signifying real, and some only nominal, essences) on the other, that *either* the coherence theory of truth *or* the standard objections to it can begin to look plausible. Only then is the notion plausible that inquiry consists in getting our "representations" into shape, rather than simply describing the world. If we no longer have a view about knowledge as the result of manipulating *Vorstellungen*, then I think we can return to the simple Aristotelian notion of truth as correspondence with reality with a clear conscience—for it will now appear as the uncontroversial triviality that it is.

To develop this claim about the way in which Kantian epistemology is linked with the notion of a nontrivial correspondence theory of truth and thus with the "realist's" notion of "the world" would require another paper, and I shall not try to press it further. Instead I should like to conclude by recalling some of the historical allusions I have made along the way, in order (as Sellars says) to place my conclusions in philosophical space. I said at the outset that the notion of "conceptual framework" and, thus, that of "alternative conceptual framework" depend upon presupposing some standard Kantian distinctions. These distinctions have been the common target of Wittgenstein, Quine, Dewey, and Sellars. I can now express the same point by saying that the notion of "the world" that is correlative with the notion of "conceptual framework" is simply the Kantian notion of a thing-in-itself, and that Dewey's dissolution of the Kantian distinctions between receptivity and spontaneity and between necessity and contingency thus leads naturally to the dissolution of the true realistic believer's notion of "the world." If you start out with Kant's epistemology, in short, you will wind up with Kant's transcendental metaphysics. Hegel, as I suggested earlier, kept the epistemology, but tried to drop the thing-in-itself, thus making himself, and idealism generally, a patsy

for realistic reaction. But Hegel's historical sense—the sense that nothing, including an a priori concept, is immune from cultural development—provided the key to Dewey's attack on the epistemology that Hegel shared with Kant. This attack was blunted by Dewey's use of the term 'experience' as an incantatory device for blurring every possible distinction, and so it was not until more sharply focused criticisms were formulated by Wittgenstein, Quine, and Sellars that the force of Dewey's point about "funded experience" as the "cash-value" of the notion of "the world" could be seen. But now that these criticisms have taken hold, the time may have come to try to recapture Dewey's "naturalized" version of Hegelian historicism. In this historicist vision, the arts, the sciences, the sense of right and wrong, and the institutions of society are not attempts to embody or formulate truth or goodness or beauty. They are attempts to solve problems—to modify our beliefs and desires and activities in ways that will bring us greater happiness than we have now. I want to suggest that this shift in perspective is the natural consequence of dropping the receptivity/spontaneity and intuition/concept distinctions, and more generally of dropping the notion of "representation" and the view of man that Dewey has called "the spectator theory" and Heidegger, the "separation of *physis* and *idea*." Because the idealists kept this general picture and occupied themselves with redefining the "object of knowledge," they gave idealism and the "coherence theory" a bad name—and realism and the "correspondence theory" a good one. But if we can come to see both the coherence and correspondence theories as noncompeting trivialities, then we may finally move beyond realism and idealism and to the point at which, in Wittgenstein's words, we are capable of stopping doing philosophy when we want to.

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RORTY ON LANGUAGE AND THE WORLD *

RORTY formulates two main lines of objection to the thesis that there can be alternative conceptual frameworks. He first claims that the acceptability of the thesis is conditional on the viability of two distinctions drawn by Kant—namely,

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