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# OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE IN EDUCATION

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1982

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# ABSTRACT


This thesis examines and ultimately rejects the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge, according to which education is necessarily indoctrinatory because it cannot be based on objective knowledge.

In Part One discussion centres on the subjectivist claim that there can be no objective knowledge. It is argued in response to this claim that justified true belief constitutes objective knowledge. The notion of justification is then analysed as the survival of critical tests, a procedure which is made possible by criteria of rationality which are universally valid and can themselves be rationally justified.

Part Two investigates the methodological implications of the objectivist epistemology put forward in Part One. The subjectivists claim that objectivism undermines the sociology of knowledge. In reply it is maintained that objectivism is compatible with the sociological investigation of knowledge and indeed widens its scope by permitting a critical approach.

Two intermediate conclusions have therefore been established: that there can be objective knowledge and that recognising that fact does not compromise the sociological investigation of institutions for transmitting it.

Accordingly, the way is open to examine in Part Three the specifically educational claim made by subjectivists, namely, that the methods and content of education are necessarily indoctrinatory and exploitative. This claim is rejected on the grounds that the curriculum, and the educational judgements based upon it, are potentially objective. The forms of knowledge provide an objective framework for the curriculum, because they can be transcendentally deduced from the concept of rational action. The rational form of sensibility is the set of preconditions of acting for a reason; they give rise to the forms of knowledge, which constitute the preconditions of acting for a reason in the world as we know it.

It is concluded that only objectivism makes possible a critical attitude to knowledge and institutions and that subjectivism, if widely accepted, would lead to the subordination of reason to irrational forces.

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## INTRODUCTION

The central question of this thesis is whether knowledge and rationality carry within themselves the seeds of their own destruction. Some of those who set out in search of knowledge come to believe as a result of their inquiries that the object of their quest is not what they took it to be; seeking to discover the way the world actually is, they are led to conclude that all they can hope to find is a reflection of their own needs and interests; the grail is but a beaker. Similarly, some of those whose aim is to formulate the principles of rational thought and action are led by reason to deny that anything that is thought or done can be rationally justified; reasons are never reasons _for_ belief or action but are mere epiphenomena, produced by but not producing events whose sole progenitor is the passions; the quest itself is just another power-struggle. The end of the endeavour to know and to be rational is that there can be no body of propositions which reveals the structure of reality and no laws of thought and conduct which are entitled to constrain the individual. These sceptical arguments have a common and an ancient root in the subjectivism of Protagoras: 'man is the measure of all things - alike of the being of things that are and of the not-being of things that are not' and 'any given thing is to me such as it appears to me and is to you such as it appears to you.'[1]

A contemporary branch from this traditional root is the 'new sociology of education', or, in the terminology to be used throughout this thesis, 'the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge'. This title is preferred because not all sociologists share its characteristic views, some non-sociologists subscribe to them and its origins lie outside sociology. The subjectivist critique of education is based upon the alleged self-destructiveness of knowledge and rationality. It is claimed that sociology, as part of the quest for knowledge, as one mode of rational inquiry, shows the pretensions of knowledge and rationality to be false. Thus, it is maintained that the sociology of knowledge challenges objectivism,[2] which is defined as follows: 'The individual consciousness recognizes objects as being "out there", as coercive, external realities .... Knowledge is thereby detached from the human subjectivity in which it is constituted, maintained and transformed.'[3] And subjectivists take the view that 'the rules of logic .... are conventional, and will be shaped and selected in accordance with the purpose of the discourse.'[4]

The main assumption on which subjectivism is based is, then, that scepticism about knowledge and rationality is implicit in the sociological investigation of their antecedents and effects. On this view, the sociology of knowledge is an essentially debunking inquiry: to show that knowledge and rationality are influenced by social conditions is to undermine the claims traditionally made on their behalf and with

their authority. The reasons for this critical approach are not purely epistemological ones; political considerations are also important. The subjectivist claim is that those who defend knowledge and rationality 'treat Western academic standards as absolutes.'[5] Accordingly, the sociology of knowledge is presented by subjectivists as 'subverting absolutism', which can be traced back to 'the traditions of a centralized intellectual elite with close links to those holding economic and political power.'[6]

The political implications of subjectivism are made explicit in its critique of educational knowledge. By 'educational knowledge' is meant (i) what teachers and examiners claim to know about pupils and candidates, and (ii) what is taught and learnt in schools. If there can be no knowledge, then <u>a fortiori</u> teachers and examiners cannot know what they claim to know and teaching can neither be nor in any way involve the transmission of knowledge. Instead, the judgments of teachers and examiners and even the school curriculum itself are, according to subjectivists, instruments of political control. Thus, it is argued that the 'imputation of normal attributes to pupils by teachers does not tell us objectively about pupils ..... For the teacher, social control may depend on his being able in the classroom to maintain publicly his definition of the situation.'[7] And the ways in which teachers classify pupils are claimed to have a wider social significance; according to Althusser, schools constitute an ideological state apparatus, whose function is 'the reproduction of the

relations of production, i.e. of capitalist exploitation.'[8] Similarly, the curriculum, as traditionally conceived, forms part of what Friere calls the 'banking concept' of education, which, he contends, 'is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well men fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.'[9]

The main aim of this thesis is to rebut the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge. Two preliminary comments on the general standpoint from which this will be attempted may be helpful. Firstly, the political outlook with which subjectivism has recently been associated will receive no direct attention. Moreover, it will not be contended that the rejection of the subjectivist critique carries any very specific political message. Of course it is true that thinkers on the political right have been among its most notable critics.[10] But Kolakowski, for instance, in the course of a reaffirmation of the social democratic idea, links the spiritual recession threatening affluent open societies to 'the world-wide degradation of educational systems', which he in turn traces to 'a lack of confidence among older generations in the intellectual and moral standards we inherited.'[11] The philosophical questions about knowledge, sociology and education which are raised by the subjectivist critique will accordingly be considered on their own merits.

Secondly, objectivism must be distinguished from absolutism: to defend the objectivity of knowledge is not to imply the absolute and unchangeable rectitude of all the criteria of knowledge and rationality currently in use, still less of all contemporary educational policies and practices. Far from seeking to confer immutability upon the methods used to acquire and transmit knowledge, objectivism, as advocated in this thesis, aims at establishing conceptual connexions between knowledge and criticism. And to criticise a practice or an institution implies the possibility of changing it. Nevertheless, it will be argued that there are timelessly and universally applicable preconditions of rationality; certain things must be the case if rational intercourse with reality is to be possible. But to claim that there must be criteria of rationality is not to endorse the criteria in use. There are limits to what can count as rational inquiry, but these limits cannot be so tightly drawn that only one set of procedures can fall within them.

The argument of the thesis may now be foreshadowed. The subjectivist critique of educational knowledge has a tripartite logical structure: there is the epistemological claim that there can be no objective knowledge; there is the methodological claim that objectivism is challenged by the sociology of knowledge; and there is the claim that the methods and content of education are instruments of domination. The thesis is accordingly divided into three parts.

The subjectivists' epistemological claim will be examined, and ultimately rejected, in Part One. It will be interpreted as an attack upon the traditional analysis of knowledge as justified true belief and a defence of that analysis will be offered. The argument will be advanced that there can be objective knowledge in the sense of a body of propositions which have withstood critical tests and that survival of criticism amounts to justification. But the possibility of being justified in believing something is precisely what is challenged by the second of the subjectivists' epistemological arguments, that rationality, the process of giving reasons for doing and believing, 'self-destructs'. Here subjectivism calls upon its allies, relativism and scepticism, to show that criteria of rationality (i) apply only to members of a particular social group and (ii) cannot themselves be rationally justified. In reply it will be maintained that there are some criteria of rationality, which, being indispensable to any rational intercourse with reality, are of universal applicability and can be rationally justified. This argument will occupy chapter three, the core of Part One; chapters four and five will offer accounts of ideas which will have been taken for granted in the development of an objectivist epistemology. The main conclusion of Part One will be that there can be objective knowledge.

The methodological implications of this conclusion will be examined in Part Two. The subjectivist claim is that objectivism is incompatible with the sociology of knowledge: knowledge is socially constructed rather than objective; all

beliefs are irrational or ideological; and objective knowledge about the social context of belief and action is impossible. In reply it will be contended that subjectivist fears that objectivism threatens the sociology of knowledge are groundless; objectivism neither undermines nor unduly restricts sociological inquiry; indeed, in one respect, it widens its scope.

The epistemological and methodological discussions of Parts One and Two are intended to lay the foundations for an examination of the subjectivists' educational claim, that criteria of pupil assessment and the curriculum are instruments of exploitation, in Part Three. Until it has been shown that there can be objective knowledge in general, the question whether there can be objective educational knowledge in particular cannot arise. And until it has been shown that sociological investigation is compatible with a recognition of the place of knowledge and rationality in human actions and institutions, it is impossible to evaluate the subjectivist claim that educational institutions cannot be saved by their concern with knowledge and reason from being modes of social domination.

Part Three will open with a consideration of the subjectivist argument that the categories and criteria used in assessing pupils are socially constructed. It will be agreed that there is a sense in which this is true: teachers' judgements about pupils' scholastic attainments and abilities express institutional, rather than brute, facts. Nevertheless,

it will be maintained that such judgements can still express objective knowledge, as long as they are based upon an objective school curriculum. The forms of knowledge will be invoked as a curricular framework and a transcendental deduction of the forms will then be undertaken. The concept of acting for a reason will be shown to give rise to a set of preconditions of rationality, which constitute the rational form of sensibility. The forms of knowledge will then be derived from the rational form of sensibility; they state the indispensable preconditions of acting for a reason in the world as we know it.

In conclusion it will be held that the curriculum is potentially objective and so provides a foundation for objective educational judgements. Of course some actual educational judgements are false, ideological or irrational. But that does not entail that they must necessarily be so. For, it will be argued, a curriculum is possible which reflects, through the forms of knowledge, the preconditions of rational intercourse with reality. And such a curriculum permits the construction of an educational system based, not on the interests of a particular class, but on those of all rational beings.

# P A R T   O N E

# THE SUBJECTIVIST CRITIQUE OF OBJECTIVE KNOWLEDGE

## INTRODUCTION TO PART ONE

The first part of the subjectivist attempt to unmask education can be construed as a critique of the objectivity of knowledge. The initial subjectivist claim is that knowledge is not objective but socially constructed, to which it will be replied that knowledge, as justified true belief, is objective precisely because it is socially constructed. Each component of the objectivist account of knowledge, according to which if someone believes that p, is justified in so believing and p is true then he knows that p, must be examined.

All beliefs, the subjectivist maintains, are ideological. In reply it will be contended that some beliefs belong to intellectual traditions, which embody criteria of rationality. Accordingly, a belief is ideological only if its putative justification departs from the appropriate criteria.

The fact that efforts to justify beliefs presuppose criteria of rationality provides a new target for subjectivist criticism: no one is ever justified in believing anything, because criteria of rationality are socially relative and impossible rationally to justify. Against this view it will be argued that some criteria of rationality are presupposed by any systematic intercourse with reality. Consequently, they can be justified and are not socially relative.

But the relation between belief and reality, posited by the previous reply, raises the question of truth. Denying

that truth consists in the correspondence of thought to reality, the subjectivist asserts that it is no more than coherence with the beliefs of the dominant class or utility in serving their interests. In response it will be argued that truth must be defined as correspondence and that, while truth-criteria vary from one form of knowledge to another, those derived from the general idea of correspondence to reality are of crucial importance.

The correspondence theory of truth presupposes that thought and reality are distinct and mutually independent, an assumption challenged by the subjectivist, who claims that reality itself is mind-dependent. It will be replied that this contention is true, but only within the philosophical, not the empirical, form of knowledge, where it does not threaten the correspondence theory of truth.

The conclusion of Part One is, then, that the subjectivist critique of the objectivity of knowledge fails. Belief is not intrinsically ideological; the criteria of rationality used in justifying beliefs are indispensable; truth consists in the correspondence of thought to reality; and reality is mind-independent in the required sense. These statements support the conclusion that justified true belief is objective knowledge.

That conclusion will be used as the premise of further arguments concerning the methodological and educational implications of subjectivism.

# CHAPTER ONE : KNOWLEDGE

## 1.1 Introduction : Subjective and Objective Knowledge

The subjectivist claim that knowledge is not objective but socially constructed finds a notable proponent in Esland. The 'objectivistic theory of knowledge' is presented by him in the following terms: 'The individual consciousness recognizes objects as being "out there", as coercive, external realities ..... Knowledge is thereby detached from the human subjectivity in which it is constituted, maintained and transformed. Such a view implicitly presents man as a passive receiver, as the pliable, socialized embodiment of external facticities.'[1] 'Objectivism', he claims later, 'meant the transcending of socio-cultural influences and validation by universal reason.'[2] And he goes on to argue that 'the problems which are thought to reside in a "body" of knowledge and the rules for their effective solution or verification are themselves socially constructed.'[3] The discussion in this chapter will focus on two important oppositions which underlie Esland's statements: (i) knowledge constituted in human subjectivity is contrasted with knowledge as a body of problems and solutions; (ii) the fact that the pursuit of knowledge is a social process is assumed to be at odds with its claim to be a rational one. These two dichotomies are aspects of a more general opposition between subjectivity and objectivity. Also apparent in Esland's claims is an association between

subjectivity and agency, on the one hand, and objectivity and passivity, on the other. In this section reasons will be given for accepting, and indeed insisting upon, the first distinction. In later sections it will be argued that the assumed conflict between the social nature of knowledge and its rationality, and the alleged affinities between subjectivity and agency and between objectivity and passivity, do not accurately reflect the procedures by which knowledge is attained.

The first distinction implicit in Esland's views, between knowledge constituted in human subjectivity and knowledge as a body of problems and solutions, is recognised by him only so that it can be denied. For it is clear that he regards the distinction between, let us say, subjective and objective knowledge as itself part of the objectivism he seeks to undermine. Objectivism is 'a reified philosophy in which objectivity is autonomized and which does not regard as problematical for the constituency of the object its constitution in the subjective experience of individuals.'[4] It is therefore 'fundamentally dehumanizing'. But there is in fact a distinction between subjective and objective knowledge which arises naturally out of common observations concerning human actions and experiences. The antonyms on which the distinction depends are of course ambiguous. They may designate any of the following dichotomies: what belongs to consciousness and what belongs to the external world; the imaginary and the real; matters of personal preference and matters of fact; opinion or prejudice and conclusions based

on an impartial survey of the evidence. But, properly defined, they mark a distinction which is essential to the understanding, not just of knowledge, but of language and thought in general.

The distinction between subjective and objective knowledge is one aspect of a more general distinction between speech acts and mental states, on the one hand, and propositions, on the other. Searle[5] introduces the concept of a speech act by drawing attention to sentences, such as 'The President is sober today', which it is appropriate to utter only under certain aberrant conditions. It could appropriately be uttered if, for example, the President is, or is believed to be, an habitual drunkard. There would be no point in uttering it if he were always sober and it had never occurred to anyone to believe otherwise. In general it is pointless to assert of a standard situation just that it is standard, unless one has reason to believe that one's audience thinks it is aberrant. It follows that the truth of what is said is not always a sufficient reason for saying it. A more technical way of making exactly the same point is to say that the truth of a proposition is not always a sufficient reason for asserting it. And this insight presupposes a distinction between propositions and speech acts, or, in other words, between what is said and the saying of it. This distinction is the source of a series of ambiguities afflicting terms of cardinal importance in the theory of knowledge. 'Assertion', 'belief', 'knowledge', 'statement' and 'thought' are all ambiguous between (i) what

is asserted, believed, known, stated or thought, that is, a proposition, and (ii) the act or state of asserting, believing, knowing, stating or thinking. The significance of this distinction is twofold. First, it has important implications for the sociology of knowledge, which will be explored in chapter six. Second, and of more immediate interest, it is of considerable epistemological importance, for it shows that a major defence of the objectivity of knowledge is grounded in a generally recognised feature of language as a whole. The distinction between speech acts and propositions, that is to say, between the saying of something and what is said, underlies Popper's distinction between subjective or second-world knowledge, defined as a 'state of being aware or informed', and objective or third-world knowledge, in the sense of a 'branch of learning; a science; an art.'[6]

It is clear that Esland's distinction between knowledge constituted in human subjectivity and knowledge as a body of problems and solutions is essentially the same as that drawn by Popper between subjective and objective knowledge. And it is equally plain that Esland wishes entirely to discard the notion of objective knowledge: an adequate epistemology could consist only of ascriptions of subjective knowledge, such as 'S knows that p'. But, if the argument above is cogent, a full account of such ascriptions must include an explanation of what p, as distinct from what S's knowing that p, is; it must postulate propositions as well as speech acts. It is not suggested that this consideration is alone sufficient to

refute the subjectivist account of knowledge, but only that it indicates the form such a refutation may take. In the middle sections of this chapter it will be argued that ascriptions of subjective knowledge in formal, and specifically educational, contexts, presuppose, not just the distinction between what is said and the saying of it, but the existence of objective knowledge, that is, of a body of propositions with two essential characteristics. This idea of objective knowledge departs from the classical Popperian concept, for reasons to be explained below,[7] by incorporating two conditions:

There is objective knowledge if there is a body of propositions

(i) which are true

and (ii) which it is rational to believe.

Before proceeding with the argument to show that subjective ascriptions of knowledge in formal situations presuppose objective knowledge in this sense, it is necessary to examine the second dimension of the subjectivity/objectivity dichotomy, which contrasts social influences and universal reason.

## 1.2 The Social Nature of Knowledge

According to subjectivism, as exemplified by Esland's remarks, the pursuit of knowledge is beset by a conflict between social influences and universal reason. There is a sense in which this claim is true.[8] But it can be misleading, especially if taken together with the subjectivist association of

subjectivity with agency and objectivity with passivity. It is perhaps the principal innovation of twentieth century epistemology that knowledge is social in nature and that its objectivity arises out of what people do in the public world rather than out of what happens to them in the privacy of the mental world. Thus, when Esland says that 'objectivity was thought to reside in the cognitive act of the individual who was endowed with an absolute capacity for rationality',[9] he is in agreement with most contemporary philosophers. But, whereas he rejects the old definition of objectivity as part of a repudiation of objectivity as such, there are many philosophers who reject the traditional account in order to provide a new one. And indeed the main argument of this chapter is another statement of the modern interpretation of objectivity.

In traditional epistemology it was assumed that the question 'What is knowledge?' is synonymous with the question 'What conditions must be satisfied before we are entitled to say that someone knows something ?'. The orthodox reply was a statement of the triune thesis that someone knows that p if and only if p is true, he believes that p and is justified in so believing. This answer led to a search for criteria of justification, such as sense-experience or self-evidence, which were held to be applicable to the individual knower. It is this traditional approach which has been criticised by modern philosophers, notably Popper and Wittgenstein.

Popper[10] dismisses attempts to analyse the meaning of statements of the form 'S knows that p', on the grounds that such ascriptions of knowledge are irrelevant to the understanding of scientific knowledge, with which epistemology ought mainly to concern itself. The traditional interpretation of the question 'What is knowledge ?' is subjectivist in that it focuses attention on the mental state of the knowing subject. It thereby invites an authoritarian answer, that is, an answer that grounds knowledge in an ultimate criterion, such as sense-experience or self-evidence. S knows that p if and only if p can be derived by S from the approved authoritative source. Popper's main criticism of this answer is that no such source, no such ultimate criterion, is defensible. But it is not just that he rejects the answer; the question itself is misguided in its concentration on the individual. A replacement for putative criteria of justification which apply directly to the individual is to be found by recognising the social nature of scientific inquiry, turning away from the lonely scholar subject to no constraint other than his own sense-experience or intellect, and looking instead at the procedures of the scientific community. If we then ask 'What is knowledge ?' we will be led to think of propositions rather than mental states. They can be criticised, tested and accepted or rejected by anyone who understands them. Propositions and the social activity of testing and criticism take the place of mental states and private reasoning.

Wittgenstein's attack on traditional epistemology[11] shares with Popper's the idea that knowing is a social activity. A private language was, he argued, an impossibility, for using words presupposes the existence of public rules. The epistemological corollary of this view is that knowing presupposes the possibility of error; unless it is possible for someone claiming to know something to be wrong, and for someone else to correct him, he cannot properly be said to know. And someone else can correct him only if there are publicly accepted rules or criteria for assessing claims to know. Thus, before we can judge a claim to know, we must be conversant with the appropriate criteria of adjudication.

And so, according to both Popper and Wittgenstein, claiming to know is a social, rule-governed activity. The justification of a claim to know is never the tracing of an epistemological family tree, the discovery of a source, but rather the critical appraisal of the claim in terms of public, or objective, criteria. There is the prospect that social influences, albeit of a special sort, may support rather than undermine objectivity. And the association of objectivity with passivity is broken, for objective knowledge is not data descending on 'passive receivers' but the product of hard critical labour.

## 1.3 Knowledge and Justified True Belief

The characteristic tenets of traditional epistemology are not entirely to be discarded. One such belief is the

triune thesis, alluded to in the previous section, that someone knows that p if and only if p is true, he believes that p and is justified in so believing. It will be maintained that, although it is not acceptable in that familiar form, which may also be expressed as the claim that knowledge is justified true belief, an alternative formulation is true. The version to be defended here is that justified true belief is knowledge.

It is natural to assume that 'Justified true belief is knowledge' is simply another way of saying 'Knowledge is justified true belief' and that both of these statements are logically equivalent to the claim that someone knows that p if and only if p is true, he believes that p and is justified in so believing. But analysis reveals differences not just of style but of philosophical substance. As a statement of the conditions for subjective knowledge, 'Justified true belief is knowledge' is not a mere re-arrangement of 'Knowledge is justified true belief'. For if we have justified true belief then we necessarily have knowledge, while if we have knowledge then we do not necessarily have justified true belief, because we may have reliable true belief instead. A weak version of the familiar thesis is therefore acceptable: someone knows that p if p is true, he believes that p and is justified in so believing. The deletion of the customary 'and only if' is designed to recognise the fact that someone may know that p even though he cannot justify his nevertheless reliable belief that p.

Some formal notation used by Griffin and Harton may help to clarify the matter.[12] The epistemic terms 'knows' and 'believes' are symbolized by the two-place predicates 'K' and 'B'; 'a' is an individual variable representing a knower or believer; 'p' is a propositional variable. Thus, 'Bap' means 'a believes that p'. 'JaBap' is to be read as 'a is justified in believing that p' and 'RaBap' as 'a reliably believes that p'. The strongest version of the traditional thesis, that someone knows that p if and only if p is true, he believes that p and is justified in so believing, can now be expressed as

$$(1) \quad Kap \leftrightarrow (p \ \& \ Bap \ \& \ JaBap)$$

which is false, because

$$(2) \quad Kap \rightarrow (p \ \& \ Bap \ \& \ JaBap)$$

is also false. But

$$(3) \quad (p \ \& \ Bap \ \& \ RaBap) \rightarrow Kap$$

is true. The version of the traditional thesis to be defended here is

$$(4) \quad (p \ \& \ Bap \ \& \ JaBap) \rightarrow Kap.$$

This is the thesis that justified true belief is knowledge.

The argument depends upon the assumption that, while justified true belief and reliable true belief are sub-species of knowledge, in that both (3) and (4) are true, they are not merely different but mutually exclusive. What distinguishes (4) from (3) is its reliance on the notion of objective knowledge. For we cannot make sense of the idea of justifying a belief except in terms of the admissibility of

the proposition believed to the body of objective knowledge. What we say about an individual knower when we ascribe justified true belief to him cannot be understood without reference to what we say about a body of propositions when we confer upon it the status of objective knowledge. And so ascriptions of subjective knowledge as justified true belief differ from ascriptions of subjective knowledge as reliable true belief in incorporating objective knowledge. For the same reason, justified true belief is epistemically preferable to reliable true belief.

The strongest statement of the relation between knowledge and justified true belief, namely, (1), will now be examined, with the intention of showing that it is false and that (3) and (4) are true. The distinct elements of (1) are not equally controversial. Indeed, in discussions of the claim that someone knows that p if and only if p is true, he believes that p and is justified in so believing, the first condition is seldom disputed. Perhaps this neglect is merely a symptom of the insularity of that debate, for it has been argued, in connexion with objective knowledge, that truth is not a necessary condition of knowledge. Popper[13] breaks the link, contending that false, no less than true, propositions can be constituents of the body of knowledge. But this abrogation ought to be resisted, because we need to distinguish knowledge from justified belief. It has often been remarked[14] that truth and

rationality do not coincide, in the sense that it may be rational to believe what is in fact false. It is surely worth preserving this distinction, for an essential part of the meaning of 'true' is the idea that the mere fact that a proposition is believed, however justifiably, does not guarantee its truth. So the truth condition stands.

The second component of the tripartite thesis, the claim that someone's believing that p is a necessary condition of his knowing that p, is more widely disputed. Against the traditional view that knowledge is belief plus something else, some philosophers maintain that knowledge excludes rather than incorporates mere belief.[15] It is true that if someone (merely) believes that p then he does not know that p, but this entails only that knowing and believing are not identical, and is therefore consistent with the claim that believing that p is a necessary condition of knowing that p. But to dispose of a reason for denying a proposition is not to furnish a reason for asserting it. In the present case such a reason is to be found in the fact that knowledge is sometimes attained through the justification in public testing and debate of a hypothesis that was previously only believed by its begetter. Someone initially believes that p, submits p to criticism and testing and, if p withstands efforts to refute it, he is then judged to know that p. To see knowledge, in the circumstances described, as belief plus something else is to do justice to the way in which it is on those occasions achieved.

It might be objected that this view of knowledge concentrates excessively on scientific inquiry, a formalised pursuit of knowledge which has little relevance to everyday uses of 'know'. Williams, for example, dismisses as mere prejudice the assumption that knowledge is belief plus quite a lot more, which he sees as the outcome of undue attention to 'the examiner situation', characterised thus : ' ....... I know that p is true, this other man asserts that p is true, and I ask the question whether this other man really knows it or merely believes it.'[16] In other words, the examiner checks the candidate's credentials for claiming to know what he, the examiner, already knows. The examiner situation shares with scientific inquiry a concern with objective knowledge, the difference being that scientific inquiry involves new contributions to the body of propositions, whereas the examiner situation has to do with its transmission. Both are formal situations and Williams may well be correct in thinking that there is a common, informal use of 'know' which has weaker conditions of application than 'believe'. But this usage is of only peripheral interest in the analysis of knowledge in educational contexts: in the context of research, the use of 'knowledge' in scientific inquiry will be relevant, while in the context of teaching, the use of 'know' in the examiner situation will be appropriate. So it seems reasonable to accept the belief condition as part of an account of knowledge in educational contexts.

It might be thought that another reason for rejecting the belief condition arises out of the fact that a proposition p* could belong to the body of knowledge even though no one believed it. If p* were entailed by other propositions which were true and justifiably believed, it would be difficult to deny that p* constitutes objective knowledge. But perhaps no one notices the entailment and so no one believes that p*. In that case, it might be concluded that belief is not a necessary condition of knowledge. But this argument fails to take account of the distinction between subjective and objective knowledge. The belief condition applies only to ascriptions of subjective knowledge; the argument under discussion does not undermine the claim that if S does not believe that p* then he does not know that p*. The oddity to which it draws attention is the fact that p* could constitute (objective) knowledge even though no one (subjectively) knew it. But the paradox is only apparent. It is simply that objective knowledge may contain a latent or potential element, arising from the fact that propositions can entail others but the entailments go unperceived. The belief condition can therefore be accepted.

The question now arises whether the two necessary conditions can be converted into a set of necessary and sufficient conditions by the addition of a third. Should the believer be justified in believing what is true, does he thereby become a knower ? Discussion of this issue has

concentrated on some alleged counter-examples, which are claimed to show that someone could be justified in believing what is true in circumstances which would inhibit the verdict that he knows. Gettier[17] has argued that the justification for S's belief that p may have nothing to do with the truth of p. This argument has been dismissed as redundant by Armstrong.[18] If S knows that p on the basis of evidence, that evidence must be a proposition, q, which is also known to S. In Gettier's counter-examples, the justifiably believed grounds are false and so cannot be known; that they are also irrelevant to the truth of p is therefore beside the point. It is clear however that Armstrong has saved the idea of knowledge as justified true belief only at the cost of importing a regress into the definition, for he accepts that if S knows that p on the basis of q, then S must also know that q and so on.

Having rejected several reactions to the regress, Armstrong responds to it by propounding a reliability view, which he initially expounds in terms of non-inferential knowledge :

'A's non-inferential belief that p is non-inferential <u>knowledge</u> if, and only if :

(i) p is the case

(ii) There is some specification of A such that, if any person is so specified, then, if they further believe that p, then p is the case.'[19]

Armstrong later extends this analysis to inferential knowledge, insisting that there is no difference between the two accounts.[20] It is instructive to recast Armstrong's conditions in the tripartite form characteristic of accounts of subjective knowledge :

A knows that p if, and only if:

(i) p is true

(ii) A believes that p

(iii) There is some specification of A such that, if any person is so specified, then, if he further believes that p, then p is true.

This new set of conditions derived from Armstrong's can be seen to differ from statements of the view that knowledge is justified true belief in substituting reliability for justification. But reliability is not a satisfactory surrogate for justification, although it does give rise to a sub-species of subjective knowledge. That is to say,

(5) $Kap \leftrightarrow (p \ \& \ Bap \ \& \ RaBap)$

is no substitute for (1), but (3) is true. (5) is of course false, because (4) is true. Reliable true belief and justified true belief are two kinds of subjective knowledge.

The argument to establish this conclusion is based on a counter-example, developed from one discussed by Armstrong.[21] Suppose that A has a brain defect such that

whenever he experiences a visual stimulus of a certain sort he forms the belief that there is a sound in his environment. It so happens, quite accidentally, that visual stimuli of the appropriate sort coincide with the occurrence of sounds in A's environment. But the nature of the visual stimuli which cause A to believe that there is a sound in his environment varies unpredictably, so that it is impossible for A to establish a law-like connexion between visual stimuli of a particular kind and his believing that there is a sound in his environment. Indeed, it does not occur to A that anything is amiss; as far as he is concerned, there is a sound in his environment and that is all there is to it.

Before commenting on A's situation, it may be advisable to clear up a possible misunderstanding concerning the description of a belief as reliable, or, in Armstrong's phrase, 'empirically reliable'. It seems that empirical reliability is, for Armstrong, a descriptive rather than a normative notion, being the property of being true on repeated occasions, not just once by a fluke. In normal usage, to say that something is reliable is to commend it, and so a reliable belief is necessarily one that one would be justified in holding. In this sense, the reliability of a belief is not a natural relation between a belief-state and the situation which makes it true. Since Armstrong's account of knowledge is 'Externalist', in that 'what makes a true non-inferential belief a case of <u>knowledge</u> is some natural relation which holds between the belief-state, Bap, and the situation which

makes it true',[22] it is plain that he is not using 'reliable' in its ordinary normative sense. The qualification 'empirically' may be intended to signify a purely descriptive use, though it could also be read as 'a reliable belief about an empirical matter'. In discussing the set of knowledge-conditions derived from Armstrong's, the purely descriptive usage, which means 'true on repeated occasions', will be adopted, though the ambiguous qualifier 'empirically' will be dropped.

It is clear that A's belief that there is a sound in his environment is reliable in the sense specified for it is repeatedly true. But A cannot know that there is a sound in his environment, because his belief is reliable only by accident; it is true on repeated occasions, but only by virtue of a whole series of flukes. For the same reason the conditions derived from Armstrong's are not satisfied. The occurrence of a sound in his environment is not a necessary condition of A's believing that there is, and so we do not yet have a counter-example to the reliability view.

But it is possible to construct one from the case discussed by Armstrong. Suppose there is a mad scientist who can predict when a sound is about to occur in A's environment and who contrives to bring it about that, on every such occasion, A experiences a visual stimulus which causes him to believe that there is a sound in his environment. A's brain defect is temporarily repaired by

the scientist whenever a visual stimulus which would otherwise cause him to believe that there is a sound in his environment occurs at a time when there is in fact none. There being a sound in his environment is in these circumstances a necessary condition of A's believing that there is. His belief is therefore reliable by virtue of a law-like connexion between the visual stimuli which induce the belief and the sounds whose occurrence make it true. It follows that, on the conditions derived from Armstrong's, A knows that there is a sound in his environment. But does he really know this ?

Yes and no. A reason for saying yes is that he believes that there is a sound, his belief is true and it is not true merely by a fluke. To put it more generally, someone knows if he believes what is true and if what makes his belief true is connected in a law-like manner with what leads him to believe it. On the other hand, a reason for concluding that A does not know is that he is ignorant of this connexion and so cannot justify his belief. So A knows if 'know' means 'hold a reliable true belief' but not if 'know' means 'hold a justified true belief'. How might these opposing views be defended ?

The adherent of the reliability view will take the anecdote as showing that knowledge is not justified true belief, since it is unreasonable to demand more of A than that his belief should be true and reliable: whenever there

is a sound in his environment he believes that there is and he does not hold this belief on any other occasion. Of course A knows; it is just that he does not know <u>how</u> he knows. The case is no different in principle from that of Ayer's consistently successful forecaster of lottery results: 'If his run of successes were sufficiently impressive, we might very well come to say that he knew which number would win, even though he did not reach this conclusion by any rational method, or indeed, by any method at all.'[23] Similarly, the upholder of the reliability view might contend, the regularity of A's success in holding true beliefs about his auditory environment precludes accident or coincidence. And so, when A says that there is a sound in his environment, we have to admit that he knows that there is.

This will not however convince the defender of the justifiability view, who will continue to maintain that A's success is, as far as A himself is concerned, an accident. As for the lottery man, Ayer's own verdict will be cited : 'Not everyone would regard a successful run of predictions, however long sustained, as being by itself a sufficient backing for a claim to knowledge. And here there can be no question of proving that this attitude is mistaken.'[24] On the justifiability view, A, far from being in possession of knowledge, is the victim of deception, the butt of an elaborate practical joke played upon him by a mad scientist, who has manipulated him rather than informed him of something. A has been duped; he has not discovered a fact about his environment.

Rather than try to make a straight choice between these conflicting views, it seems more helpful to build upon a conclusion shared by both disputants. The common conclusion is that A cannot justify his belief that there is a sound in his environment. One side takes this as a reason for denying that he knows, the other as a reason for rejecting the definition of knowledge as justified true belief as being too stringent. A sequel to the counter-example endorses this shared view, by showing what would have to happen before A can justify his belief. During a medical examination for severe headaches, A's brain defect is discovered and he is told about it. A uncovers the activities of the scientist, by observing his work and collecting evidence that whenever there is a sound in his environment - this being corroborated by B, whose brain is free from defect - the evil genius causes him, A, to believe that there is. A can now justify his belief by putting forward the hypothesis that a mad scientist is interfering with his brain. Should this hypothesis be tested and remain unfalsified, it would be reasonable to conclude that A knows that there is a sound in his environment, in that there is a sound in his environment, he believes that there is and he is justified in so believing.

It is clear then that reliable true belief is not the same as justified true belief. Nothing is gained by responding to this difference by restricting the term

'knowledge' to just one of these sorts of belief. This would be a quite arbitrary stipulation. In more formal terms, both

(1) Kap $\leftrightarrow$ (p & Bap & JaBap)

and

(5) Kap $\leftrightarrow$ (p & Bap & RaBap)

are false. We should instead recognise that there are two sub-species of subjective knowledge, or, more formally, that both

(3) (p & Bap & RaBap) $\rightarrow$ Kap

and

(4) (p & Bap & JaBap) $\rightarrow$ Kap

are true. The next stage of the argument is to try to show that justified true belief is not merely different from reliable true belief but epistemically preferable to it.

## 1.4 The Epistemic Preferability of Justified True Belief

It might be objected that, even if successful, the argument presented above as a defence of a version of the thesis that knowledge is justified true belief cannot be more than a pyrrhic victory, for it has been admitted that reliable true belief is also subjective knowledge, which it has been a main purpose of most defenders of the traditional thesis to deny. Is the verification of (4), balanced against that of (3) and the consequent falsification of (1), to count as success or failure ? Perhaps we can no more answer that question than we can say whether a glass of water is half-empty or half-full. But

it seems possible to tip the scales towards the traditional thesis by showing that justified true belief is epistemically preferable to reliable true belief.

To say that justified true belief is epistemically preferable to reliable true belief means that only the former can be the subject of rational argument. A useful distinction here is that drawn by Reichenbach[25] between the context of discovery, in which occurs the process of thought by which a new hypothesis is actually arrived at, and the context of justification, in which the hypothesis is presented to public scrutiny. The actual process of discovery may contain invalid steps and unwarranted assumptions, but in the context of justification we are given 'a logical substitute rather than real processes',[26] something which purports to be a valid argument for the hypothesis rather than an historical account of how it was in fact discovered. It is clear that reliable true belief, as exemplified by the lottery forecaster and A before his detective work, cannot be rationally reconstructed to take its place in the context of justification. It is not that their processes of discovery resist translation into that context; there are no processes to be translated. A simply finds himself believing that there is a sound in his environment, while it just occurs to the lottery forecaster that 12 will win. They issue pronouncements which cannot be submitted to public criticism, because they are isolated statements without a supporting theory. In Popperian terms,

they resemble the practitioners of 'revealed science', who produce 'a result, which, though in agreement with some scientific results, is not the product of scientific method.'[27]

But why, it might be asked, can A and the lottery man not cite their past records in justification of their present claims ? Why should we not reinstate the commendatory implications of 'reliable' in its normal usage, closing the gap between the reliability and the justification of beliefs ? It is helpful to consider the rocking-horse winner,[28] whose case is similar to those of A and the lottery man, for he is a boy who, after riding his rocking-horse, is able to say which horse will win the next race. His predictions are consistently accurate but inexplicable. Why not say that his regular success in the past justifies his belief - which turns out to be true - that Gringolet will win the 3.30 ? It will not do to reply that, apart from the usual difficulties over justifying induction, some betting men would act on counter-inductive principles. But at least this answer shows that the rocking-horse winner's appeal to his record is unlike that of a forecaster who studies form. Although, unlike the lottery man, who has no method at all, he does follow a procedure, it is not a rational one. If asked how he arrives at his predictions, he can only reply that he rides his rocking-horse, whereas the rational punter can explain that Gringolet has stamina, prefers soft going and is to be

ridden by the champion jockey. The point is that somebody else could check the rational punter's calculations; he could go through the same sort of procedure and compare results; in the event of disagreement, it would in principle be possible to settle the matter by rational argument. Nothing like this can be done in the case of the rocking-horse winner; it is most unlikely that anyone else who rode the rocking-horse would find himself with a prediction to make; even if he did and his forecast differed from the boy's, there could be no question of settling the dispute by rational argument. For there is no right or wrong way of predicting racing results by riding a rocking-horse, whereas there are right and wrong ways of doing so by inductive reasoning. A putative justification based on past success, where that success is the outcome either of no method at all or of an inexplicable one, is no substitute for the appraisal of arguments. Lacking an argument for appraisal, lacking a procedure which others can replicate, the rocking-horse winner would be unable to get his claims to know accepted as a contribution to objective knowledge. While we must admit that he subjectively knows, in the sense that he holds a reliable true belief, it must be insisted that what he knows does not constitute objective knowledge. For objective knowledge presupposes the presentation of an argument for public criticism in the context of justification.

## 1.5 Knowledge in Formal Situations

The main aim of this section is to show that justified true belief is the correct analysis of knowledge in formal situations, including educational ones. In order to do this it is necessary to clarify the nature of justification. This issue raises a major philosophical problem, the criterion problem, which requires a chapter to itself (chapter three). All that is needed at this stage is an elucidation of the idea of public testing and criticism in the context of justification.

Justification should be understood as a procedure for choosing rationally amongst the many beliefs which compete for our allegiance. This has traditionally been taken to imply that justifying a belief consists in deriving it from the fundamental criterion of rationality. While this is in principle possible, it is not in practice what people, in trying to justify beliefs, do. For the fundamental criteria are so general that two incompatible beliefs may both be in accordance with them. Thus, a fundamental criterion of rationality in the historical and social scientific (or 'other minds') form of knowledge is that there are conscious beings other than oneself. But it is impossible to settle disputes about the causes of the Industrial Revolution, the changes in living standards it brought about or the effects of affluence on class

consciousness by showing that only one of the set of conflicting beliefs on each of these questions can be derived from the other minds assumption. And so justification is better understood as failed criticism. We criticise a belief because it is one of several competing for our allegiance. And if we try to criticise a belief and fail, then we have justified our acceptance of it, if only until a more stringent critical test has been devised. To justify a belief is unsuccessfully to criticise it. The definition of objective knowledge offered above[29] can now be amended thus :

There is objective knowledge if there is a body of propositions

which are true

and which have survived the best available critical tests.

The claim that justified true belief is subjective knowledge, symbolized as (4), can accordingly be stated as follows :

If p is true

A believes that p

and p has survived submission by A to the best available critical tests

then A knows that p.

This definition recognises the fact that ascriptions of subjective knowledge as justified true belief presuppose objective knowledge and hence the existence of public criteria to be used in the process of justification by failed criticism.

It thereby acknowledges the social nature of knowledge, for a procedure can count as criticism only if it can be replicated by someone other than the original knowledge-claimant. The social nature of knowledge has also been pointed out by Walsh,[30] in connexion with Ayer's account of knowing as having the right to be sure. His suggestion is that the notion of a right is a social one, implying the existence of an authority qualified to confer the right in accordance with the rules for adjudicating such cases. The concept of a claim is similarly social: one cannot be said to have a claim unless there is an institution, comprising an authority to dispense decisions about the granting or refusal of claims and rules for the authority's guidance. In the case of scientific knowledge, the institution is an open one, with the claimant's peers constituting the authority. What has to be decided is whether the proposition which A claims to know should be accepted as a member of the body of knowledge. Attention is focused on the proposition rather than on A, and it is just this aspect of objective knowledge that is captured by the idea of justification as the survival of criticism.

It might be objected that knowledge has in effect been admitted to be socially relative rather than objective, in that what is known is merely what the appropriate authority says is known. But this is to misunderstand the social nature of knowledge. What is being asserted is that the authority's verdict is a necessary but not a sufficient

condition of knowledge. Unless a proposition has been submitted to critical tests and has been admitted by the authority to have survived them, it cannot be said to constitute objective knowledge. But the authority itself may err (and, when it is an informal group of practitioners of a discipline, may of course be divided against itself), and so its decision is not a sufficient condition of knowledge. Indeed, this is just the point of preserving the truth condition in the definition of objective knowledge:[31] distinguishing knowledge from justified belief by means of truth entails that the authority's approval is not a sufficient condition of knowledge. Recognising the social nature of justification while retaining the truth condition shows that knowledge is socially constructed without being socially relative.

The rest of this section will be devoted to an attempt to show that justified true belief is the correct analysis of subjective knowledge in formal situations, to which educational contexts belong. It is helpful to begin by considering informal circumstances, in which the plausibility of analysing knowledge as justified true belief is much reduced. Saying 'I know....' does not always count as claiming to know, for one may instead be admitting knowledge or pointing out the superfluity of one's would-be informant's statement. Suppose R says 'It's raining' and S replies 'I know'. It is conceivable that S might be challenged and, if so, he must be able to offer some sort of justification. But it need

not be anything very sophisticated: 'I've just seen T come in soaking wet' would do. S need not have considered other possible explanations of T's wetness and found that only 'It's raining' survives the critical tests. But even here such alternatives are available and there is a theoretical background to S's unconsidered utterance. It is simply that the theory is so uncontroversial that it can be assumed to be common ground. Of course R might say 'But T and I have played a practical joke on you; the sun is shining and I turned the hose on him'. So there is an exception to the rule that when someone comes in soaking wet it means it is raining. But the need for justification will normally stop there; S would not usually be called upon to justify his assumption that if someone goes out unprotected in the rain he will get wet. And so it seems pretentious to analyse this case as one of justified true belief.

In contrast, the paradigm case of a claim to know occurs in a formal or structured situation, in which knowledge is most perspicuously analysed as justified true belief. The main distinguishing feature of such cases, in which someone is putting forward a proposition as a candidate for admission to the body of knowledge, is theoretical explicitness. What is to be judged is not a single proposition in isolation from all others but a proposition complete with its supporting theory. The would-be knower is called upon to justify his claim that p be admitted to the body of knowledge by showing

that it has survived the best available critical tests in better shape than its rivals. And this cannot be done unless there is a general theory in the background. This approach is typical of claims to knowledge made during academic disputes, legal proceedings, various sorts of official and semi-official inquiries and political and religious controversies. In these formal circumstances, the theoretical background is open to question just as much as the individual proposition.

Another feature of these formal situations is the fact that, if p is to be known, there must be at least one other proposition which answers the question answered by p. Otherwise, it would be an empty procedure to choose the proposition which best withstands criticism. There is a Popperian and a Wittgensteinian way of taking this requirement. In Popperian terms, it demonstrates the necessity for public debate, as shown by the case of the rocking-horse winner. Although, after the race, we can discuss whether his prediction was falsified, we cannot discuss how he got it right or where he went wrong, for there are no procedures which can be replicated and there is no supporting theory. In Wittgensteinian terms, the requirement shows that knowing presupposes the possibility of error. Or, more precisely, it shows that claiming to know presupposes the possibility of error. And perhaps this is the view which ought to be attributed to Wittgenstein. When someone says 'Of course I

know how I feel', the proper philosophical comment is that his utterance is not a claim to know. If it is impossible for anyone else to show that he was mistaken, then it is impossible to withhold agreement. And if it is impossible to withhold something, then it is inappropriate to claim it. And so a claim to know that p presupposes that p could be falsified by someone other than the claimant. Thus, Wittgenstein's point is true, not of knowing as such, but of claiming to know. And it seems reasonable to read the relevant part of Philosophical Investigations[32] as implying precisely that uses of 'know' which do not admit of public checking are not to be understood as claims to know.

People make claims to knowledge outside the formal situations which have been discussed. And it might be objected that the account of justification as failed criticism is excessively elaborate for such cases and is therefore of limited application. Moreover, it might be said, the analysis of claims to know should reflect the fact that they are made in a range of situations of different degrees of formality. But, while it is true that it would be asking too much of the ordinary knowledge-claimant that he should have subjected p to a battery of critical tests, it remains essential that he should be able to perform such tests if called upon to do so. Suppose A says that he saw a great spotted woodpecker in the copse this morning and B asks him if he is sure that it was not the lesser spotted woodpecker that he, B, saw there yesterday. A replies that

he knows that it was the great spotted variety and explains that it was the size of a thrush and had the diagnostic red abdomen. So even in this informal context A acts on the assumption that to know is justifiably to believe what is true and that to justify a belief is to consider alternatives and accept the unfalsified one. For he has already, even if only subliminally, ruled out possible identifications of the bird he saw as a blackbird or a starling. Perhaps at first he thought it _was_ a starling, when he glimpsed it _contre jour_ through branches. But, when seen clearly, its plumage was mainly black and white with two bits of red, and so a critical test rules out one alternative. A did not consider eagles and seagulls, nor did wrens and chiffchaffs cross his mind, but he must be able to eliminate these species if asked to do so. People are not computers; we do not sort serially through all the species of British birds, comparing the bird we saw with each picture in _Birds of Britain and Europe_; but we must be able to go through this data-processing procedure if we have to. Justification, therefore, is failed criticism even in these relatively informal circumstances. It is probable that all claims to knowledge involve justification in this sense, along a continuum of increasing formality.

## 1.6 Summary

In reply to the subjectivist claim that knowledge is not objective but socially constructed, it has been argued that it is both. Ascriptions of subjective knowledge have been found

to fall into two categories: those ascribing justified true belief and those ascribing reliable true belief. Ascriptions of subjective knowledge as justified true belief can only be understood in terms of the admission of a proposition to the body of objective knowledge. And for that reason justified true belief is epistemically preferable to reliable true belief, for only the former admits of rational discussion. This is a social activity, in which propositions are submitted to critical tests, and so the result is both objective, as a body of propositions, and socially constructed. This analysis applies to all claims to knowledge and is particularly appropriate to the theoretically explicit justification characteristic of formal contexts.

# CHAPTER TWO. BELIEF

## 2.1 Introduction : Belief and Ideology

In replying to the subjectivist claim that knowledge is not objective but socially constructed, it was argued, in chapter one, that some ascriptions of subjective knowledge are ascriptions of justified true belief. This means that if someone believes that p, is justified in so believing and p is true then he knows that p. Thus, knowledge is in some circumstances to be analysed as the satisfaction of three conditions. It is therefore natural that arguments to undermine the objectivity of knowledge are sometimes addressed immediately to belief and only indirectly to knowledge. The account of knowledge defended in chapter one is an amended version of the traditional thesis that knowledge is justified true belief. And that thesis is at the very least a recognition of a series of undeniable conceptual relations between knowledge, belief, justification or rationality, and truth. Accordingly, there exist subjectivist arguments intended to show that belief, justification and truth are not objective but socially constructed. It is helpful to see these arguments as stages in a continuing debate, in which the objectivist replies to one subjectivist claim only to find that he has presupposed or relied upon another component of justified true belief and has thereby invited a new subjectivist challenge. This procedure is in a sense artificial, though not misleadingly so. It is not suggested that any one thinker has put forward all of the subjectivist arguments to be considered, though there is every reason to believe that some writers would be prepared to do so. It is simply that most

writers who deny the objectivity of knowledge do so, quite naturally, by concentrating on one particular issue, such as truth or criteria of rationality. So, while the subjectivist critique of justified true belief is a construction, its constituent parts are real enough. All that has been done is to integrate the various subjectivist claims, and the corresponding objectivist replies, into a single, developing argument.

The subject of this chapter is, then, the nature of belief; in subsequent chapters the issues to be discussed are what it is for a belief to be justified (or, more perspicuously, what it is for someone to be justified in holding a belief) and what it is for a belief to be true.

The subjectivist claim is that all belief is ideological. Helm, for example, maintains that 'human thought is ....... constrained by the conceptual limitations of the prevailing ideology.'[1] The assumption that lies behind such a claim is that rational belief requires that we can have grounds for accepting or rejecting a belief which are independent of any theory. For a theory incorporates assumptions about what questions are worth asking, definitions of crucial terms, methodological principles and so on, of some of which we may be unaware. Blackburn explains that some of his contributors believe that 'ideology is ....... defined by .... those assumptions of which the theorist is least aware and about which he is least explicit.'[2] Consequently, such

assumptions are likely to be the irrational responses of people, as members of a pa rticular social group, to features of the social structure. So social pressures engender ideological prejudices, which condition theories, which influence in turn the acceptance or rejection of beliefs. As an example of the intellectual deadlock to which ideological beliefs can lead, Montefiore refers to the problem of how to describe a strike in a capitalist economy: 'If a Marxist formulates his description in terms of class struggle and so on, the "liberal" will protest at the intrusion of unnecessary and tendentious theorizing; for the Marxist, the liberal's own more "straightforwardly factual" account could be equally tendentious in what it left out.'[3] Montefiore's diagnosis of the trouble is similar to Helm's: descriptions presupposes a theoretical framework, which incorporates a response to social conditions: 'in this instance, where one description assumes the absence and the other the existence of some fundamental conflict of interests, the choice of terms may willy-nilly commit one to an at least indirect support of or opposition to one side or the other.'[4] Moreover, according to some thinkers, to deny that choice between beliefs presupposes a theoretical background is itself ideological: 'the very notion that social research can be conducted other than on the basis of the prior development of concepts and theories is held to be ideological.'[5]

But why should it be thought that the fact, if it is a fact, that beliefs presuppose theories entails that beliefs are ineluctably ideological ? What is it about theories that makes their implicit presence incompatible with rational choice between beliefs ? The answer lies in the notion of a paradigm, which was introduced by Kuhn.[6] Its influence is apparent in Helm's claim that 'the paradigms within which scientific problem-solving techniques are utilized are themselves conditioned by conceptual limitations of societies.'[7] The significance of paradigms is that they preclude the construction of a theory-neutral language, that is, a language 'consisting entirely of words which are attached to nature in ways that are unproblematic, and, to the extent necessary, independent of theory.'[8] Without such a language, the subjectivist contends, it is impossible to make a rational choice between competing theories. Given that beliefs presuppose theories, it follows that it is impossible to make rational choices between beliefs. It is clear that a critical examination of the concept of a paradign is essential if the claim that belief is necessarily ideological is fruitfully to be discussed.

## 2.2 Paradigms and Ostensive Definition

Two arguments will be put forward against the claim that paradigms render theories incommensurable and hence beliefs ideological. The first concerns ostensive definition and the second forms of knowledge.

The term 'paradigm' is ambiguous. One commentator distinguishes three senses: (i) 'exemplary instances of past scientific achievement that continue to serve as models for current practitioners'; (ii) 'the choice of problems and the set of techniques for analyzing them'; (iii) 'a general metaphysical world outlook'.[9] But Kuhn's use of the word 'paradigm' is not as capricious as its ambiguity may suggest, for there is a common characteristic underlying the different senses. This is the idea that paradigms can only be learnt ostensively. The connexion between paradigms and ostensive learning emerges in Kuhn's critique of Popper's advocacy of Tarski's semantic conception of truth.

Kuhn's argument is that theories cannot be compared to discover which most closely approximates to the truth, because that procedure presupposes the existence of a theory-neutral language and the fact that some of each theory's terms can only be ostensively learnt precludes the possibility of constructing such a language. According to Kuhn, Popper 'takes it for granted that proponents of competing theories do share a neutral language adequate to the comparison of ...... observation reports. I am about to argue that they do not. If I am right, then "truth" may, like "proof", be a term with only intratheoretic applications.'[10] In support of his claim about the intra-theoretic nature of truth, Kuhn cites Quine's contention that translation is always problematic and on occasions impossible because the

definition of words in terms of other words presupposes that 'we already possess some vocabulary acquired by a non-verbal or incompletely verbal process.'[11] Just as ostensive learning is an impediment in the translation of languages, so, Kuhn claims, it is an obstacle to the comparison of theories. And the significance of paradigms is precisely that they register the role of ostensive learning in rendering theories incommensurable. 'When I speak of knowledge embedded in terms and phrases learned by some non-linguistic process like ostension, I am making the same point that my book aimed to make by repeated reference to the role of paradigms as concrete problem solutions, the exemplary objects of an ostension.'[12] Thus, Kuhn regards ostensive learning as the source of the paradigms which prevent the construction of a theory-neutral language. The premise on which his argument is based appears to be that, if understanding a theory were entirely a matter of understanding words defined in terms of other words, a neutral language could be formulated and theories compared. In such a language all the words of theory A could be translated by words from theory B and _vice versa_. But, the argument continues, the fact that some words are learnt ostensively entails that understanding a theory is not entirely a matter of understanding words defined in terms of other words. For words which are learnt ostensively cannot be defined solely in terms of other words. And so those words of theory A which are learnt ostensively cannot

be translated into words from theory B, and vice versa. The conclusion is drawn that theories A and B are not inter-translatable and do not therefore refer to a common reality against which they could be compared to discover which more closely approximates to the truth.

The main weakness in Kuhn's argument is the assumption that all words are either definable in terms of other words or can only be learnt ostensively. On the contrary, it is common for a word to be both definable in terms of other words and susceptible of ostensive learning. Moreover, those words which can only be learnt ostensively, such as colour words, can nevertheless be translated into other languages, although not without difficulty. Some American Indians, for example, had only two colours where we have three; instead of distinguishing yellow, green and blue, they talked of 'spring leaf colour' and 'deep water colour'. Nevertheless, it seems that the truth is rather the reverse of what Kuhn claims: the fact that some words are learnt ostensively is the basis, rather than the ruin, of translation. For, if the words of theory A could only be defined in terms of other words of theory A, and if the same were true of the words of theory B, then it is indeed difficult to see how a theory-neutral language could be constructed. The prospect of devising such a language exists only if it assumed that some words of both theories can be learnt ostensively.

This line of thought suggests an alternative argument for Kuhn's conclusion. For it has been argued, notably by Wittgenstein, that ostensive learning is rather more problematic than traditionally supposed.[13] The essential point is that if someone is to learn what 'blue' means by his teacher's pointing to a blue object and uttering the word, he must have the theoretical background to enable him to realise that it is the colour of the object which is being defined for him, and not its shape, size, number, texture or spatial location. So it is not, as Kuhn thought, that ostensive learning undermines the possibility of a theory-neutral language. It is rather that ostensive learning could provide the foundation for such a language, if only it was as self-explanatory as philosophers had been accustomed to believe. But it is not. And so we need to know the theory _before_ we can grasp the meaning of those of its words which can only be learnt ostensively. And if we cannot understand the ostensively learnt words of theory A until we have understood the rest of the theory, then, if the same is true of theory B, then there cannot be any words with which to construct a theory-neutral language.

It is important to distinguish the general argument that ostensive learning presupposes a grasp of underlying linguistic principles from its particular application in support of the alleged incommensurability of theories. For it will be contended that, while the general argument may well be valid, the incommensurability argument is incoherent. An

understanding of why this is so leads to the conclusion that an adequate theory of knowledge must accommodate, not only beliefs and theories, but also disciplines, or forms, of knowledge.

## 2.3 Paradigms and Forms of Knowledge

The source of the general argument for the theory-dependence of ostensive learning is Wittgenstein's The Blue and Brown Books, where he invites us to consider an attempt to 'explain the word "tove" by pointing to a pencil and saying "this is tove".'[14] The definition could be taken to mean any one of several things: that this is a pencil, that it is round, wood, one, hard and so on. The learner can identify the intended meaning only if he already has the necessary background knowledge of how language is used: 'understanding a sentence means understanding a language.'[15] This may well be true; certainly, we do not acquire concepts separately, as is shown by the fact that we cannot know what yellow is without knowing what colour is and we cannot know what colour is in general without knowing what at least one particular colour is. But, if this is so, all that has been established is that we cannot ostensively learn a word in language L unless we already apprehend some general principles of L. And that is far from showing that we cannot ostensively learn a word in theory A unless we already apprehend the general principles of A.

The transformation of the general argument into an incommensurability argument can be effected by another Wittgensteinian idea, that of a form of life. The claim is that language games, including theories, are embedded in forms of life, so that the ostensive learning of a word in the language game presupposes an understanding of its characteristic principles, which can be secured only through participating in the appropriate form of life. This application of the general argument assumes that forms of life are socially variable, an assumption which is commonly made but highly controversial.[16] It receives support from some of Wittgenstein's remarks: for example, having envisaged a 'language consisting only of orders and reports in battle', he comments that 'to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life.'[17] But on other occasions he seems to have in mind a universally and distinctively human form of life: thus, arguing that it is human agreement that underlies the concepts of truth and falsity, he adds that this 'is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.'[18] The textual evidence for the authenticity of the interpretation of forms of life is therefore incomplete. But, even if it is based on a misinterpretation of forms of life, the 'new' incommensurability argument may still be valid.

The argument is that beliefs are ideological because theories are incommensurable. Theories are incommensurable because a theory-neutral language in which they could be compared as approximations to the truth cannot be constructed. No such language can be constructed because there are no

words which can be learnt independently of understanding a theory. And there are no such ostensively learnable words because learning presupposes an understanding of the characteristic principles of the theory to which they belong and the form of life in which the theory is embedded. It will now be contended that this argument is incoherent.

The claim that theories are incommensurable is intelligible only if it is false. Upholders of the incommensurability argument take it for granted that we know when it is a problem that theories are (they allege) incommensurable. So we do, but only because the theories are commensurable. There are many incommensurable theories: the theory of phlogiston is incommensurable with Keynesianism, Darwin's theory of evolution with Euclidean geometry, the ontological argument with Romanticism, and so on. But none of these incommensurable pairs presents a rational inquirer with a dilemma. There is no reason to try to compare any of these pairs of theories, so the fact that they are incommensurable does not matter. That the alleged incommensurability of two theories is perceived as problematic presupposes that they have something in common. But what ?

Perhaps it is enough that the two theories belong to the same academic subject. If the suggestion is simply that a sufficient condition of the commensurability of theories is that they concern the same subject-matter, it must be rejected. For we do not differentiate subjects solely on

the basis of their subject-matter. Physical geography differs from geology, or physics from chemistry, mainly on the basis of their different objects of inquiry; it is customary to see each of these subjects as the scientific study of a different aspect of the world. But if this were the only criterion of demarcation, it would be impossible to differentiate subjects as we do. Nobody takes Kant's famous remark about the starry heavens as a contribution to astronomy arrived at in accordance with an idiosyncratic paradigm.[19] And many poems have been written about meteorological, geographical and astronomical subjects without being mistaken for scientific treatises. Yet we would be liable to commit that confusion if we relied exclusively on subject-matter in organising knowledge into academic subjects. So there must be some other means of distinguishing one subject from another.

A set of criteria which is adequate to this task is to be found by recalling that academic subjects belong to disciplines or forms of knowledge. It is not just that objects of inquiry differentiate knowledge into subjects; it is also that 'the major forms, or disciplines, can each be distinguished by their dependence on some particular test against experience for their distinctive expressions.'[20] Four related distinguishing features of the forms of knowledge are set out by Hirst: each form has its own characteristic central concepts, a distinctive logical structure, a set of criteria for testing its expressions

against experience and particular methods of exploring experience.[21] These features differentiate knowledge into forms, or disciplines, which are in turn divided into subjects according to areas or objects of inquiry. Thus, what accounts for the fact that poems about heavenly bodies are not mistaken for astronomical theories is that poetry and astronomy belong to different forms, or disciplines, of knowledge.

It is now possible to understand why the putative incommensurability of some contributions to knowledge is thought to pose a problem for rational inquiry, while the real incommensurability of others is not. If two theories belong to the same subject or discipline, and hence the same form of knowledge, then it would be an embarrassment to the rational inquirer to be bereft of criteria for choosing between them. But their belonging to the same form shows that they have enough in common to be commensurable. The concepts, logical structure, truth-criteria and techniques of testing provide shared standards for their comparative evaluation as approximations to the truth. It is only when we look at theories from different forms that we cannot compare them; but then there is no reason to do so. For unless we can see theories A and B as rivals competing for our allegiance, the fact that we cannot rationally choose between them does not matter. The necessity to choose brings with it the criteria for doing so rationally. The

incommensurability of theories could be a problem only if they belonged to the same form of knowledge, but, if they do, they have enough in common to be commensurable. And so the incommensurability argument is incoherent.

The claim that all beliefs are ideological because they are theory-laden does not therefore receive support from the incommensurability argument. But the general argument for the theory-dependence of ostensive learning, and so of belief, may well be valid. If so, the conclusion it establishes is consistent with the view that some beliefs are not ideological. For the assumption that rational belief is possible only if there are theory-independent grounds for choosing between beliefs is unsound. It overlooks the fact that the intrusions of theory may be of two kinds: (i) there are the explanatory theories which belong to particular academic disciplines, such as monetarist and Keynesian explanations of inflation; (ii) and there are the assumptions, principles, concepts and criteria which may be common to all the theories within a discipline, such as the definition of price or demand and the measurement of inflation by the retail price index, or even to all the disciplines within a form of knowledge, such as the concepts of action and rational choice.[22] The point of this distinction is that the general aspects of thought afford grounds for judging explanatory theories which are independent of the theories under consideration but not of theory as such.

It may be objected that the forms of knowledge, or intellectual traditions, in question may well have originated as responses to social pressures. But even if they did, the history of their development necessarily shows a gradual emancipation from their social origins, as the concepts and criteria which characterise them are elaborated.[23] And so the beliefs to which they give rise are not intrinsically ideological. Within a fully autonomous form of knowledge, ideological belief occurs only to the extent that its putative justification departs from the appropriate criteria or uses concepts from an alien form, and does so because adherence to the acknowledged standards would diminish the belief's utility in serving social interests. An analysis of the concept of an ideological belief will now be undertaken.

## 2.4 Ideological Utterances and Beliefs

Belief is a psychological state, but the criteria for its identification are based on its expression in public behaviour. As Williams has suggested, the most straightforward public expression of belief is assertion, though asserting that *p* is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition of believing that *p*.[24]

There are many interpretations of the concept of ideology. An ideology may simply be the set of beliefs prevailing in a certain society at a certain time: a literary critic might trace the influence of the prevailing ideology on

a poet's work. Or it may be the beliefs which are characteristically held by members of a relatively well defined social group: a feminist writer might promote her book as a contribution to feminist ideology. In these cases it is clear that the term is being used descriptively; it is not implied that the beliefs are false or unfounded. But there is an important strand running through the complicated pattern of the concept of ideology according to which to say that a belief is ideological is to imply it cannot be rationally justified and presents a false or distorted picture of reality. A closely related aspect of the concept is its action-guiding character: an ideological belief is one that is held, not because there are grounds for thinking it to be true, but because it prescribes actions which are perceived as serving the ideologist's interests.

These dyslogistic and prescriptive features of the concept of ideology are recognised in an attempt to distinguish ideological from non-ideological documents.[25] Non-ideological documents present a rational case for these theoretical and practical judgements. But, while ideological documents appear to do the same, they are in fact 'epistemologically unsound in that much of what they assert is inadequately grounded.'[26] On this view it follows that 'ideological documents are likely to contain empirical and other statements which are made, not because there are appropriate or relevant grounds for them, but rather because they are believed to support an independently adopted normative position.'[27]

Ideological documents, then, are epistemologically unsound and believed to be socially useful in guiding action which promotes the interests of a social group. Moreover, they are epistemologically unsound <u>because</u> they are intended to initiate such action. That they are epistemologically unsound is a necessary condition of their success in promoting interests. For their readers would be unlikely to accept the practical judgements which they contain as reasons for action were not those judgements supported by apparently valid arguments from seemingly true premises. But there are no valid arguments from true premises which support the practical judgements in question. So invalid arguments intrude to produce the semblance of a rational justification for the practical judgements which the ideologist intends his readers to accept. The occurrence of unsound reasoning is not on its own a sufficient condition of a document's being ideological: incompetence or negligence could explain it. It must be the case that the effect of publishing the document could not come about without the acceptance by readers of practical judgements because they are supported by a putative justification in which ratiocinative weaknesses occur.

In analysing the concept of an ideological utterance, it is clear, then, that it is not enough to consider the logical relations between the proposition asserted and other propositions believed by the assertor and his hearer. The instrumental relations between the asserting of the

proposition and the intended perlocutionary effect of that speech act must also be explained. In fact, a speech act cannot be said to be ideological if it is exhaustively described as the bare asserting that p. For it is necessary that the assertor be trying to convince his hearer(s) of the truth of p and of the desirability of some course of action for which p is part of the reason. It is possible to assert something in a 'take it or leave it' manner, so there is no necessary connexion between A's asserting that p and his trying to convince H of its truth. As Searle has it, '"I am simply stating that p and not attempting to convince you" is acceptable, but "I am arguing that p and not attempting to convince you" sounds inconsistent.'[28] Arguing, urging, justifying and so on constitute a sub-division of the general class of assertorial speech acts, and it is in respect of that sub-division rather than of the class itself that the question whether an utterance is ideological arises.

An utterance is ideological if it involves a divergence between what it would be appropriate to say if the speech act were one of assertion _simpliciter_ and what is actually said because the speech act belongs to the subdivision of assertorial acts which are attempts to convince. According to Searle, the performance of an assertorial speech act implies that four conditions have been met: (i) a condition relating to propositional content; (ii) a sincerity condition, according to which A's asserting that p counts as the

expression of his belief that *p*; (iii) a preparatory condition, to the effect that A, in asserting that *p*, implies that he has evidence for its truth, and that it is not obvious to both A and H that H already knows that *p*; (iv) the essential condition, that A's asserting that *p* 'counts as an undertaking to the effect that *p* represents an actual state of affairs.'[29] Thus, in attempting to convince H that *p*, A asserts that *p* and thereby implies, *via* the preparatory condition, that he has evidence for its truth. But, if his utterance is ideological, he will not have any such evidence. What appears to be evidence for the truth of *p* only seems so because A has perpetrated one or more of the ratiocinative deceits which have been seen to be a necessary condition of an utterance's being ideological.

In distinguishing ideological from non-ideological utterances, it is therefore the first part of the preparatory condition that matters. The first condition has to be met if a meaningful utterance is to occur at all, while the essential condition also has to be met if *p* is to be asserted, whether ideologically or not. The second part of the preparatory condition need not be satisfied, because A may intend to remind H of what he already knows rather than apprise him of new information. (This may seem at odds with the account of knowledge as justified true belief defended in the previous chapter. But it is quite possible for H to be justified in believing what is true and for A to use an invalid argument in support of the same proposition.) The sincerity

condition may or may not be met: if it is, A is deceiving himself as well as H; if it is not, A is knowingly deceiving H, and, if p is false, is telling an ideological lie.

It has been objected that lies create a difficulty for this analysis of ideological utterances.[30] The claim is that the suggested conditions do not discriminate between ideological utterances and straightforward lies or deceptions in contexts which it is counter-intuitive to describe as ideological. For example, the conditions could be satisfied where A is a father, H is his small son and p is 'Father Christmas will not come until you go to bed'. In reply it might be argued that a further condition is needed to limit the content of p to political matters. But this seems unwise, because many apparently innocent remarks can have political implications. It is preferable to admit that the father's asserting that Father Christmas will not come until his son goes to bed _is_ ideological, _if_ the formal conditions are met. The incongruity of describing the father's assertion as ideological arises from the fact that such assertions are not usually presented as the conclusion of a rational argument, whereas ideological utterances must be part of an attempt to convince by ostensibly rational argument. If the father tells his son a story about Father Christmas designed to support his original claim, few would deny that he is trying to manipulate his son's behaviour by imposing upon him a rudimentary ideology.

It may therefore be concluded that the suggested conditions for an utterance's being ideological are adequate. They may be summed up as follows :

A's assertion that *p* is ideological iff

(1) A is attempting to convince H that *p*
or, that *p* and therefore *r*
or, that *p* and therefore H ought to do *x*

(2) A asserts that *p*, thereby implying that he has evidence for the truth of *p*

(3) A does not have evidence for the truth of *p*.

It is important to notice that this account of ideological utterances presupposes that criteria exist for deciding what is, and what is not, evidence for the truth of *p*.

It remains to comment briefly on ideological beliefs. The above analysis of ideological utterances suggests that a belief could be ideological in one of two ways. First, A might believe that *p* in circumstances such that, if he were to try to convince someone else that *p*, his utterance would satisfy the conditions set out above. Second, if A succeeds in attempting to convince H that *p* and the conditions for an ideological utterance are met, H's belief that *p* will clearly be ideological. Thus, ideological beliefs have their proponents and their victims.

It can be seen that ideological belief is a sub-species of unjustified belief. It was argued in the previous

chapter[31] that to justify a belief is to try to criticise it and fail. An unjustified belief is therefore one which is held despite (a) its having failed the critical tests or (b) its not having been submitted to them. In both cases the believer may be merely incompetent, not realising that p has failed the tests or that others are available. But, if these errors of reasoning are a necessary condition of success in attempting to convince someone else of the truth of p, or have been committed by someone who succeeded in convincing someone else of the truth of p, then the belief that p is ideological.

## 2.5 Summary

The subjectivist claim is that all beliefs are ideological. The argument for this claim is that rational choice between beliefs presupposes theory-independent criteria. But, it is maintained, beliefs presuppose theories and theories involve paradigms, which prevent the construction of a theory-neutral language for the comparison and rational selection of beliefs and theories. In reply it has been argued that the claim that theories are incommensurable is incoherent, on the grounds that incommensurability could be a problem only if the theories belong to the same form of knowledge and that the fact they do so ensures that they share criteria and other features which enable a rational choice to be made between them. Given the existence of forms of knowledge and the criteria associated with them, it is possible

to distinguish rational from ideological beliefs. Ideological beliefs are a sub-class of unjustified beliefs. Their identification, and the distinction between rational or justified and irrational or unjustified beliefs, presuppose the existence of criteria of justification.

The question now arises whether these criteria can themselves be rationally justified or whether they are socially relative. This will be the subject of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER THREE. JUSTIFICATION.

## 3.1 Introduction : Conceptual Relativism and the Criterion Problem.

It was argued in the previous chapter that a distinction can be drawn between rational or justified and ideological or unjustified beliefs. That distinction is part of the central argument of this section, that there is such a thing as objective knowledge and that it is to be analysed as justified true belief. Clearly, rational and ideological beliefs can be distinguished only if there are criteria for doing so. And the previous chapter ended by foreshadowing the expected subjectivist response to this presupposition of criteria of rationality, which is that such criteria are socially relative and cannot themselves be rationally justified. It is this subjectivist claim which is to be discussed in the present chapter.

The claim is twofold, comprising relativist and sceptical elements. So the first task is to explain how these components of the subjectivist claim are related. In a sense the relativist contention prepares the ground for the sceptical one, for the fact, if it is a fact, that some societies use different criteria of rationality from those employed by others is no reason to conclude that all such sets of criteria are equally valid, which is the point of the claim that they are socially relative. For it may be that there is one uniquely valid set of

criteria and that some, most or even all societies are using flawed approximations to it. But this possibility is ruled out by the sceptical argument. So the claim that criteria of rationality are socially relative, as distinct from the assertion that the criteria actually in use vary from one society to another, depends upon the sceptical conclusion that the criterion problem is insuperable.

The relativist claim is most controversial when made in connection with the rules of logic, on the basis of which we distinguish valid from invalid inferences. Thus, Bloor maintains that 'to appraise an argument for validity is to apply the standards of a social group. It cannot be other, or more, than this because we have no access to other standards.'[1] Another writer, Young, expresses his approval of the suggestion that 'the rules of logic, whether practical or academic, are conventional, and will be shaped and selected in accordance with the purposes of the discourse.'[2] This suggestion is owed to Mills, who is also cited by Esland as holding that 'criteria of validity and truth ...... are themselves, in their persistence and change, open to socio-historical relativization.'[3] A philosopher to whom, rightly or wrongly, a similar view is sometimes attributed is Winch: 'criteria of logic ..... are only intelligible in the context of ways of living or modes of social life.'[4]

In reply to the objection that these points establish only that members of some societies reason incompetently, not because they contravene rules their neighbours follow, but because the rules are themselves imperfect, the relativist can appeal to philosophical scepticism. For the objection presupposes that there are rules by comparison with which the unsatisfactory rules can be seen to be so. And these presupposed rules must be universally applicable and, even more important, capable of being rationally justified themselves. For nothing would be gained if some societies' rules were rejected on the basis of rules, adherence to which cannot be defended but must be admitted to be a matter of dogmatic commitment. That all criteria ultimately depend upon such commitment is, however, just the conclusion the sceptic seeks to prove. Sextus Empiricus' statement of it is quoted by Popkin as follows: '....... in order to decide the dispute which has arisen about the criterion, we must possess an accepted criterion by which ...... to judge the dispute; and in order to possess an accepted criterion, the dispute must first be decided.'[5] Either we decide upon a criterion arbitrarily and hold to it dogmatically or the search for a criterion continues *ad infinitum.*

In the remaining sections of this chapter several arguments against the social relativity of criteria of rationality and several attempts to solve the criterion problem will be examined and rejected as a prelude to the

exposition of an acceptable defence of the objectivity of certain criteria of rationality. The self-refutation and internal disagreement arguments against relativism are found to be inconclusive. A more promising line of thought is taken up by the communication breakdown argument, a transcendental argument according to which there must be universally valid criteria of rationality if communication between members of different societies is to take place. Granted that such communication does occur, it follows that there are universally valid criteria of rationality. But it is clear that relativists would be reluctant to concede as much; communication of the sort required is at best imperfect and incomplete. So once again the outcome is inconclusive. The quest for a definite answer to the question whether it is possible for someone to be justified in believing something must therefore turn to philosophical efforts to solve the criterion problem. For if that can be done a criterion, or a set of criteria, might be found to exist, which it would be in the real interests of all people, regardless of the social group to which they belong, to adopt. And that is indeed the answer to be given in this chapter. Several traditional and more recent proposed solutions to the criterion problem are considered, only to be found wanting. A transcendental argument, derived from the communication breakdown argument, is then constructed, according to which much more than communication between members of different societies depends on the existence of universally valid criteria of rationality.

Without such criteria, no systematic intercourse with reality would be possible at all. It would be difficult for the relativist or the sceptic to counter this argument by maintaining that all our transactions with reality are somehow delusory or disordered or that we never have any contact with reality at all. So the criterion problem is not so much solved as shown to be spurious: there are criteria for which a justification is available, because they are presupposed by our ordinary and indispensable dealings with the world. Accordingly, they are not even socially variable, let alone socially relative. Rather are they part of the distinctively human form of sensibility.

## 3.2 Conceptual Relativism

3.2.1 The Self-Refutation Argument. It is commonly argued that relativism is self-refuting, in that it cannot be stated without presupposing what it purports to deny. While this claim is true of some naive versions of relativism, a coherent form of relativism can be propounded. It will however be encumbered with the notion of a form of life, which raised further problems.

The self-refutation argument is put forward by Trigg and Passmore. According to the former writer, the claims that 'there is no such thing as "objective truth"' and that 'truth is relative to societies' both 'clearly purport to be objectively true, and are intended as truths about all

societies.'[6] Similarly, Passmore contends that it is a presupposition of all discourse that some propositions are true. 'We cannot,' he maintains, 'simultaneously put forward propositions for discussion and assert that no proposition is true.'[7] It is impossible to disagree with Passmore that it is self-refuting to assert, or imply, that no propositions are true, because, if it is true that no propositions are true, then at least one proposition is true. But it is less obvious that the idea of truth contains as an essential element the implication that if a proposition is true then it has a claim upon anyone who understands it. Admittedly, the view that a proposition is true only for its assertor is incompatible with rational discussion, from which it follows that someone who puts forward that view as a contribution to rational discussion is guilty of self-refutation. But perhaps the relativist wishes to follow a middle course between the incoherent doctrine that a proposition is true only for its assertor and the only alternative so far entertained, that a proposition is true for anyone who understands it, or, more straightforwardly, true *simpliciter*.

The middle way is the view denounced by Trigg, that propositions are true for their assertors and other members of the same society. This concedes that a proposition is, so to speak, entitled to be recognised as true by others than its assertor, who is therefore immune to the charge of self-refutation if he engages in rational discussion with

his neighbours. But it does not go so far as to admit that putting forward a proposition is putting it forward, not as true for members of a certain social group, but simply as true. Is this a reason for thinking that it does not go far enough ? What exactly is the difference between a proposition's being true for members of the same social group as its assertor and its being, simply true ? It may be helpful to distinguish between the state of affairs that makes a proposition true and that proposition's being known by someone to be true.[8] What makes a proposition true does not depend upon who asserts it and by whom it is understood. For instance, what makes it true that the Earth revolves around the Sun is simply the Earth's revolving around the Sun. And that is a state of affairs that is as it is regardless of whether or not anyone knows that it is. If the relativist, using the locution 'true for....', wishes to deny this, then he is committed to metaphysical idealism, a doctrine which will be examined at length in chapter five. If, on the other hand, he wishes merely to draw attention to the fact that a proposition can be known to be true only by someone who understands it, then an unorthodox theory becomes a trite observation.

Or so, at first sight, it may seem. For further reflection reveals a more interesting claim implicit in this relativist middle way. In asserting a proposition, a speaker uses concepts and criteria drawn from his own form of

life. Consequently, the relativist maintains, his proposition will be intelligible only to those who share the speaker's form of life. If forms of life are socially variable, then propositions can be understood and known to be true only by members of a social group defined by participation in the form of life from which the concepts and criteria used in asserting those propositions were drawn. The conclusion at which the relativist arrives is that, even if what makes a proposition true is not relative to a social group, what makes someone justified in believing it is. An evaluation of this claim entails an analysis of the notion of a form of life. And that is best begun by considering another argument against relativism, namely, the internal disagreement argument.

3.2.2 The Internal Disagreement Argument. A form of life is best understood as a congeries of concepts and criteria, attitudes and assumptions, shared by members of an identifiable social group, which at once underlies their transactions with each other and limits their communication with members of other social groups.[9] Thus, there are two quarters from which it may expect attack: the internal disagreement argument concerns relations within the social group, while the communication breakdown argument refers to relations between members of different social groups.

The internal disagreement argument is an attempt to prove that relativism collapses in trying to explain the

existence of discord within a form of life. The relativist, unlike the proponent of the view that a proposition is true for its assertor alone, can, it appears, accommodate disagreement about the truth or falsity of propositions. For the individual assertor can be judged against the standards current in his society. But this apparent advantage turns out to be the cause of the relativist's downfall. Or so it has been claimed. Trigg, for example, poses the problem as follows: 'there is a disagreement in the society, which must be resolved by deciding what the majority thinks.'[10] The trouble with such a procedure is, in his view, that it would be circular to use the result of the ballot as a criterion of truth to settle the dispute, because the organisers would have to ask each respondent what he believed to be true. This circularity can be avoided by asking each respondent to predict the result of the ballot rather than say what his own opinion is. But, according to Trigg, this amendment only displays the ultimate incoherence of relativism. For the new procedure entails that people predict their own and other people's predictions and therefore their own and other people's predictions about their predictions,and so on. Since the respondents 'cannot all look at each other simultaneously to see what the majority thinks,' Trigg concludes that 'individual judgements about what is true precede questions about what most people think.'[11] One final difficulty faces the the relativist: since he accepts the standards of a society, he cannot also question them. Consequently, he

is obliged, in Trigg's opinion, to adopt the implausible position that the lone rebel, the reformer or the prophet are simply mistaken about what the standards of their society actually are, 'for they cannot recognise the standards and still reject them.' Do these difficulties amount to a refutation of relativism ?

There are two reasons for returning a negative answer to this question: a workable ballot procedure is after all available to the relativist and, in any case, the whole idea of his having to resort to a ballot is misguided. A valid ballot procedure can be worked out by ignoring Trigg's amendment and clarifying the original method. The organisers ask people what they believe to be true; they employ the commonsense notion of truth as correspondence to the facts. The results of the ballot are taken as evidence, not of what is true, but of what is true*, where a proposition is true* if and only if it is assented to by the majority. Clearly, there is no circularity in trying to find out what is true* in society S by asking members of S what they believe to be true. But, it will be objected, this procedure presupposes the ordinary notion of truth with which the relativist wishes to dispense. This is not so. The organisers of the ballot are not committed to endorsing the beliefs of members of S. It is certainly not necessary for the relativist to deny that many people believe that some propositions are true; after all, it is only because some people are not relativists that those who are have to defend their views. For the fact that

members of S believe that there are objective truths does not entail that there actually are any. Perhaps the members of S are simply mistaken. A relativist response of this sort is akin to the error theory of ethics: 'The claim to objectivity, however ingrained in our language and thought, is not self-validating ..... Although most people in making moral judgements implicitly claim, among other things, to be pointing to something objectively prescriptive, these claims are all false.'[13] But the relativist generalises this claim to cover factual propositions as well as moral judgements. And so it is appropriate to resurrect the self-refutation argument, on the grounds that relativism now presupposes objective falsity, and so, by implication, objective truth. The relativist can, however, evade this charge by adopting a Pyrrhonian strategy: the organisers of the ballot must claim no more than that the proposition that the beliefs held by members of S are all false is true <u>for those who share the organisers' form of life</u>.[14]

The second reason for rejecting the internal disagreement argument is that the relativist can properly object to having the ballot procedure foisted upon him. The assumption was that a ballot is the only means of deciding who is right when unanimity collapses, because the relativist is confined to the standards which are operative in <u>S</u>. So he is. But this does not entail that all he can do is attempt to discover which standards are most widely used.

For standards, in common with rules, criteria, principles and laws, exhibit a most important characteristic, namely, universalizability. Both descriptive and prescriptive laws go beyond experience. 'All swans are white' entails 'If anything is a swan, then it is white' and thereby attempts, so to speak, to legislate for future experience in a way that is foreign to 'All swans so far observed are white'. Similarly, if I say that Simon is a fox terrier by virtue of having characteristics $c$ ... $c^*$, then I am committed to saying that anything else, as yet unexperienced, which has $c$ ... $c^*$ is a fox terrier. What I say about Simon commits me to saying certain things about objects of future experience, on pain of inconsistency. All saying is doing, performing speech acts, and so what a speaker does on a certain occasion commits him to acting in a certain way on other occasions, as long as he is trying to be rational. A standard or criterion applies beyond the particular occasion of action when its presence was first detected. Suppose that all the members $M$ ... $Mn$ of $S^*$ are perfectly rational agents. Then, if $M$ does $x$ in circumstances $C$ he will do $x$ in circumstances $C^*$ as long as $C$ and $C^*$ are alike in all relevant respects. It may be assumed that agents in real societies are only imperfectly rational. Discrepancies therefore arise between what an agent actually does in $C^*$ and what he should have done in line with the principle manifest in his action in $C$. If one and the same agent can in this sense disagree with himself there is no mystery about disagreement between different agents within the

same form of life. Some are simply more rational than others. And this is sufficient to explain the existence of rebels, reformers and prophets: they are typically more rational than their neighbours in S. They see that a principle has implications for action in areas other than those in which it has so far been applied, while other members of S either fail to perceive the connexion or, through moral weakness, fail to act in accordance with their professed principles. Those who sought the emancipation of slaves or the enfranchisement of women exemplified this description particularly clearly. And so, in a sense, Trigg was right in thinking that the relativist can explain internal disagreement only as the outcome of a mistake. But not in the sense intended. For, in the first place, it need not be the minority view that is erroneous, as the reformer examples illustrate. And, secondly, the error is not a factual one about what the standards actually are, but a ratiocinative one about their applicability. Thus, internal disagreement is rooted in the universalizability of criteria of rationality.

3.2.3. The Communication Breakdown Argument. This argument may be stated as follows : if relativism were true, people from different forms of life would be unable to communicate with one another; but people from different forms of life do communicate with one another; so relativism cannot be true. An argument of this form is advanced by Lukes: '........ the

existence of a common reality is a necessary precondition of our understanding G's language', where G is a social group other than our own, for otherwise '..... we and they would be unable to agree about the successful identification of public, spatio-temporally located objects.'[15] An interesting feature of the communication breakdown argument is that it seeks to establish a conclusion which the relativist also wishes to insist upon. Far from being embarrassed at the revelation of a hitherto unsuspected implication of his doctrine, he will readily agree that, in the absence of a common reality, communication breaks down. But, whereas his critics assume that the breakdown of communication rarely, if ever, occurs, the relativist maintains that it is a common phenomenon. Thus, Kuhn, whose early views are generally agreed to be relativist despite his later disclaimers, writes of scientists working within different paradigms in the following terms: 'Since the vocabularies in which they discuss such situations consist, however, predominantly of the same terms, they must be attaching some of those terms to nature differently, and their communication is inevitably only partial.'[16] Another writer often perceived as a relativist, Winch, emphasises the limits of communication in the following passage : 'Something can appear rational to someone only in terms of his understanding of what is and is not rational. If <u>our</u> concept of rationality is a different one from his, then it makes no sense to say anything either does or does not

appear rational to <u>him</u> in <u>our</u> sense.'[17] The assumption here is that there are no universally valid criteria of rationality; criteria of rationality are either theirs or ours. It is difficult to evaluate the communication breakdown argument and the reply to it, because the extent and frequency of communication breakdown required by either side before it can claim victory is not clear.

The deadlock might be broken by questioning an assumption shared by both parties to the controversy, namely, that there must be either a common reality or a myriad realities having nothing whatsoever in common. Suppose it is agreed that communication between members of social groups having different forms of life does take place but is limited to the identification and description of material objects. The simplest explanation of such a state of affairs is that there is a fundamental reality which is common to everyone and a superstructure of localized realities tied to different forms of life. Perhaps the common reality is itself tied to a distinctively human form of life. In the present context the idea of a common reality with localized realities superimposed upon it is interesting because it suggests a compromise solution to the problem of communication breakdown. This can be seen by considering how Winch could reply to a version of the communication breakdown argument directed specifically against his views.

The argument starts from the familiar assumption that 'the possibility of communication ...... requires that there be a shared ground between the languages of the various forms of life.'[18] Its proponent, Kekes, suggests that this common ground is provided by the fact that people 'perceive the world in terms of five sense modalities.'[19] The resultant commonsense presents Winch with the following dilemma: 'if commonsense and ordinary language do form a substratum of forms of life, then there is a ready-made, context-independent standard with reference to which claims made within different forms of life can be appraised; if, on the other hand, commonsense and ordinary language are regarded as one form of life among many, then it becomes impossible to explain how communication is possible in the absence of a shared conception of reality.'[20] But the dilemma is false. For there is no reason why Winch should not agree that there is a substratum of forms of life which make it possible for people from different forms of life to communicate about a limited range of subjects, say, material objects. This would be consistent with relativism concerning other things, whose identification and description presuppose the existence of human institutions and associated forms of life. Indeed, a limited relativism of this sort seems to be just what Winch propounds: 'Two things may be called "the same" or "different" only with reference to a set of criteria which lay down what is to be regarded as a relevant difference.

When the "things" in question are purely physical the criteria appealed to will of course be those of the observer.'[21] It is implied here that it does not matter what form of life the observer belongs to. For if this did make a difference, then two observers from different forms of life would employ different criteria and it would not be possible to speak of the criteria of the observer. Accordingly, it is reasonable to conclude that Winchean relativism applies only to a finite range of things, namely, intellectual or social things. This does seem the best way to read page 108 of The Idea of a Social Science. A limited relativism along these lines can be made more worthy of credence by drawing attention to its affinity with a valuable distinction, pointed out, for instance, by Searle, between brute and institutional facts.[22] Brute facts concern material objects and knowledge of them does not presuppose criteria drawn from socially variable forms of life; institutional facts have to do with what Winch calls intellectual and social things and knowledge of them does presuppose criteria embodied in social institutions and their associated forms of life. Thus, the most plausible response to the communication breakdown argument is a combination of objectivism with regard to the material world and relativism concerning the world of human institutions.

It may be helpful at this point to examine the implications of this tentative conclusion for the question whether beliefs can ever be justified. The premise on which

this chapter is based is that justification presupposes criteria of rationality, which are generally assumed to be universally valid. The provisional conclusion is that, while there are criteria of rationality of universal validity, they apply only to beliefs about the natural or physical world. So it seems that beliefs about intellectual and social things cannot be justified on the basis of universally valid criteria of rationality. Does this mean that beliefs about social institutions, including those for the acquisition and transmission of knowledge, can never be fully justified ? Does there inevitably come a point at which justification has to stop: 'this game is played' or 'this institution exists' ? If so, the justification of a practice would be relative to the institution of which it is a part, and, on the assumption that institutions cannot themselves be rationally justified, therefore incomplete. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to an attempt to show that this view, that justification of beliefs about social and intellectual things is necessarily incomplete, is not implied by the tentative conclusion and is in any case unsound. In the next section it will be argued that concepts and practices are embedded in institutions or forms of life, so that even the notion of what is real reflects human purposes and interests. This indeed is the truth in relativism. But in the remaining sections of the chapter it will be contended that there is a certain continuity between such institutions or forms of life and commonsense or the human form of sensibility. Philosophical discussion

can sometimes be advanced by exchanging the horns of a dilemma for the shades of a spectrum. And it seems unlikely that human affairs can be adequately described in terms of simple dichotomies, such as that between forms of life and commonsense or that between brute and institutional facts. Human activities cannot, except at the cost of over-simplification, be divided into those that engage wholly with the physical world and those that are entirely confined to the social sphere. And so, if we can find some universally valid criteria of rationality, we may reasonably expect them to underlie, or in some way inform, the localised criteria peculiar to the more differentiated forms of life. It will be argued in the concluding sections of this chapter that such criteria exist and are indispensable to activities which are presupposed by the most socially variable forms of life.

3.2.4 Forms of life. The discussion of the communication breakdown argument produced the suggestion that, while common-sense or the human form of sensibility explains communication success, the existence of socially variable forms of life is necessary to understand communication breakdown. People from radically different cultures successfully communicate with each other up to a certain point by virtue of their common human form of sensibility. That their success is limited, that there comes a point at which communication breaks down, is to be accounted for by reference to forms of life. What this means in practice can be understood by considering an imaginary

example of communication between people from different forms of life. Suppose that the people involved are a monk and a soldier and that the subject of discourse between them is something that can at least be described as a stone wall.[23] The criteria by which it is identified as a material object of that particular sort are the same irrespective of whether it is the soldier or the monk who is looking at, or talking about, it. For these criteria are part of the human form of sensibility. So the monk and the soldier agree that the object in front of them is a stone wall. But for both of them it is much more than that, and it is over its further description that disagreement arises. The monk regards the wall as a holy shrine, the site of an ancient miracle; it is, as Weber would say, charismatic, _aussertäglich_, outside the everyday. It is natural to say that the wall _is_ a shrine for the monk. But not for the soldier; for him, what Weber called _Entzauberung der Welt_ has long ago taken place. Nevertheless, he sees the wall as more than just a wall; his enemy is sheltering behind it and so he regards it as a legitimate target for his artillery. And so the object that is a wall for both soldier and monk is a target for one and a shrine for the other. What is it really ? Is it really a shrine or a target ? Or is it really just a wall ?

The value of conceptual relativism lies in revealing the futility of these questions. To endorse either of the further descriptions and dismiss the other would be arbitrary. To insist that both further descriptions are invalid and that the

wall is really nothing but a wall would entail a drastic diminution of reality. A world that contains stone walls but neither targets nor shrines is not a world in which a fully human life could be led. Reality as we engage with it is more than merely material. And it is precisely this insight which is implicit in the idea of forms of life. For an important aspect of the meaning of 'real', and one which objectivists are liable to overlook, is that what is real is partly a matter of what is taken seriously by people in thinking and acting.[24] Suppose, for example, that the monk visits the soldier with the intention of urging him to respect the holiness of the wall. It is unlikely that the soldier would contradict the monk's claim that it is a shrine. The conflict between them is not accurately described by saying that one denies what the other asserts, that the wall is a shrine. Certainly, the soldier does not believe that the monk is simply mistaken, that, say, the authenticated site of the miracle is actually a mile or two down the road. It is just that he does not take the description '$\underline{x}$ is a shrine' seriously. The monk and the soldier do not contradict each other, because they do not speak from within the same form of life. And what shows that they do not speak from within the same form of life is that they do not take the same descriptions seriously.[25] But what exactly is involved in taking a description seriously ?

A person takes a description seriously if it guides his actions, if it is before his mind when he makes decisions.

And since the idea of taking a description seriously was introduced in order to explain how the reality of something can be relative to a form of life, it is clear that part at least of what makes something real is how people behave towards it. Thus, although the soldier might understand the place which the shrine has in the lives of religious believers, it is not a shrine for him because he does not take that description seriously. But, whereas the description of the wall as a shrine carries no weight with the soldier, it does influence the actions of the monk. For him the following practical syllogism is valid :

(i) Shrines are to be treated with respect.

(ii) This wall is a shrine.

(iii) Therefore, this wall ought to be treated with respect.

In other words, if the wall is a shrine for the monk, then we can derive an 'ought' from an 'is'. Some descriptions, such as '<u>x</u> is a shrine', comprehend, rather than simply entail, evaluations, which shows that what is real has something to do with human action and is not purely a matter of what things are like. And so the description of the wall as simply a wall is not a privileged description which takes precedence over, or is somehow more real than, than the description of it as a shrine. Far from it. The neutral description of the wall as a wall has fewer implications for action than evaluative ones, and so it applies to something that is less real, not more so. The wall is a shrine, and a real shrine, because

of the way in which people behave towards it. And so there is a sense in which man is indeed a world-producer, for an adequate description of the world must certainly include shrines (and barricades) as well as walls.

This, then, is the truth in conceptual relativism: what is real is in part determined by what we do. And this has important implications for education. For what is real in education is in part a matter of what teachers do. The standards in terms of which they classify pupils are the outcome of decisions rather than part of the unalterable fabric of the universe, but they are no less real for that. This point will be discussed in detail in chapter nine. The next step in the argument of the present chapter is to show that, while relativism contains a kernel of truth, it does not constitute the whole truth. Although what is real depends in part upon what is taken seriously in a form of life, it is also conditioned by commonsense or the human form of sensibility. If this claim is to be made good, the criterion problem must be confronted and solved.

## 3.3 The Criterion Problem

Before a solution to the criterion problem can be offered, it is necessary to survey the philosophical controversy surrounding it. Only in that way can its significance be fully appreciated. Several putative solutions will be considered and rejected, but only as a preliminary to the eventual objectivist argument that the criterion problem can indeed be solved.

3.3.1 Methodism and particularism. Two traditional responses to the sceptical challenge are methodism, the view that we do have a general criterion or method for deciding what we know, and particularism, according to which there are occasions when we do not need a criterion to know that we know.

It is particularism which Chisholm finds the more attractive counter-sceptical strategy. The main premise of his argument for this doctrine is the claim that 'in order to find out whether you know such a thing as that this is a hand, you don't have to apply any test or criterion.'[27] There are therefore paradigm cases of knowledge, 'many things which, quite obviously, we do know to be true',[28] and these enable us to formulate a general criterion to apply in less straightforward cases.

But particularism, however initially attractive it may be, is ultimately incoherent. The fact that the paradigm cases have to be selected makes it clear that it is just not true that we can sometimes know that we know without applying a criterion. The cases which Chisholm picks as paradigms are not chosen in an aleatory manner but have to pass a test, namely, that what is known must be obvious or self-evident to the knower. Knowledge of propositions such as 'This is my hand' or 'I am now typing' expressed in the appropriate circumstances meets this criterion and so is taken as

paradigmatic, whereas knowledge of propositions such as 'There is intelligent life on Mars' or 'It is now snowing in Florida' fails the test. So particularism is really a disguised form of methodism, for the particularist does have to apply a criterion, that of self-evidence or obviousness.

It might be objected that this is not a criterion, that the whole point of particularism is that giving reasons must come to an end somewhere and that in the paradigm cases we know without being able to justify our knowledge and so without appealing to a criterion. Particularism, the objector might suggest, is really another name for intuitionism. But this objection misses the point. If the paradigm cases are known by intuition in the way that empiricists hold that basic propositions are known by sense-experience, then intuition is overtly another general criterion or method. If, on the other hand, it is argued that the paradigm cases are simply known without the possibility of justification, so that any appeal to intuition is not to a faculty but merely to the lack of justifiability, then it remains true that the cases have been selected in a non-arbitrary manner and that non-justifiability is now the covert criterion.[29] Either way, particularism collapses into methodism, open or concealed.

This outcome naturally arouses interest in methodism. But the standard objection to that doctrine, that the chosen criterion is at once of very general application and completely arbitrary, is a powerful one. As Chisholm puts it, the

methodist 'leaves us completely in the dark so far as concerns what reasons he may have for adopting this particular criterion rather than some other.'[30] Clearly, the methodist faces a dilemma: if he gives us a reason for adopting the criterion which is independent of the criterion, then he has shifted his ground and the problem arises all over again in respect of the new criterion; if his reason depends on the criterion, then it is evidently circular. But, it may be asked, is this true of all possible reasons that might be given for adopting a particular criterion ? Is a different kind of justification possible ?

3.3.2 Pragmatic justification. The claim that traditional answers to the criterion problem have failed because they have relied upon cognitive justification, and that the problem is to be solved only by pragmatic justification, has been put forward by Feigl.[31] An adequate theory of knowledge, he maintains, must distinguish the fact that a rule is followed from the fact that it is valid. Thus, the sociology of knowledge, which seeks to explain why certain claims to know are made in preference to others, must not be confused with, or thought to have superseded, epistemology, which is concerned with questions about the validity of knowledge-claims. It follows that a theory of knowledge which treats logical rules and methodological principles as no more than empirical phenomena is inadequate. The difficulty is that the criterion problem seems to imply that, since we cannot without circularity justify our most basic principles of rationality, then we have no choice but to regard

them as purely empirical phenomena. We could give a causal explanation of their popularity or success but we could not justify them.

In an effort to solve the criterion problem, Feigl postulates a new kind of justification. What he is looking for is a justification of the most basic and general methodological principles to which contemporary scientific practice conforms. Take, for example, the principle of induction: we observe repeated instances of X's being followed by Y and frame the inductive generalisation 'X causes Y.' Since this statement goes further than the more cautious assertion 'X has so far always caused Y' and the even less adventurous 'X has so far always been followed by Y', it assumes that the future will resemble the past in all relevant respects. It would clearly be circular to try to justify this principle on the grounds that induction has so far enabled accurate predictions to be made and that action based upon such forecasts have produced desirable consequences. It is for this reason that Feigl disclaims any attempt to establish empirical conclusions about the practical discomforts likely to accompany the implementation of unsound principles, even though that is the form which a pragmatic justification might reasonably be expected to take.

A pragmatic justification of basic methodological principles is, Feigl suggests, one which relates them conceptually to the realisation of certain ends. These ends are the ideals of clarity, definiteness, consistency and

conclusiveness, warranted assertibility and maximum scope. The methodological principles are pragmatically justified if 'it can ..... be shown deductively (and asserted in an analytic statement) that conformity with the principles is a necessary condition for the attainment of these ideals.'[32] Suppose that theory A is preferred to theory B because it explains phenomena for which B cannot account. We could justify our preference, according to Feigl, by showing that maximum scope is part of the meaning of 'theory', so that necessarily A is a better theory than B. The relation between the principle, that we should prefer the theory which explains the most phenomena, and the ideal, maximum scope, is a conceptual one. Feigl can therefore claim to have avoided the circularity which vitiates cognitive justifications.

However, it does not follow that pragmatic justification has solved the criterion problem. Even if methodological principles have been shown to be conceptually related to certain ideals, it seems reasonable to press the demand for justification a stage further and ask why it is rational to pursue these particular goals. All that Feigl has to say is that 'they are taken as the objects of certain interests' and that successes and failures 'in the enterprise of science have given rise to a strong interest in them.'[33] This is simply to take for granted the validity of current scientific principles and practices. Any attempt to justify the ideals themselves, which inform those principles and practices, would evidently encounter the criterion problem all over again. So the notion of pragmatic justification does not solve the

problem, but merely pushes it back a stage further: the problem now is to justify, not our criteria of knowledge, but our ideal of knowledge, or the cluster of ideals which constitute the goal of systematic scientific knowledge.

Cognitive and pragmatic justification have both failed to solve the criterion problem. A possible response to this outcome is to question the propriety of the demand for justification.

3.3.3 Comprehensively critical rationalism. If, then, we are led to conjecture that there may be something wrong with the demand for justification, Bartley's doctrine of comprehensively critical rationalism (CCR) will seem to us to be a promising alternative. For the assumption on which that theory is based is that previous accounts of rationality have erred in identifying it with justification.[34] Since justification is taken to be the deriving of a belief from the ultimate criterion of knowledge, or rationality, rationalists are at once faced with the criterion problem. Admitting the impossibility of justifying rationality, Bartley argues that rationality consists in criticising, rather than trying to justify, beliefs. All beliefs and standards, including CCR itself, are to be held only provisionally, so that they are always open to critical scrutiny and the possibility of revision or rejection. In this way, according to Bartley, the need for an irrational

initial commitment as the foundation of rationality is obviated.

Discussions of CCR have tended to concentrate on some of its curious consequences. Bartley insists that an adherent of his doctrine could be persuaded to renounce his rationalism, so proving that he had not been dogmatically committed to it but had been holding it only provisionally until something better came along. But, if he was led to abandon his rationalism by adverse criticism of it, CCR has been vindicated: rationalism has been renounced in response to criticism. It seems that nothing could count as a refutation of CCR, in which case the distinction between holding it provisionally and adhering to it dogmatically is difficult to discern.[35] Even if it can be extricated from this embarrassing predicament, CCR is open to criticism on other grounds.

Bartley's initial premise concerning the nature of rationality is unsound. The assumption is that rationality consists in trying to criticise rather than justify beliefs, which presupposes that criticism and justification are distinct. But in practice to try to criticise a belief and fail is to justify it, if only provisionally and until more exacting critical tests have been devised. Indeed, it has already been argued that a belief is criticised because it is one of several competing for our allegiance and that it is the belief which best withstands the critical tests that has to that extent been

justified.[36] But why, it may be asked, does this matter for CCR ? Does it not merely indicate the advisability of revising our notion of justification ? Is not CCR left intact, simply being reinterpreted as a revision rather than a rejection of the demand for a justification of criteria of rationality ?

The answer to the last two questions is no. A criticism of a theory, or of a belief, is not an isolated atom of thought, owing nothing to other products of the mind; a criticism presupposes a theory and a reply to a criticism will often take the form of subjecting the theory on which it relies to criticism in its turn. And so criticising a theory presupposes criteria of knowledge just as much as justifying a theory does. What made it look as though there was a radical difference between criticism and justification, so that reliance on the former would escape commitment to an ultimate criterion, is an ambivalence in CCR between attitude and policy. To hold one's beliefs open to criticism is to hold them in a certain way, to adopt a certain attitude toward them, more specifically, to refrain from placing one's absolute trust in them. And it is clear that to adopt such an attitude does not involve committing oneself to a criterion of knowledge. So, if Bartley is understood as analysing a certain sort of cognitive attitude, his doctrine may be accepted and the attitude adopted. But it is plain that he is trying to do more than this: he is seeking to recommend a policy; otherwise, the dispute over the curious consequences of putting his theory into practice would be beside

the point. Actually criticising one's beliefs, as distinct from having a certain attitude towards them, does presuppose a theoretical background, which will include a criterion, or set of criteria, of knowledge. The conclusion must be that CCR is no solution to the criterion problem.

3.3.4 Inconsequentialism. One possible response to the failure of these attempts to solve the criterion problem is to question the assumption that a solution needs to be found. The inconsequentialist admits that the criterion problem cannot be solved at the theoretical level but insists that this failure does not matter because it has no practical consequences. The sceptic presents us, not with a real problem requiring a solution, but with a bogus problem which recognition will dissolve. This argument will be expounded at greater length; it will then be rejected on the grounds that scepticism about criteria of knowledge does have practical consequences and is therefore a genuine problem which must be solved if objectivism is to be established.

The argument to be considered is that scepticism about criteria of knowledge resembles philosophical scepticism in general, in entailing no practical consequences. Thus, scepticism about material objects is too general to make any difference to what we do; its proponents continue to make the same discriminations within the class of material objects as everyone else does; they can tell a hawk from a hernshaw, an elephant from a postage stamp, a mountain from a molehill.

Where the sceptic differs from the rest of us is in holding that we cannot justify our belief in the existence of material objects as such. Although he makes the same discriminations as everyone else does, he gives a different account of the objects of those discriminations. If his scepticism were more selective, it could well have untoward practical consequences. A man who believed in the existence of some material objects but not in that of others would act in ways that might put his life in danger and his sanity in doubt. But just because the sceptic's doubts are so comprehensive they will not disturb the customary pattern of his behaviour.

Similarly, the argument continues, all the putative criteria of knowledge have been found to depend upon an ultimate criterion which cannot itself be justified. But this need not prevent us from using context-dependent or discipline-specific criteria of knowledge. And so scepticism about the basic criterion of knowledge does not entail that we can never have grounds for preferring one claim to know to another. Even if we cannot justify the principle of induction, for example, it is still rational to test theories by controlled experiments rather than haruspication. Perhaps the former is not simply beyond justification but outside the need for it. After all, sceptics and other irrationalists, such as fideists, continue to engage in rational argument. Just as the sceptic about material objects can discriminate between real and

hallucinatory daggers, so the sceptic about the ultimate criterion of knowledge can differentiate between sound and unsound arguments or propositions which it is reasonable to believe and those which it is not reasonable to believe. And again, just as the sceptic about material objects differs from the non-sceptic in the way in which he describes his experience and not in what he experiences, so does the sceptic about the ultimate criterion of knowledge differ from the non-sceptic only in the status which he ascribes to the criteria they both use.

There is some truth in inconsequentialism: it is indeed odd to ask for a justification of principles as basic as that of induction, as though dispensing with such principles were a serious possibility. Nevertheless, the demand for justification is intelligible and must therefore be met. While inconsequentialism points towards the right answer to the criterion problem, it does not itself provide that answer. For the sceptic believes that the use of criteria of knowledge is limited in a way which the objectivist cannot accept. Rational argument is limited, in the sceptic's view, in that it cannot settle disputes between those whose fundamental commitments are to different criteria. As long as the disputants remain within the limits of rationality, by appealing only to shared criteria, their dispute can in principle be resolved. But if either side should invoke a criterion not accepted by the other it becomes impossible to settle the dispute by rational means. And so

inconsequentialism cannot be accepted, because scepticism about the ultimate criterion of knowledge does have practical consequences, in that it limits rational argument.

It should not however be assumed that the objectivist has to deny that there are any limitations on rationality at all. True, this assumption is apparently made by Bartley, who believes that to concede that rationality is limited in any way is to succumb to irrationalism.[37] Similarly, Popper denounces as 'a pernicious philosophy' the view that 'rational discussion is possible only between people who agree on fundamentals.'[38] But the conclusion of the previous section was precisely that rationality is limited in that there are some disputes that cannot be settled. In the example concerning the monk and the soldier, there is simply no answer to the question whether the wall is really a shrine or a barricade. And this surely amounts to saying that here is a dispute which reason is powerless to resolve. So the objectivist must agree that there is a sense in which rationality is limited.

But he must also insist that there is a sense in which rationality is not limited. What this sense is can be understood by noticing an ambiguity in the sceptic's claim that reason cannot settle disputes between those whose fundamental commitments are to different criteria of knowledge. This can mean, for instance, that someone <u>as a monk</u> has a fundamental commitment to religious criteria according to

which a wall near his monastery is a shrine, while someone else has a fundamental commitment as a soldier to military criteria in terms of which the wall is a barricade. In this sense the sceptic's claim is true. But it can also mean that the monk and the soldier do not have any criteria of knowledge in common at all, because each uses criteria which depend upon a different fundamental criterion. In this sense the sceptic's claim is false. For the monk and the soldier as human beings share some criteria of knowledge. Indeed, if this were not so, it would be impossible to speak of there being a dispute between them.

Bambrough makes the same point. Referring to the alleged fact that proof requires a premise and that the premise itself is always questionable, he suggests that the sceptic is 'right in saying that these requirements cannot be met ...... but wrong in supposing that they have to be met.'[39] We should, he continues, look at the cases cited by the sceptic in a new perspective, seeing them as revealing, not the limits, but the scope of reason. That there cannot be a dispute between people unless they share some common ground entails, not that rational discussion is limited to people who agree on fundamentals, but that even people who are in dispute have something in common, for otherwise they would be at cross-purposes and not in dispute at all. For instance, the disagreement between members of the Inquisition and their liberal critics is intelligible only on the assumption that they agree on certain points. Both sides want to save the heretic

from avoidable pain and differ only in that the Inquisitors do, whereas their critics do not, believe that 'a temporary and temporal torment would save a man from eternal hellfire.'[40] Bambrough's conclusion is 'not that we never fail to resolve our conflicts but that our failures to resolve them are failures in our powers or failures in our efforts; that we cannot escape responsibility for the failures by attributing them to the character of the questions instead of to our own.[41]

But this distinction between our powers and efforts and the questions with which we are faced is less significant than Bambrough believes. For a question is only a question if somebody asks it. We can of course abstract a question from its context and imagine how disputants more rational than the original ones could use reason to resolve it. But in real life there are many cases like that of the monk and the soldier, a rational resolution of which would involve too great a sacrifice on the part of one of the disputants, requiring him to abandon a commitment that is fundamental to his role as a monk or a soldier. Even if the nature of the questions themselves imposesno limits on the scope of reason, in practice reason is curtailed by the fundamental commitments people have as incumbents of social roles. So, while Bambrough's point that a dispute implies common ground is true, it does not entail that all disputes are amenable to rational resolution.

It may be helpful at this point to compare the results of this discussion with those of the previous section on forms

of life. The truth in conceptual relativism was found to lie in the assertion that some questions about what is real cannot be answered, for what is real depends in part upon what descriptions are taken seriously and that in turn depends upon the form of life to which a person belongs. Similarly, there is a sense in which what the sceptic says about criteria of knowledge is true: there are disputes which reason cannot resolve, because important criteria are not shared by the disputants. On the other hand, it was concluded in the previous section that the objectivist was right to insist that as well as socially variable forms of life there is a distinctively human form of sensibility. Again, this conclusion is echoed in the view that the truth in inconsequentalism is that there are some criteria of knowledge which we cannot seriously consider dispensing with, so that even those in dispute with one another still share some common ground. Both discussions suggest that, while there are socially variable forms of life which limit the scope of reason, there is also an underlying human form of sensibility without which reason could not operate at all. In the next section it will be argued that this is enough to solve the criterion problem.

## 3.3.5 The Human Form of Sensibility.

> '...... we are like a person in whose mind the law of causality barely exists, a person who would be incapable therefore of establishing any connexion between one phenomenon and another, to whose eyes the spectacle of the world would appear unstable as a dream.' [42]

The purpose of this section is twofold: (i) to propose a solution to the criterion problem; (ii) to introduce the notion of the human form of sensibility. It will be argued that there are criteria of knowledge which are rationally justified in that their use is indispensable to any systematic intercourse with reality. These preconditions of systematic engagement with the world constitute the human form of sensibility.

A detailed analysis of the human form of sensibility is outside the scope of this thesis but an attempt will be made to describe those features of it which are particularly significant for the idea of knowledge as justified true belief. The most elaborate description of what has been referred to in this thesis as the human form of sensibility is that contained in two major works by Strawson.[43] His aim is 'to lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure',[44] which are indispensable to the more particular processes of thought with which we are commonly occupied. The conclusion of his investigations is that our conceptual framework must include the following features: the concepts of space and time; the notion of material bodies which exist independently of us; the concept of a person; the everyday concept of causality; the law of non-contradiction; and the concepts of truth and falsity.[45] The principle of induction must also feature in any specification of the human form of sensibility.

The existence of the human form of sensibility enables it to be seen that there is no need to pretend that the criterion problem is not a genuine problem or is one that can safely be left unsolved because it makes no difference to the conduct of practical affairs. On the contrary, were the criterion problem to be left unsolved, were it to be admitted that no criteria of knowledge can be justified, the damage would be enormous. Not only rational inquiry and scientific knowledge, not only communication between members of different forms of life, would be in jeopardy: no organised dealings with the world would be possible at all. And *there* is the solution to the criterion problem. We *do* engage with the world in many rational and routine ways and that is sufficient justification for the criteria of knowledge on which we rely in doing so.

It is of course a justification that will only rarely be demanded. For the most part the fundamental criteria of knowledge, which constitute the human form of sensibility, are taken for granted. And rightly so. Subjectivists too readily assume that to show that a principle or a belief is taken for granted is to destroy its claim to validity or truth.[46] But to accept something without question may be perfectly rational if it is an indispensable precondition of any rational thought and action at all. An example may help to substantiate this claim.

One such indispensable criterion is the principle of induction. It is important to be clear about just what the

principle of induction actually is. It cannot be the assumption that all past regularities will continue indefinitely, for the vagaries of futurologists' pronouncements demonstrate the folly of simply extrapolating every observed regularity into the future. So the principle of induction is the assumption that some regularities, which it is impossible to specify a priori, will continue, or, in other words, that the world will continue to exhibit a certain degree of pattern and uniformity. Strawson puts it thus : 'The chaotic universe ..... is not one in which induction would cease to be rational; it is simply one in which it would be impossible to form rational expectations to the effect that certain things would happen.'[47] It is worth trying to imagine what life would be like in the chaotic universe.

The consequences of placing the principle of induction in abeyance would be drastic. The world includes my body and in my dealings with the rest of the world I take for granted many things concerning my body. For instance, I unconsciously assume that my legs are not liable to sudden and unpredictable changes in length. But suppose that in the chaotic universe instantaneous changes in the length of my legs become commonplace. I might begin a stride on the assumption, carried over from the real world, that my inside leg measurement was its customary thirty-three inches, only to discover that it at once extended to twice that span, with the disconcerting consequence that my foot regains contact with the ground when, according to my usual sublimal calculations, it should still

have been in mid-air. No sooner would I seek to accommodate my actions to my new-found length of limb than my legs would diminish to half their normal length. And so in the chaotic universe, bereft of the principle of induction, not only rational discussion and scientific inquiry but even such everyday activities as walking would be rendered quite impossible. For the conjunction of many bodily and environmental changes, of the sort just described, would put an end to human life as we now live it. And that is of course the justification for the principle of induction: it is part of the human form of sensibility, in that human life would be impossible without it.

Another constituent of the human form of sensibility is what Wittgenstein calls 'agreement in judgements', which he regards as indispensable to communication: 'If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also ..... in judgements.'[48] This must mean two things. Firstly, it implies that similar objects produce similar effects on the sense-organs of different people. It is a contingent fact, to be explained in terms of the similarity of human sense-organs and nervous systems, that a particular object, such as a rose, causes similar visual and olfactory sensations in different people. But it is a fact which can be inferred from the existence of language, for without such constancy linguistic communication would be impossible. Secondly, agreement in judgements is a presupposition of language in the sense that each individual must be able to recognise the similarity of similar sensations

without knowing what the common quality is. If he could not do this, if he could not perceive the similarity between a current sensation and one which he experienced yesterday or which is familiar even though no particular experience of it comes to mind, then he would be quite unable to learn how to apply a word to a range of particulars. And so, firstly, without agreement in judgements between different people language could not function as a means of communication and, secondly, without agreement in judgements by the same person at different times language could not be taught and learnt.

There are, then, two sorts of constituents of the human form of sensibility: criteria of knowledge and contingent features of human beings as biological organisms. Both are necessary if a rational engagement with the world and with other people are to be possible. But it is the criteria of knowledge which are of greater philosophical interest. For we are, so to speak, 'stuck with' the cognitive apparatus with which evolution has endowed members of the species homo sapiens. But the necessity for criteria of knowledge can be, and of course has been, questioned; it is intelligible to suggest that they are not indispensable to rational thought and action. And so an adequate account of the human form of sensibility must include a justification of the need for criteria of knowledge.

This is a task that is usually undertaken as part of a theory of truth. For, if justified true belief is knowledge, distinguishing valid from invalid claims to knowledge may actually mean distinguishing propositions which one would be justified in believing from those which one would not; and believing a proposition is necessarily believing it to be true. So what have been called in this chapter criteria of rationality or knowledge <u>are</u> criteria of truth. The next chapter will therefore offer an account of criteria of truth as part of the human form of sensibility. But it will also perform another task, since truth is the remaining constituent of knowledge as justified true belief, which it is the main purpose of this section to analyse.

## 3.4 Summary

Two arguments for the subjectivist claim that no one is ever justified in believing anything have been considered. The first is the conceptual relativist thesis that the criteria we use in justifying beliefs are socially relative. Three arguments against this thesis were discussed. The self-refutation argument was rejected because it overthrows only an extreme version of conceptual relativism. The moderate form which survives depends upon the idea of a form of life, which the internal disagreement argument seeks to undermine. But the universalizability of criteria of rationality enables the conceptual relativist to meet this objection by showing that forms of life can accommodate internal disagreement. The

communication breakdown argument is partially successful, in establishing that, as well as socially variable forms of life which explain communication breakdown, there must be an underlying human form of sensibility which makes possible communication success. Thus, the conceptual relativist is right in introducing the notion of forms of life but wrong to eschew the equally valuable idea of the human form of sensibility.

The second argument for the subjectivist conclusion is the sceptical thesis that criteria of rationality cannot themselves be rationally justified. Some unsuccessful attempts to solve the criterion problem were discussed. Particularism collapses into methodism; methodism is circular; pragmatic justification relies on ideals which it does not try to justify; comprehensively critical rationalism is vitiated by its assumption that criticising a belief can be distinguished from justifying it; and inconsequentialism is refuted by the fact that scepticism about criteria of rationality does have practical consequences. A solution to the criterion problem was then put forward: some criteria are indispensable to rational thought and action and as such are partly constitutive of the human form of sensibility.

The next chapter has a double aspect; it will contain an account of the criteria of truth and therefore of the human form of sensibility to which they belong; and it will at the same time complete the analysis of knowledge as justified true belief.

# CHAPTER FOUR. TRUTH.

## 4.1 Introduction

There are two tasks to be undertaken in this chapter. The main aim of Part One of the thesis is to clarify and defend an account of knowledge as justified true belief. It has been argued that to justify a belief is to try to criticise it and fail; and that rational belief is distinguishable from ideology. And it has been found that rationally justifying beliefs presupposes criteria which are not socially relative and which can be rationally justified themselves. As necessary conditions of rational thought and action, these criteria form part of the human form of sensibility. In order to amplify this account of knowledge as justified true belief two questions must be answered: What is truth ?, and What precisely constitutes the human form of sensibility ? For in the first place the subjectivist, even if he admits that there are justified beliefs, will no doubt point out a new target for his attacks: the objectivist claim that some justified beliefs are also true. And he will try to show that truth itself is socially relative. A complete account of knowledge as justified true belief therefore requires a theory of truth. As for the second question, while it has been argued that some criteria for justifying beliefs are part of the human form of sensibility, only one example of such criteria, namely, the principle of induction, has so far been considered. It will be contended that there are other preconditions of rationality; that they serve as

criteria of truth; and that the concept of truth itself is a central component of the human form of sensibility. Correspondence to reality and coherence with other beliefs will be proposed as further criteria of truth, which link the human form of sensibility with the forms of knowledge.

The first task is, then, to give an objectivist answer to the question, What is truth ?. The subjectivist seeks to prove the social relativity of truth by refuting the correspondence theory and upholding the coherence and pragmatist theories. A repudiation of the notion of truth as correspondence to reality is implicit in Esland's outline of the objectivism which he deplores: 'The individual consciousness recognises objects as being "out there", as coercive, external realities.'[1] A reason for rejecting this view emerges a little later on: 'Such a view implicitly presents man as a passive receiver, as the pliable, socialized embodiment of external facticities .... One finds it difficult to disagree with the claim that this epistemology is fundamentally dehumanizing.'[2] Esland's preference for pragmatism is expressed in his approval of Mills' contention that 'the rules of the game change with a shift in interest',[3] for the rules of the game include 'norms of truth'. So it seems that, in Esland's opinion, for a statement to be true is for that statement to serve an interest, specifically, the interest of those who make the rules of the game. The idea of truth as coherence can be interpreted so as to yield a very similar position. Thus Bloor maintains that 'the

objectivity of knowledge resides in its being the set of accepted beliefs of a social group. This is why and how it transcends the individual and constrains him ..... The authority of truth is the authority of society.'[4] It follows that 'new' beliefs will be accepted only if they are coherent with those already held by members of the dominant social group, or possibly, by the majority of people in the society in question.

In reply it will be argued that an adequate theory of truth must be syncretistic, drawing on two of the traditional accounts, the correspondence and coherence theories, though allotting the major role to the former. To understand why a composite theory is necessary and how it is possible to construct one, a preliminary distinction must be drawn between a definition and a criterion of truth. Truth can then be defined in terms of a very general notion of harmony or agreement, which encompasses both correspondence and coherence while excluding pragmatic utility. A similar eclecticism is appropriate when analysing criteria of truth, for there are forms of knowledge which are distinguished on the basis of their characteristic truth-criteria, so that no single criterion applies invariably across all the forms. Nevertheless, the dominant role must be assigned to the idea of correspondence between thought and reality, because it is a family resemblance concept whose members appear in almost all the forms of knowledge. Coherence, on the other hand, is the criterion of necessary truth and so is characteristic of the

mathematical form of knowledge. Pragmatic utility is not a criterion of truth in any form of knowledge, although it does provide evidence for the truth of statements in certain fields, as distinct from forms, of knowledge; it is best understood as being reducible to correspondence.

It was suggested in chapter three that the preconditions of systematic transactions with the world constitute the human form of sensibility. The suggestion that those features of the human form of sensibility are also criteria of truth is, however, less likely to command assent. Nevertheless, they provide a means of identifying some propositions as false and so they constitute the first stage of the filtering process by which we seek to select for the body of knowledge only those propositions which are true. The notion of causality may be taken as an example. Part of that concept is the assumption that every event has a cause, that things do not just happen for no reason at all. It is unlikely that anyone would actually deny this, but someone might put forward a theory which has that denial as an unrecognised entailment or might act on the tacit assumption that the denial is true. It would be enough to refute his theory or to impugn the rationality of his action if we were to point out the unacceptable assumption to which he is committed. Indeed, this form of argument has been deployed against Cartesian dualism, in an effort to show that it entails

solipsism, and against the Causal or Representative Theory of Perception, with the intention of showing that it entails the denial of the existence of the external world.[5] The essential feature of such arguments is the assumption that some propositions (that there are persons other than myself, that there is an external world) are so secure in their truth that they can be used as a standard for judging the truth or falsity of others.

It is however only rarely that a claim to knowledge made in the ordinary course of events, during, for instance, an examination, an academic dispute, a trial, a scientific investigation or an official inquiry, can be rejected on such grounds. For the propositions advanced in such circumstances will have no difficulty in getting through the initial screening provided by the indispensable preconditions of rationality. A finer net is needed if we are to select, from among several rivals, the one proposition which offers the true description or explanation which we seek. And this is precisely the need which traditional theories of truth have tried to satisfy: correspondence, coherence and pragmatic utility have each been suggested as the one criterion necessary to distinguish truth from falsity.

It will be argued, however, that none of these criteria is adequate on its own; the syncretistic theory of truth to be put forward in this chapter incorporates both correspondence

and coherence. The tests which are applied in the search for truth can all be subsumed under one or other of those two general ideas. And so a hierarchy of truth-criteria emerges: the tests which are actually used to distinguish true from false propositions; the two general types of such tests, namely, correspondence and coherence; and the involvement of those same two ideas in the definition of truth. That definition expresses a major constituent of the human form of sensibility, for rationality presupposes (i) a means of relating propositions to reality, that is, correspondence, and (ii) a means of relating one proposition to others, that is, coherence. In this way the concept of truth connects the human form of sensibility, universal and fundamental to all rational thought and action, to its particular manifestations in the forms of knowledge, which are local and underlie only one, albeit powerful, conception of reality.

## 4.2 The Definition of Truth.

It will be suggested that there is a minimal account of truth available, based on agreement or harmony. This idea is shared by the notions of correspondence and coherence, which are differentiated by the terms which they relate. It will later be argued that both correspondence and coherence are indispensable to rationality.

Before truth can be defined, a distinction must be drawn between a definition and a criterion. In everyday usage this distinction is straightforward: the definition states the

meaning of a word, while the criterion provides a test for detecting the presence of the object to which the word refers and so for applying the word. The chemical term 'acid', for instance, means 'a substance which neutralizes and is neutralized by alkalis and is compounded of hydrogen and at least one other element'; the test for the presence of an acid is that it turns litmus paper red. But even in ordinary usage the terms display a tendency to coalesce. Thus, 'freezing point' is defined as the temperature at which liquids, in particular water, freeze, so there can be no more reliable criterion for the temperature's being at freezing point than that water freezes. Is 'true' like 'acid' or like 'freezing point' ? Or is it unlike both of these easily and uncontroversially defined terms ? A more formal statement of the difference between a definition and a criterion may help to answer those questions.

It has been suggested that a distinction can be drawn between guaranteeing criteria, which are infallible, and authorising criteria, which are fallible.[6] *C* is a guaranteeing criterion of *x* if it is necessarily true that *C* occurs if and only if *x* obtains. Clearly, a definition of a word provides a guaranteeing criterion of the presence of what the word stands for. If, for example, a chemical substance neutralizes alkalis and is neutralized by them, then it is necessarily true that the substance is an acid, for those properties belong to the definition of 'acid' and provide infallible guaranteeing criteria of the presence of an acid. (Perhaps this would remain

true even if the substance were found to contain no hydrogen, for we might then abandon our present definition of 'acid'). It may however be impossible to apply the guaranteeing criterion, in which case authorising criteria are worth having. As Haack puts it, '...... an authorising criterion gives an indicator which may be less than completely reliable, but which, by way of compensation, is easier to discover to obtain.'[7]

Unfortunately, it is far from easy to apply the distinction between guaranteeing and authorising criteria to the concept of truth. If the distinction is to be used, then it must be true that (i) the definition in question is either a single property or a set of properties of finite and known number which always occur together and so could constitute guaranteeing criteria of the presence of the thing defined, and (ii) there are other properties which are easier to discover to obtain and which generally, but not constantly, indicate its presence. But truth is an essentially contested concept if ever there was one and so there is no general agreement about its guaranteeing criteria. Indeed, it seems at first sight that the only definition to which everyone could assent is so nebulous that the question of criteria of truth is left entirely open.

The three traditional answers to the question of what 'true' means are that a proposition is true if and only if (i) it corresponds to reality, (ii) it is coherent with other

propositions already known to be true and (iii) its acceptance brings about desirable consequences. The differences between these competing definitions have been widely discussed; that they exhibit a certain affinity has apparently been overlooked. All three definitions have a common root in the very general idea of agreement or harmony. Thus, the correspondence theory asserts that truth consists in a relation between thought and reality which may be designated as agreement or harmony just as well as correspondence. It may be held that there is an isomorphism between an element of thought or language and an element of reality, both having the same number of constituents arranged in the same way. Or it may simply be pointed out that what one says is true if and only if things are as one says they are. In both cases correspondence is evidently synonymous with agreement or harmony. Coherence may be analysed in a similar manner. A body of propositions is coherent if and only if none of its members is inconsistent with any of the others. And that is simply to say that there is harmony among the propositions and to imply that anyone asserting one of them could agree with someone else who asserted another. Similarly, what little plausibility attaches to pragmatism is derived from the gesture that theory makes towards the idea of harmony. If acting upon a proposition leads to the satisfaction of a certain sort of desire, then we may surely speak of harmony among the agent's beliefs, actions and desires. Perhaps, then, the three traditional definitions

of truth have developed from a common core of harmony or agreement. If so, an acceptable definition must either refine that central notion or somehow incorporate all three traditional ideas.

The idea of refining the central notion of harmony is made attractive by the existence of a definition of truth which is claimed by its creator to be epistemologically neutral: Tarski's semantic conception of truth.[8] It has been interpreted as a formal analysis of correspondence.[9] And it is indeed reasonable to see the schema

'Snow is white' is true iff snow is white

as a definition of truth as correspondence between language, on the left, and reality, represented on the right. But it could also be taken as an attempt to give systematic expression to the idea of coherence. In that case 'Snow is white' would stand for that sentence as uttered by a speaker on a particular occasion, while its repetition without quotation marks to the right of 'iff' would represent the sentence itself in its standard meaning within a given society. The truth of the sentence could then be analysed in terms of its consistency with others and the schema would state that someone speaks the truth if and only if what he says is consistent with whatever else is believed to be true in his society. It is not possible, however, to construct a plausible pragmatist interpretation of Tarski's scheme.

For the harmony to which the pragmatist appeals involves desire as well as language and external reality and there is no place in the schema for that new element. Thus, the two sides of the Tarskian schema can be taken to represent language and the world or language on a particular occasion of use and language in general but not language, the world and the will. And so correspondence and coherence, but not pragmatic utility, can be used in interpreting the bare Tarskian schema.

This does not mean, however, that the two terms are but different names for the same idea. Nor does it entail that either notion is reducible to the other. The relation itself may be indifferently described as one of agreement, harmony, correspondence or coherence; but the terms of the relation distinguish correspondence from coherence theories of truth. Correspondence is used to designate the agreement between language or thought and reality or the world; coherence refers to the agreement between, or among, two, or more, elements of language. Despite their common origin in the general idea of agreement, correspondence and coherence definitions of truth are distinct.

Must we then choose one or other of these ideas as the sole definition ? Must we elect to interpret the Tarskian formula in one way rather than the other ? Surely not. Correspondence cannot be discarded, because language would be of little use if it did not refer to something outside itself; granted that there must be a nexus between language and the

extralinguistic, truth can hardly be denied a major role in establishing the link. As for coherence, the propositions of logic and mathematics are generally said to be true or false, yet the idea of comparing them with reality outside the formal system of those disciplines seems altogether inappropriate. Empirical propositions are tested against the world outside language; analytic propositions are tested against the rest of the system. Since we use the word 'true' of both sorts of propositions, the definition must be sufficiently wide to cover correspondence and coherence alike. And so Tarski's schema provides an acceptable definition, not for the usual reason that it rehabilitates the correspondence theory, but precisely because it is impartial between correspondence and coherence.

Truth is, then, to be defined as follows: '*p*' is true if and only if *p*; where *p* is an empirical proposition its truth consists in its corresponding to reality; where *p* is an analytic proposition its truth consists in its cohering with other propositions. 'True' is not radically ambiguous, it is simply that correspondence and coherence are two sub-species of truth, each with its own sphere of application; the single Tarskian stream is fed by two equally powerful tributaries. If the ability to distinguish truth (in this sense) from falsity is to be established as a part of the human form of sensibility, correspondence and coherence must both be shown to be indispensable to rational discourse.

But this cannot be done until the question about criteria of truth has been answered. For it has been suggested that what brings out the difference between correspondence and coherence is the way in which we test a proposition for truth or falsity. So it is reasonable to expect that an account of the criteria we use in distinguishing true from false propositions will contribute to an understanding of why truth as correspondence and coherence is part of the human form of sensibility.

## 4.3. Criteria of Truth

In this section the three traditional theories will be examined to see if any of them can provide an adequate criterion of truth. It will be argued that the correspondence theory, taken literally, encounters insuperable difficulties but survives in the form of correspondence as a family resemblance concept, whose main area of application is the empirical and historico-sociological forms, or disciplines, of knowledge. Coherence is only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of truth in those two forms of knowledge, but it is an adequate criterion of truth in the mathematical form and perhaps also in the aesthetic and ethical forms, where a certain indeterminacy of truth-judgements is found. Pragmatic utility will be seen to be unable to sustain its identity. The way is therefore open for a weaving together of correspondence and coherence in the syncretistic theory of truth which will be expounded in the next section.

4.3.1 Correspondence. The epistemologically richest elaboration of the idea of truth as correspondence to reality is probably that worked out by Russell.[10] The causal nature of Russell's theory adds to its interest, because it explains why subjectivists are anxious to repudiate correspondence; if the external world causes a person's beliefs to correspond to it, then evidently social conditions are prevented from determining those beliefs. The Russellian and the subjectivist theories are simply rival accounts of the causes of true belief. It will now be contended that any causal theory of truth must be unsound; rejection of Russell's theory does not therefore entail acceptance of subjectivism.

Truth, according to Russell, consists in the correspondence of a proposition to a fact; to each true proposition there is just one fact the occurrence of which makes the proposition true. But the propositions of ordinary discourse are ambiguous; for instance, the proposition that Socrates was mortal may mean to one person that the Greek who drank hemlock was mortal, while to another it means that the teacher of Plato was mortal. So molecular propositions of this sort must be analysed into their constituent parts, namely, atomic or basic propositions. The isomorphism between a basic proposition and a fact in which correspondence consists is the product of a causal relation between the external world and the believer or assertor of the proposition. For someone asserts a basic proposition when

'the truth of what he says ... can ... be wholly dependent upon the character of one occurrence he is noticing.'[11] And so a basic proposition must 'arise on the occasion of' a sensible occurrence and be of such a logical form that it cannot be contradicted by another basic proposition; it cannot therefore refer to any previous or subsequent experience of the assertor, nor to the experience of others.

The postulation of basic propositions enabled Russell to present knowledge of the truth as the product of a process in which the knower is causally affected by his environment. Knowledge which is expressible in basic propositions is no more than the effect of the environment on the knower, while the rest of the edifice of knowledge, theories and scientific hypotheses, 'are a precarious super-structure built upon the foundation of simpler and less dubious beliefs.'[12] Correspondence to fact is therefore the ultimate criterion used in accumulating the body of knowledge, selecting from among candidates for inclusion those which can be shown to be derived from basic propositions. This invariant element being the imprint of reality, or the environment, upon the knower, the correspondence theory, as interpreted by Russell, is essentially a causal theory of truth: propositions are true if they can be derived by approved methods from basic propositions which are no more than environmental effects upon the knower. This makes the

subjectivist's suspicion of correspondence entirely understandable, for if we explain truth as the outcome of the operations of external reality on the minds of knowers we are debarred from explaining it as the outcome of human interests, social and individual alike. To the extent that truth is determined by the non-human world, as Russell claims, it cannot be determined by the human or social world. So the subjectivist would maintain. But truth is not causally determined at all.

There are four objections to be made to Russell's version of the correspondence theory. The first applies to any causal theory of truth. In chapter one a distinction was drawn between subjective and objective knowledge. Subjective knowledge consists of belief states and speech acts; it is perfectly proper to ask whether we freely choose to say and to believe the things that we do or whether we are causally determined to do so. Objective knowledge is a body of propositions, considered in abstraction from any particular occurrence in a belief state or a speech act; it is a category mistake to think that they can be either freely chosen or causally determined. The question of free will or causal determinism arises in connexion with someone's believing or asserting that p and not in connexion with p simpliciter. That someone believed or asserted a certain proposition, in one set of circumstances rather than another, might be explicable in causal terms, but the truth, or falsity, of that proposition cannot possibly be explained in such a way.[13]

A causal interpretation of the correspondence theory must therefore be rejected.

The second objection is implicit in the dismissal of methodism as an answer to the criterion problem.[14] Taken literally, the idea of correspondence between thought and reality relies on sense experience as the fundamental criterion of knowledge. Any attempt to justify it would either depend upon sense experience itself and so be circular or would introduce a new fundamental criterion and so initiate an infinite regress. Russell's postulation of basic propositions, which are by definition no more than the expression of sensible occurrences and which are used as the ultimate criterion of knowledge, is therefore vitiated by its failure to confront the criterion problem.

The third objection is the familiar one that there are no basic propositions. Even an utterance as simple as 'red patch here now', assuming that it means 'there is a red patch here now', is drawn into logical relations with other propositions by the occurrence in it of the general term 'red'. For instance, it contradicts 'there is a green patch here now' (on the assumption that 'here' and 'now' have the same referents in both propositions). One such proposition could be used to correct another; so there are no propositions which, being immune to correction, can constitute the unalterable foundation of knowledge which Russell sought.[15] It has been suggested that basic propositions, since they do not go beyond the immediate experiences which cause them, cannot contradict one

one another.[16] But in that case they cannot include general terms and so even 'red patch here now' is too complex to be a basic proposition. The conclusion must be that nothing can be both a proposition and the mere effect of a sensory cause.[17]

The fourth objection is that, even if there were basic propositions, the rudimentary awareness which they provide would not amount to a practicable criterion of truth. To postulate basic propositions as the foundation of knowledge is paradoxical, for to do so is to judge fully articulated claims to know, which people find it helpful to make and discuss, in terms of utterances which most closely resemble reflex responses to external stimuli and which no one would ever wish to use during the ordinary transactions of life. For example, even if the proposition that the divorce rate is higher now than it was ten years ago could be analysed into its myriad supposed constituents, the results would be unlikely to justify the labour of their attainment, being individually useless and aggregatively too cumbersome to understand. If the point of a criterion is that it should be easier to discover to obtain than what it is a criterion of, then correspondence, in the Russellian sense, is as unsatisfactory a criterion of truth as it is possible to imagine.

There is, nevertheless, something of great value to be salvaged from the wreckage of the causal interpretation of the correspondence theory. The point of using the word 'correspondence' is to draw attention to the terms of the relation it designates; more specifically, it is to emphasise

the fact that they must include an extralinguistic item. It follows that correspondence is the appropriate criterion when testing a proposition for truth or falsity involves some kind of contact with the world outside language, whether by means of experiment and observation or statistical techniques and surveys. In other words, when a proposition is empirical, attributions of truth must take into account the way things are in the world. What this means in detail is for the practitioners of the academic disciplines that study the empirical world to decide. In the case of everyday knowledge, it means, for example, that what makes it true that I saw a nuthatch in the woods this morning is that I saw a nuthatch in the woods this morning. And so Russell's causal interpretation of the correspondence theory can be abandoned without having to relinquish the idea of correspondence as such. Consequently, the repudiation of Russell's correspondence theory, far from offering support to the subjectivists' dismissal of truth as correspondence, entails the rejection of any causal theory of truth, including their own.

4.3.2 Coherence. The coherence theory of truth is associated with metaphysical idealism. It is therefore natural that it should be attractive to subjectivists, because their position is akin to idealism, as will be seen in chapter five. A characteristic of Hegelian (as distinct from Berkeleian) idealism is that it tends to explain something by relating it to other phenomena with which it constitutes a complex whole

rather than by analysing it into its component parts. Nothing is atomistically self-contained; everything is constituted as the thing it is by its relations to other things. And so truth is explained by relating propositions to one another instead of dividing them into simple elements having no logical relations. A single proposition is essentially a part of a body of propositions. The idealists' inclination to 'encourage everything to coagulate'[18] leads to the belief that coherence is an obstacle to correspondence, understood as a one-to-one correlation between a proposition and a fact: 'The intellectual apparatus which we try to apply to things outside the mind preventsus from really making contact with them'.[19] And so we can never hope to arrive at a theory which corresponds to reality. Since we have to give <u>some</u> meaning to the words 'true' and 'false', if we are to derive a criterion of truth, it is understandable that coherence comes to be favoured by subjectivist thinkers. For a body of propositions exists only as a consequence of collective human action. Truth as coherence is therefore a social artefact and the coherence theory a natural ally of an activist, 'non-dehumanizing' epistemology.

Everyone will agree that coherence has a part to play in justifying attributions of truth. A body of propositions some of which contradicted each other could not possibly be accepted as an explanatory theory. So coherence is a necessary condition of the truth of a body of propositions. And a necessary condition of the truth of a newly discovered

proposition is that it should be coherent with the existing members of the body of knowledge to which it seeks admission. But it is of course the standard criticism of coherence theories of truth that they provide only necessary, not sufficient, conditions of truth. This objection is evidently valid if coherence is identified with logical consistency. If s is inconsistent with p and p is true then s cannot also be true; but if s is consistent with p and p is true then, while s might be true, its consistency with p is not in itself a reason for believing that it is. But there is more to coherence than consistency.

Coherence involves comprehensiveness as well as consistency. There may be many sets of propositions all of which are internally consistent but each of which is inconsistent with at least one other set. If we are to identify one set as being uniquely true, then comprehensiveness is an attractive criterion to apply. Bradley, for example, holding that correspondence is the definition of truth, argued that, since reality is coherent, the body of propositions which uniquely correspond to it must be consistent and comprehensive, so that they correspond not merely to a part of reality but to the whole of it.[20] A more formal statement of the view that coherence is consistency plus comprehensiveness is put forward by Rescher, who suggests a procedure for selecting from among the propositions with which one is acquainted those which one would be warranted in asserting. The maximal consistent subset of the original data set is

defined thus: 'S* is an M.C.S. of S if it is a non-empty subset of S which is consistent, and to which no member of S not already a member of S* can be added without generating an inconsistency.'[21] But there is no guarantee that this procedure will lead to the identification of a single set of propositions which one would be warranted in asserting. Indeed, Rescher believes that the end-product will be a disjunction of M.C.S.s. To reduce the number of possible M.C.S.s a plausibility index is proposed to filter out some members of the original data set on the grounds of their implausibility. But this device does not, Reascher maintains, ensure uniqueness and so he concludes by recommending acceptance of the disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s.

It is therefore clear that coherence cannot be accepted as the criterion of truth. For the need to introduce the plausibility index shows that choosing propositions on the basis of their coherence with others presupposes the selection of some propositions on other grounds. Otherwise, there would be nothing for new propositions to be coherent with. An infinite regress would be initiated were coherence accepted as the sole criterion of truth. But forestalling it by means of the plausibility index is a desperate measure, relying on an *ad hoc* and makeshift procedure. Moreover, it fails, in the opinion of its author, to eliminate the disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s. It will be argued in the next section, 'A Syncretistic Theory of Truth', that, while this precludes coherence as the criterion of truth in empirical

propositions, it does not entirely destroy its usefulness, partly because there is a form of knowledge in which coherence is capable of excluding all but one M.C.S., and partly because there is another form in which a disjunction of M.C.S.s is the best we can hope to achieve.

4.3.3 Pragmatism. Pragmatism is the view that assertions are to be judged in terms of their utility, as warranted or unwarranted, rather than as true or false, as those terms are conventionally understood. So warranted assertibility can be seen as a reinterpretation of the traditional idea of truth as correspondence. The pragmatist seeks to offer a new account of the terms of that relation: there being no objective reality to which thought might correspond, the relation holds between a plan and its own execution, between a solution and the problem it solves: 'In the sense of correspondence as operational and behavioural ..... I hold that my type of theory is the only one entitled to be called a correspondence theory of truth.'[22] For the pragmatist, correspondence relates two stages of the same activity and truth is grounded in 'practical facts' which pose problems for agents rather than in the causal operation of the environment upon the knower. In view of the repudiation of causal theories of truth, this is a welcome approach. But reliance on pragmatic utility alone, it will now be contended, leads to incoherence.

Incoherence is in fact the standard argument against pragmatism. But some critics of pragmatism have been too hasty to dismiss it, putting the standard objection in a somewhat naive form which admits of a plausible reply. Russell, for instance, argued that warranted assertibility could not be used to redefine truth, because it lacked an essential feature of the orthodox interpretation of that idea, namely its capacity for performing a normative function. It lacked, that is to say, a means of imposing impartiality upon the individual scientist, or user of assertions generally. In Russell's theory, basic propositions were intended to establish a fixed standard against which other propositions could be judged. And the connexion between a basic proposition and the experience which makes it true, if it is true, is a causal one. This seems to have led Russell to assume that the connexion between an assertion and those of its consequences which warrant making it is also causal. In his view, Dewey proposed that the division of assertions 'is to be defined by the effects of assertions, while I hold, at least as regards empirical assertions, that it is to be effected by their causes.'[23] Consequently, pragmatism presupposed the traditional idea of truth it was intended to supersede; Dewey, Russell maintained, could not help but implicitly rely upon 'causal laws of the old sort "C causes E", except that C must be a situation plus an act, and E another situation.'[24] How can the pragmatist reply to this criticism ?

The most promising response is that the criticism is based on a misinterpretation of pragmatism. And this is just what Dewey sought to establish, by arguing that pragmatism is the view that assertions are to be judged by their utility in inquiry. Making an assertion is an action performed according to conventions arising out of collective attempts to solve problems; it is the conventionalised, or, in Dewey's words, 'operationally instituted', consequences of such actions which determine whether or not the making of an assertion was warranted in a particular field of inquiry. An example may help to clarify this point. Suppose a pupil knows that Lanfranc was appointed to the Archbishopric of Canterbury by William the Conqueror and also knows that his teacher is convinced that Odo was appointed. He secures the prize being offered for the right answer by saying that William made Odo Archbishop of Canterbury. On Russell's interpretation of pragmatism, what he asserted was true because asserting it produced desirable consequences. But what he said was false and so pragmatic utility is a flawed criterion of truth. Dewey, however, would reply that the pupil got what he wanted only by breaking the conventions of inquiry; he satisfied a merely personal want at the expense of resolving the doubt in the impersonal problem situation. It is the inquiry as a whole that is justified to the extent that it is causally efficacious in satisfying human needs. Dewey was, so to speak, saying of truth or warranted assertibility what Hume said of justice, that it is an artificial virtue.

This account of truth may be perfectly sound but only imperfectly pragmatist. The objectivist may readily agree that truth _is_ an artificial virtue, as long as the meaning of that phrase is properly clarified. Suppose someone argued that pragmatism was still dependent upon 'causal laws of the old sort' to establish the connexion between human institutions, such as scientific inquiry, and the satisfaction of wants. The pragmatist might reply that when we evaluate one institution we do so, as it were, from within another, so that our contact with reality never fails to be mediated by our conventions and interests. The implication is that such mediation is necessarily distorting. But this implication is untenable, for it is in effect a repetition of the relativist critique of criteria of rationality which was rejected in chapter three.[25] The pragmatist assumes that the only source of criteria and interests is forms of life; for _conventions_ of inquiry are a matter of choice, like driving on the left. But it has been argued that inquiry is also guided by principles which are not a matter of choice but indispensable preconditions of any rational intercourse with the world. If the claim that truth is an artificial virtue is taken to mean that causal laws are true because they further human interests, then it must be dismissed. But if it means that we try to establish which causal laws are true because it is in our interest to do so, then it is surely uncontroversial, for it is evidently true and compatible with the belief that which causal laws

turn out to be true is unconnected with our interests. And it is that belief which is central to the notion of truth as correspondence to reality and to objectivism in general. And so the claim that truth is an artificial virtue is either firmly pragmatist but unsound or sound but scarcely pragmatist.

It is now possible to advance a theory of truth which incorporates both correspondence and coherence as criteria, assigning each the major role in a different form of knowledge, but excludes pragmatic utility.

## 4.4. A Syncretistic Theory of Truth

'The truth is rarely pure, and never simple.'[26]

The theory of truth to be put forward in this section is impure and compound in that (i) it postulates two criteria of truth, correspondence and coherence, and (ii) it includes an account of correspondence as a family resemblance concept. An eclectic theory of this kind may seem to be no more than an issue-fudging compromise. But it is mere prejudice to assume that to every philosophical problem there is a pure and simple theory that fits it.[27] Moreover, in allocating correspondence to empirical knowledge and coherence to mathematical knowledge, the syncretistic theory elaborates an insight owed to Hirst: 'The truths of formal logic and mathematics involve concepts that pick out relations of a general, abstract

kind, where deducibility within an axiom system is the particular test for truth. The physical sciences, on the other hand, are concerned with truths that, in the last analysis, stand or fall by tests of observation by the senses.'[28] And so the argument of this section is also a defence of the irreducibility of at least two of the forms of knowledge.[29]

The concept of correspondence is particularly appropriate in testing empirical propositions for truth. It originates in sense-perception: if I see something under standard conditions, precluding hallucinations, colour-blindness and so on, then the contents of my visual field correspond to the objects in my surroundings. Seeing is distinguished from hallucinating precisely on the grounds that it can only be done if there is something outside myself for me to see.[30] This is perhaps the root of the idea of correspondence which plays a distinctive part in the empirical sciences and in our everyday dealings with the physical world. But there is no general formula which can encompass the entire range of tests for agreement between thought and reality. A series of family resemblances between a variety of specific tests is all that can be found. It is possible to arrange truth-criteria in a spectrum, so that, while the first and the last members may have nothing in common, each member shares a characteristic with its immediate neighbours.[31] Consider the following list of ways of testing propositions: observing the effects of a chemical substance on litmus paper;

recording readings on a voltameter; observing the physical reactions of sentient creatures to various sorts of physical stimuli; eliciting the psychological responses of human beings to contrived environments; carrying out a survey of opinions among people in their accustomed surroundings; reporting on the unintended consequences of the unco-ordinated actions of many individuals; collecting and analysing samples to discover if there is a correlation between the presence of a virus in the water supply and the incidence of a certain disease; and collecting and analysing statistics to find out whether the rate of growth of £M3 is correlated with the rate of inflation.[32] Similarly, there is no single property which is possessed by all and only the following activities: a physicist's plotting a graph from movements of a needle across a dial; Sir Humphry Davy's administering of nitrous oxide to himself; the dissecting and experimenting of a vivisectionist; and an historian's efforts to establish the authenticity of a mediaeval document. Yet it is clear that they display the criss-crossing and overlapping network of similarities which Wittgenstein found to characterise the range of activities we call games.[33]

There are three ways in which coherence can enter into the testing of propositions. It will be remembered that the indeterminacy problem facing the coherence theorist was left unresolved. The three ways of using coherence as a criterion of truth arise out of three different responses to

this problem, each of which is appropriate in a distinctive form of knowledge. The first reply to the objection that coherence yields only a disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s is simply to deny that this is always true. The mathematical form of knowledge provides a counter-example to the claim that coherence is only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition of truth. Just as correspondence originates in the workings of the senses, coherence is rooted in the operations of the intellect. It would be misleading to try to explain the truth of Pythagoras' Theorem as a matter of correspondence to reality, as though it were an inductive generalisation based on observation of triangles. In a sense, it is reality that has to correspond to the proposition, for if it is not true of a certain figure then that figure cannot be a right-angled triangle. What makes it true that the square on the hypotenuse of a right-angled triangle is equal to the sum of the squares on the other two sides is that certain terms, such as 'right-angled', 'triangle', 'hypotenuse' and so on, have been defined in certain ways and that certain mathematical rules concerning sums and squares are acknowledged. The Theorem of Pythagoras cannot be denied as long as these definitions and rules are accepted. And so its truth is evidently a matter of coherence. It might be objected that all that has been established is that within a given formal system coherence yields a single true proposition rather than a disjunction of possibly true propositions. If so, the objector might continue, nothing has been done to remove the possibility

of there being a disjunction of permitted, that is, internally consistent and comprehensive, formal systems. This is true: there is non-Euclidean as well as Euclidean geometry and classical logic has been joined by many-valued and non-truth-functional deviant logics. But these systems are not so numerous as to prevent the practical application of the theorems they contain. In principle it may be impossible to rule out a disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s.; in practice it is clear that one attains a dominant, indeed unassailable, position. And, within that system, coherence alone can eliminate all but the one proposition which is true.

The second response to the indeterminacy problem is to draw attention to forms of knowledge in which the conclusive resolution of disputes appears to be impossible. A criterion of truth which yields a disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s is to be welcomed as an explanation of the nature of these forms of knowledge. Perhaps the clearest example of such a form is philosophy itself. For there are few philosophical disputes which can confidently be said to have been settled. And the emphasis in justifying philosophical theories is placed on consistency and comprehensiveness, as it is bound to be in a discipline which tends to define its questions by distinguishing them from empirical ones about the same subject. The present thesis provides a case in point: what is said about belief limits what can be said about justification and what is said about justification is

compatible with only some of the many things that might be said about truth. Truth in philosophy depends ultimately upon logical relations between concepts. Literature and the arts furnish another example of a form where indeterminacy is a requirement in a criterion of truth and not a weakness. Whether they constitute a form of knowledge themselves is of course a controversial question.[34] But it is clear that aesthetic and literary criticism, being propositional, have a secure claim to constitute a form of knowledge. And it is equally clear that propositions such as that D.H.Lawrence was a better novelist than C.P.Snow or that Romanticism was a reaction to the Industrial Revolution are not empirical. Yet they cannot simply be asserted without constraint; and the constraint is <u>what else we wish to say</u> about novelists or poets. Again, it would be a cause for suspicion, not congratulation, if someone proposed a criterion of truth that would facilitate the conclusive resolution of such controversies. And so there exist forms of knowledge in which the best we can do is to arrive at a disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s.

The third response to the indeterminacy problem is to admit that there is a form of knowledge in which coherence is only a necessary, and not a sufficient, condition of truth, because a disjunction of permitted M.C.S.s is not the best attainable outcome. A single M.C.S. can be established as uniquely true in empirical disciplines where correspondence is available as a criterion of truth. But even here the notion

of coherence is important. For the more theory-saturated a proposition is, the more its logical relations with other propositions will enter into the making of judgements concerning its truth-value. The greater the scope for rejecting it as false because it is inconsistent with other propositions already known to be true, by virtue of their correspondence to reality, the more important is coherence as a criterion of truth. And so there are many propositions which are judged to be true or false according to whether they both correspond to reality and cohere with other propositions. At one end of the scale, a deduction from a complex theory, such as Darwin's theory of evolution through natural selection, will be logically related to a great many other propositions. It will be inconsistent with many of them, such as those belonging to competing theories and rival world-views, and so we may be able to decide on its truth-value even if direct observation or experiment are impossible and so correspondence inapplicable in this particular case. At the other end of the scale, a proposition of the simplest sort, such as that there is a red patch here now, will be consistent with so many propositions that coherence would be a useless test for truth. We would be unlikely to be able to decide upon its truth-value in the absence of a test for correspondence. Coherence, it can be concluded, has no more than an ancillary role, albeit an important one in some circumstances, in the empirical form of knowledge.

Correspondence between thought and reality and coherence among propositions may both, therefore, be criteria of truth, depending on the form of knowledge concerned.

## 4.5 Truth and the Human Form of Sensibility.

How, if at all, are the forms of knowledge related to the human form of sensibility ? Can the testing of propositions for truth or falsity be justified by deriving the criteria employed in such testing from the human form of sensibility ? It was suggested above[35] that the concept of truth is a principal constituent of the human form of sensibility and that the tests which we apply in the quest for truth can all be subsumed under one or other of the two general ideas of correspondence and coherence. The previous section has attempted to accomplish the second of these tasks, by showing how correspondence is a family of different but related tests and coherence a sufficient test of the truth of some propositions and an ancillary one for others. It must now be established that truth, defined so as to encompass both correspondence and coherence as criteria of application, is a component of the human form of sensibility.

Truth has been defined as follows : *p* is true iff *p*.[36] It can be shown that this concept is indispensable to rational discourse, and therefore part of the human form of sensibility, by proving its denial to be self-refuting. Suppose someone argues that we can safely discard the idea of truth and the practice of distinguishing true from false propositions. The suggestion may have an initial plausibility; there are many propositions which were once widely believed to be true, and justifiably so, but are now known to be false; it is therefore

likely that some of the propositions we are now justified in believing will turn out to be false. This is of course quite true but it is far from entailing the dispensability of the distinction between the true and the false. That some propositions now justifiably believed to be true will in the future be found to be false does not entail that all such propositions will, or even could, be found to be false. And even if it did it would not follow that rational discourse could survive such a catastrophe. For it is a precondition of rational discussion that some propositions are true and some false. There is at least one proposition that must be true if rational argument is to be possible and that is the proposition that there is a difference between a true proposition and a false one. To deny that proposition would make it impossible to continue to engage in rational discussion. For if there were no difference between true and false propositions no one could ever have a reason for asserting one proposition rather than another. And, since to believe a proposition is necessarily to believe it to be true, no one could ever have a reason for believing one proposition rather than another. Rational discourse would therefore be impossible.

The general argument that truth is a necessary condition of rational debate can be reformulated in terms of both correspondence and coherence. The indispensability of correspondence can be shown by considering the purpose of rational argument about empirical questions. The purpose of

such discourse is to say how things are: 'The general form of proposition is: This is how things stand.'[37] So the idea of correspondence to reality is implicit in the definition of rational discussion about empirical matters. It follows from that definition that propositions that correspond to reality, that is to say, that succeed in saying how things are, are to be preferred to those that do not. To repudiate the distinction between propositions that do, and those that do not, say how things are is to reject the entire enterprise of rational discourse about empirical questions.

Coherence is an essential precondition of rational discourse in any field. If someone, _A_, asserts _p_ and _q_ and _p_ and _q_ are inconsistent, then he has failed to give his hearer, _H_, a reason for believing either _p_ or _q_. It is as though he had asserted nothing at all.[38] Under normal circumstances _A_'s asserting that _p_ will be understood by _H_ to imply that _A_ believes _p_ and wants _H_'s recognition of that belief to be instrumental in bringing it about that _H_ believes that _p_. If _H_ knows _A_ to be a competent authority or a reliable witness, and an honest man, then _A_'s asserting that _p_ gives him a reason for believing _p_ to be true. But once _A_ asserts _q_ that reason is withdrawn. And so asserting inconsistent propositions is incompatible with giving someone a reason for believing something. It must in turn be concluded that coherence is a precondition of rational discourse.

The human form of sensibility includes, then, the concept of truth as correspondence and coherence. This reflects the fact that if rational discourse is to be possible we must have a way of relating words to the world and a way of relating them to each other. It also shows that the doctrine of the forms of knowledge is in part based upon the human form of sensibility. For correspondence and coherence are criteria of truth which apply characteristically to the empirical and the mathematical forms of knowledge. That knowledge can be divided in this way is therefore entailed by the fact that truth is an indispensable precondition of rational discourse.[39] This outcome raises some interesting questions about the forms and educational knowledge, as will be seen in chapters ten and eleven.

## 4.6 Summary

It has been argued that an adequate theory of truth must incorporate elements which are usually assumed to be disparate. Truth is to be defined in epistemologically neutral terms, but implicit in this definition are the two ideas of correspondence and coherence. These have been developed in two ways: as criteria of truth and as parts of the human form of sensibility. Correspondence, understood as a family resemblance concept, is characteristic of the empirical form of knowledge, while coherence, only a necessary condition of the truth of empirical propositions, is also a sufficient condition of truth in the mathematical, and

philosophical, forms. Both ideas are indispensable to rational discourse and as such are partly constitutive of the human form of sensibility. It follows that the distinction between the empirical and the mathematical (and philosophical) forms of knowledge can be derived from a consideration of the human form of sensibility. The implications of this limited support for the doctrine of forms of knowledge will be examined in chapter ten.

Of more immediate interest is the place of the syncretistic theory of truth in the defence of the claim that justified true belief is knowledge. For the argument that truth as correspondence and coherence is part of the human form of sensibility rebuts, if it is valid and based on true premisses, the subjectivist contention that the criteria which we use in distinguishing true from false propositions are not objective but merely socially useful. The pragmatist theory of truth on which this claim is based has been found to be unsound; pragmatic utility is neither the definition nor a criterion of truth. But it may seem that this reply to subjectivism has succeeded only in setting up another target for criticism, for to speak of correspondence between thought and reality is to presuppose the distinctness and mutual independence of the terms of that relation. And it is precisely that presupposition that the subjectivist will seek to undermine. The arguments with which he will try to establish the idealist view that thought and reality are too close ever to fail to correspond will be discussed in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER FIVE. REALITY.

## 5.1 Introduction

The main subjectivist claim about reality is that it is mind-dependent, a thesis familiar to philosophers as metaphysical idealism. If, as the metaphysical idealist is generally held to maintain, reality is the product of thought, the two can hardly fail to correspond. Since truth is often difficult and sometimes impossible to attain, it cannot consist in a correspondence which is unavoidable. In this way metaphysical idealism is thought to undermine the correspondence theory of truth. While that theory was argued in the previous chapter to be inadequate as an account of truth in general, correspondence was found to be an important criterion of truth in the empirical form of knowledge. And so it seems that metaphysical idealism threatens the objectivity of knowledge in the empirical domain, for objective knowledge is commonly interpreted to be knowledge of an objective, or mind-independent, world. If metaphysical idealism succeeds in showing that there is no such world, or reality, then there can be no objective knowledge. A possible objectivist response to this challenge is to accept the idealist contention that there is no objective world and to reinterpret the notion of objective knowledge, perhaps in terms of public criteria governing beliefs and claims to know. But it is just such an anthropocentric approach which has been adopted in this thesis and which has led to reliance on the idea of truth as correspondence to reality and so to the need to postulate

the existence of mind-independent reality. So the question of whether metaphysical idealism is true is the crux of the entire argument in support of an objectivist epistemology.

Before examining the subjectivist argument that metaphysical idealism prevents correspondence from playing any role in the identification of true propositions, two other manifestations of idealist thinking in the sociology of educational knowledge must be discussed.

## 5.2 Idealism in the Sociology of Educational Knowledge

In addition to the claim that there is no mind-independent reality, there are two theses put forward by subjectivists in recent contributions to the sociology of educational knowledge which are idealist in inspiration. These will be discussed briefly before the main subject of this chapter, metaphysical idealism itself, is examined.

The first of these idealist contentions is that part of reality, namely the social world, is mind-dependent, in the sense that it is constructed by social actors. Berger and Luckmann appear to subscribe to this view in saying that 'sociology of knowledge understands human reality as socially constructed reality',[1] but their tendency to refer to 'reality' rather than reality suggests a need for caution in bestowing the title 'idealist' upon them. For if their claim is that it is 'reality', that is, what is taken to be reality, which

is socially constructed, then it is consistent with the metaphysical realist assertion that reality itself is mind-independent. But it is likely that they would deny the distinction between reality and what is taken for or counts as reality in the sphere of war, marriage, suicide and so on. This is certainly how one commentator interprets what they say: 'What are important in any social world are the processes of Institutionalization, Legitimation and Internalization of intersubjectively constructed social reality. These are the chief components, then, of any society, above the purely biological or physiological constitution of human reality.'[2] So this is a restricted version of idealism, according to which only a segment of reality, namely the social world, is socially constructed or mind-dependent. It is unnecessary to discuss it at any length, because it is no more than an alternative formulation of a position which has already been endorsed.[3] But there is another subjectivist claim of idealist origin which cannot be accepted.

The second idealist claim is put forward by Blum: 'it is not an objectively discernible purely existing external world which accounts for sociology; it is the methods and procedures of sociology which create and sustain that world.'[4] Clearly, this is not a claim about reality in general; the idealist argument is applied to the specific case of that part of reality which is studied by sociologists. It has already been established that the social world is mind-dependent, in that facts about it are institutional rather than brute facts. If

Blum, in the first part of the passage quoted, is claiming no more than that social facts are not brute facts, then what he says is true. But he goes on to claim that it is not social actors but sociologists whose activities create the institutions presupposed by expressions such as 'is married' or 'declared war'. Since the first idealist claim is, it has been argued, true, this one must be false. One could not get married or declare war in the absence of the appropriate institution; but one could do both of these things even if no sociologists had ever existed.[5] Indeed, since marriages and wars antedate the emergence of sociology, it is unquestionably false that 'the methodical character of marriage, war and suicide is only to be seen, recognized and made possible through the organized practices of sociology.'[6]

The third idealist thesis in the sociology of educational knowledge is a statement of metaphysical idealism itself, as interpreted by a subjectivist. In repudiating the idea of correspondence between thought and reality, Esland rejects the objectivist assumption that 'the individual consciousness recognizes objects as being "out there", as coercive, external realities' and goes on to attack objectivism for presenting man 'not as world-producer, but as world-produced.'[7] It rather looks as though Esland is denying that human actions are in any way constrained by external objects. But people do have to take account of such things, even if they do not know what they are, as Helm has pointed out: 'It is because of the physical

properties of the world that human beings cannot walk through brick walls, no matter what they believe about ..... them. What _is_ compulsory about the physical environment is the fact that if men are to survive in it, they must reckon with it in certain ways.'[8] Having the concept 'brick wall' does not bring brick walls into existence and is not a necessary condition of having to reckon with them. Someone from a society lacking that concept is not thereby enabled to walk through them. What is real is in part a matter of what descriptions are taken seriously. But only in part, as argued in chapter three (see sections 3.2.4 and 3.3.5). It seems that Esland is committed to denying that the physical environment is, as Helm puts it, compulsory; for to say that the physical environment is compulsory is surely to say that there are coercive, external realities. And this is just how metaphysical idealism is widely understood.[9]

It appears that metaphysical idealism entails the denial of an incontrovertible truth, and must therefore be false, in which case the idea of truth as correspondence between thought and reality remains intact. But the issue is not in fact as simple as it appears. For metaphysical realists and subjectivists misinterpret metaphysical idealism in precisely the same way, as an empirical rather than a metaphysical, or metalinguistic, theory. It will be argued in the rest of this chapter that there is a sense in which metaphysical idealism is both true and compatible with the notion of truth as correspondence between thought and reality. In the next section five arguments for metaphysical realism will be

critically examined, with a view to showing that they are based on an unsound interpretation of metaphysical issues.

## 5.3 Five Arguments for Metaphysical Realism

Metaphysical realism is assumed by its adherents to be the view that there is a world independent of human thought, which existed before the evolution of intelligent creatures and may be expected to survive their demise. There is a sense in which this realist claim is true, but it is not a sense in which the realism involved can properly be described as metaphysical. Nor is it a sense in which the well-informed idealist would wish to deny it. For it is indeed ridiculous to assert that the natural world did not exist until the emergence of creatures with minds and that its continued existence is causally dependent on mental activity. Empirical realism is therefore true; at the empirical level reality is mind-independent. But attempts to present realism as a metaphysical doctrine are bound to fail, because at the metaphysical level reality is mind-dependent. The distinction between empirical and metaphysical theories, on which this argument depends, is a difficult one and will be explained in full in section 5.5. Five arguments for metaphysical realism will now be considered.

5.3.1 Commonsense. The first argument is that metaphysical realism is part of commonsense. For reasons to be explained below (section 5.5), it is most unlikely that commonsense includes a genuinely metaphysical version of realism. But, even if it did, that would not constitute a convincing argument for metaphysical realism. That our opinions are heterodox may

be a reason to examine them more carefully, but conformity with commonsense is no guarantee of intellectual rectitude. What was at one time the most outrageous eccentricity may later be subsumed under the reassuring heading of commonsense. Not only is commonsense no basis for philosophical conclusions, its support has not infrequently been enlisted on both sides of a philosophical dispute. For instance, after arguing that realism is part of commonsense, Popper claims that idealist arguments are grounded in 'an uncritically accepted part of commonsense.'[10] The first argument must therefore be rejected.

5.3.2. Prediction without the senses. This argument is borrowed by Popper from Sir Winston Churchill, who claimed to have devised a 'method, apart altogether from our physical senses, for testing the reality of the sun.'[11] Astronomers, working on data provided by automatic observatories activated by light falling on them, predict that a black spot will cross the sun at a certain time. This prediction, arrived at without the aid of the senses, can be verified by observation, thereby proving the reality of the sun. But this line of thought is not an argument against idealism in general; if valid and based on true premises, it would refute only Berkeleian idealism in particular, for the conclusion is simply that the sun can be causally efficacious even when there is nobody around to observe it. It is questionable whether the

paraphernalia of automatic observatories are needed to make what is essentially the standard objection to Berkeley's doctrine. In any case, this argument is not germane to a discussion of metaphysical idealism, understood as the thesis that the world as we know it is mind-dependent and that any other concept of the world is unintelligible.

5.5.3. Science and Language. The second and third arguments will be discussed together, for they are similar in form: realism is presupposed by science and by language, respectively. Popper, for example, contends that 'what we attempt in science is to describe and (so far as possible) to explain reality' and goes on to say that 'an unambiguous description is always realistic; it is *of* something - of some state of affairs which may be real or imaginary ....... Rationality, description, language, argument, are all about some reality, and they address themselves to an audience. All this presupposes realism.'[12] In saying that the object of a description may be real or imaginary, Popper is not of course implying that realism would still be true even if the objects of all descriptions were imaginary. So he must mean that if the object of a description is imaginary the description must be false. Or so it might seem, for the view imputed to him is obviously false. It is possible, indeed commonplace, to assert truths of imaginary objects: 'King Arthur was the illegitimate son of Uther Pendragon' and even 'King Arthur is a legendary figure' are examples of such truths. Perhaps 'imaginary' is to be understood not as 'fictitious' but as

'mind-dependent'. But this does not help, for people frequently assert truths of mind-dependent things, such as hallucinations and toothaches. And so unless he is saying something that is evidently false, Popper must be saying no more than that some of the things we say about mind-independent things - physical, material or external objects - presuppose that those things exist. But this seems too obvious to be worth saying.

However, if an obvious truth is denied, its assertion <u>is</u> appropriate. And metaphysical realists do sometimes claim that their opponents' views are not merely erroneous but outrageously and absurdly so. Flew, for instance, takes a sociologist whom he describes as a metaphysical idealist to be denying what no reasonable person would dream of denying: 'It is ridiculous to maintain .... that the stars in their courses are in any way dependent on what we say or do not say; and it is not for any sociologist to deny the claims of the natural scientists to know that this earth existed long before it bore any language-using creatures.'[13] It may readily be agreed that when someone says 'Silicon composes 26% of the earth's outer crust' he means that silicon composes 26% of the earth's outer crust, not that 'silicon' is part of 'the earth's outer crust'. In other words, he is using language in talk about extralinguistic reality rather than using language to talk about language itself. And it is certainly true that whether silicon composes 26% of the earth's outer crust does not depend

on his saying so. The illocutionary act which the speaker performed was one of describing or reporting (that silicon composes 26% of the earth's outer crust), not one of conferring (the complex property of composing 26% of the earth's outer crust upon silicon). The speaker's saying what he says does not bring it about that silicon composes 26% of the earth's outer crust. And so science and language do indeed presuppose realism, at this straightforwardly empirical level. The question is whether this is what the metaphysical idealist wishes to deny.

Metaphysical idealism cannot be understood until the nature of metaphysical questions has been clarified. For metaphysical theories are not simply highly generalised versions of empirical ones. A genuinely metaphysical realism must therefore set out to be a theory about the ontological status of reality as such rather than a straightforward list of the contents of reality as a whole. Yet it has been seen that some philosophers seem to assume that metaphysical realism is simply empirical or naive realism writ large. In conducting scientific inquiries and in using language we take it for granted that there are stars, the earth, water, paper, acids and so. All that needs to be said about reality is that it comprises all these things. So the metaphysical realist appears to argue. But all that he has produced is a summary of the objects assumed by science and language to exist, an account which is of no particular philosophical interest. The metaphysical issue is whether, granted that we assume in empirical discourse that there is an objective world,

we should regard that assumption as unique to such discourse or carry it over to the metaphysical, or metalinguistic, level. From a metaphysical perspective, a reiteration of the assumptions of empirical discourse is irrelevant. The metaphysical question is : Is language related to reality as 'Jupiter is the largest planet in the solar system' is related to Jupiter's being the largest planet in the solar system ? But the putatively metaphysical realists do not confront this question at all, tacitly accepting an affirmative answer. A properly metaphysical theory must, however, confront it; it will shortly be argued that only an idealist answer can be defended.

5.3.4. Creation by the mind. The argument is that metaphysical realism must be true because its only rival, metaphysical idealism, is false, for it entails that an individual mind can bring the world into existence. Thus, Popper claims that idealism implies 'something like this: that it is my mind which creates this beautiful world. But I know that I am not its Creator.'[14] Metaphysical idealism, on this interpretation, also has the radically relativist consequence that there are as many realities as there are minds. No doubt there have been injudicious idealists who have espoused a theory according to which there is no reality except the many realities each of which is the creation of a mind. And it might be argued that it is best to call the mistaken theory metaphysical idealism and that where realists are wrong is in

assuming it to be the only alternative to their own doctrine. But in fact the mistaken theory is a misinterpretation of metaphysical idealism, arising out of an inadequate understanding of metaphysics as a very general sort of empirical knowledge.

Once metaphysics is properly understood as metalinguistic analysis, it becomes clear that metaphysical idealism does not entail that the mind creates, or is causally responsible for the existence of, the world it thinks about. The sagacious idealist does not believe, what would be absurd, that someone's asserting or thinking that Jupiter is bigger than Mercury somehow brings it about that Jupiter is bigger than Mercury. To believe that he does is to transfer a metaphysical thesis from the metalinguistic level, where it belongs, to the empirical realm, where it is out of place. Metaphysical idealism is not an empirical or a causal hypothesis; rather does it assert a conceptual connexion between the mind and the world. It is not that the conceptual apparatus which we employ in thinking and speaking about the world creates it, but rather that the only world there can be is the world as it is known and understood through that conceptual apparatus. <u>The-world-as-we-know-it</u> is, so to say, mind-informed. No other world is intelligible, as is shown by the fact that the attempt to imagine one yields only an empty concept of 'the world as it is in itself'.

It is important to clarify exactly what is, and what is not, being asserted. It is not being claimed that there are two worlds, or realities, the-world-as-we-know-it and the-world-as-it-is-in-itself, and that one of them is forever beyond the reach of our knowledge, so that we should, having acknowledged its existence, avert our minds from it and think only of what can be thought of. There is only one world and it is mind-informed, in that any attempt to describe it must draw on concepts and principles which cannot be understood without reference to minds. When metaphysical realists say that there is a world of things as they are in themselves, what they seem to have in mind is a world exactly like the one we seek to know and understand, except that there are no intelligent creatures about to seek to know and understand it. Although they claim to be describing a world altogether independent of minds, all that they succeed in imagining is a world causally unaffected by mind-possessing creatures. It is as if they begin with the world as it is known to human intelligence and then subtract the intelligence. A world in which there are 'rocks and stones and trees' but no intelligent creatures, no minds, is easily imagined; but it can hardly be said that such a world is uninformed by our conceptual apparatus. A world which is genuinely mind-independent is a world which cannot in principle be identified. And so the concept of such a world is a concept for which there are no criteria of application. If we remain true to the spirit of empirical realism, recalling that

science and language presuppose a mind-independent world, we must insist that there can be no sense in the idea of a world necessarily beyond the reach of human knowledge, for such a world could not be presupposed by science and language. So empirical realism entails metaphysical idealism: the assertion of the mind-independence of the world at one level of discourse entails its denial at another.

It is worth persisting in this attempt to elucidate metaphysical idealism, because misleading statements tend to intrude themselves even into its most careful expositions. Rescher, for example, maintains that 'what is mind-dependent ..... is not _reality itself_ (whatever that might be) but reality-as-we-picture it: not reality _an sich_, but _our_ reality.'[15] This disclaimer appears to undermine his idealist pretensions, for to admit that reality itself is not mind-dependent is surely to concede the central claim made by the realist. Rescher would probably reply that the notion of reality itself is so attenuated that it is, if not actually unintelligible, at least vacuous. For when all mind-involving concepts are excluded from a specification of reality, all that is left is 'a world without particularity', 'a chaos because its various stuff-kind components would not be empirically discriminable', 'an _amodal_ world - without any colouration of necessity and possibility', 'an anomic world - one without laws, and without causal interaction' and a world which lacks the 'entire potentialistic domain of powers, capacities, dispositions and the like.'[16] It is natural to

take this as a statement that is misleading in the way identified above: it is first asserted that there are two realities and then it is denied that one of them deserves the title. Furthermore, the reason for this denial appears to be that we cannot know anything about this putative reality: yet a list of its features is then provided. And so, even though those features are negative ones, the impression remains that Rescher has failed to exorcise the ghost of reality-as-it-is-in-itself from his version of idealism.

What has to be made clear is that the negative features listed by Rescher are not features of a reality which exists but is beyond the reach of our understanding. They are instead features of the concept of reality an sich. The idealist is not of course committed to the absurd view that simply possessing or postulating a concept guarantees its instantiation. Whether a concept is instantiated is an empirical question, as long as its specification is not self-contradictory and it can be supplied with criteria of application. And surely it is that second condition to which Rescher is drawing attention. For the concept of reality itself is so devoid of content that no criteria of application can be specified for it and so the question whether it is instantiated does not arise.

The concept of a world, of reality, is a concept of something with discernible characteristics of some description. For a world is necessarily a totality, something exhibiting

structure, a complex whole whose constituents are related to each other in certain ways. And these properties and relations are nothing other than what a mind can identify and discriminate. So the concept of a world is a concept of something which cannot be specified without referring to the mind. Admittedly, a thing can possess features even though no minds exist to discern them. The idealist is not saying that without the mind there would not be any features and therefore there would not be a world, as though stars could exist only when minds had evolved to identify them. This is the position mistakenly ascribed to metaphysical idealists by realists such as Popper and Flew.[17] But it is not a position which the wise idealist will wish to adopt. The point he wants to make is rather that a thing could not be entirely bereft of features and still be a thing; *a fortiori* it could not be the world, that is, the totality of things and the relations holding between them. Metaphysical idealism is not the empirical claim that nothing can exist until there are minds to think of it, but the metalinguistic thesis that we cannot say what the world is like without referring to minds.

It can therefore be concluded that no case has been made for rejecting metaphysical idealism, for the realist critique is based upon a misinterpretation. In reply the realist might argue that metaphysical realism is an equally misguided interpretation of his doctrine. Another version of realism has in fact been propounded and it is clearly appropriate to examine it.

## 5.4. Internal Realism.

Internal realism is interesting because it is put forward as an alternative to both metaphysical realism and metaphysical idealism. According to its progenitor, Putnam, this idea's task is to explain the fact that scientific theories tend to converge, 'in the sense that earlier theories are, very often, limiting cases of later theories (which is why it is possible to regard theoretical terms as preserving their reference across most changes of theory).'[18] Metaphysical realism cannot explain convergence because it envisages correspondence between thought and reality _an sich_, which can easily be seen to be unintelligible. For, as Rescher has it, 'one cannot workably operate a correspondence theory with one inaccessible member.'[19] Putman would argue that this objection overturns metaphysical realism but would go on to claim that internal realism evades it.

Internal realism is presented as an empirical thesis: 'an account of the relation of language-speakers to the world is part of a causal model of human behaviour.'[20] But if internal realism is simply a contribution to an explanatory theory of human behaviour, it can be of no more than marginal philosophical interest. For if metaphysical idealism does not entail that the world is causally dependent on the mind, it is consistent with the fact that, in speaking and acting, we need to take account

of objects which do not owe their existence to us. And so it is consistent with an explanatory model of human behaviour which also takes account of that fact. But this does not make metaphysical idealism part of such a model, because, being a metaphysical theory, it is not an empirical one. Internal realism is therefore both unnecessary and irrelevant: unnecessary in that there already exists a theory, metaphysical idealism, which does not contradict the assumption that there are objects which are causally independent of our minds, and irrelevant in that it is put forward as an empirical, rather than a metaphysical (or metalinguistic), one.

As an empirical theory, internal realism cannot accomplish the task of explaining the tendency of scientific theories to converge. Unlike metaphysical realism, which concerns the relation of a theory to the world, internal realism postulates a relation between linguistic terms and the world within a theory. Putnam explains that, according to metaphysical realism, 'there has to be a determinate relation of reference between terms in L and pieces .... of THE WORLD.'[21] This applies to all correct theories and the world is supposed to be independent of any theory about, or model of, it. Internal realism, on the other hand, 'employs a similar picture within a theory.'[22] But in that case internal realism cannot explain convergence, because that phenomenon presupposes the existence of terms which preserve their reference across changes of theory. There must therefore be objects which are independent of any particular theory;

otherwise, later theories could not be seen as more accurate accounts of the objects which figure in earlier theories. But internal realism cannot accommodate such objects, for the relation between language and the world obtains within a theory, from which it follows that no theory can attempt to explain the same phenomena as any other theory. So, far from helping us to understand how convergence comes about, internal realism, if true, would make it impossible for scientific theories ever to converge, for there would be as many realities as there were theories. At this point internal realism appears to collapse into conceptual relativism.

Realism, metaphysical and internal alike, is, it may now be concluded, unsatisfactory. An exposition of metaphysical idealism is therefore appropriate.

## 5.5. Metaphysical Idealism.

In understanding metaphysical idealism it is essential to be clear about the distinction between empirical and philosophical forms of knowledge. The former comprises propositions which are intended to say what the world is like, while the latter is made up of propositions which are not directly about the world but refer to what we say about it. In empirical discourse we attempt to describe and explain the world; in metaphysical, or metalinguistic, discourse we comment on empirical propositions and the concepts occurring

in them. And so metaphysics is the clarification and criticism of the conceptual apparatus which informs our dealings with the world. The attempt to establish the truth of metaphysical realism as though it were a straightforwardly empirical thesis is therefore ill-advised, for it is only <u>metaphysical</u> realism if it is a metalinguistic thesis about the empirical realm of discourse. The task of the philosopher is not to augment the body of empirical knowledge but to describe and critically to examine the concepts and criteria, the principles and the procedures, of those who do. To allude to a familiar analogy, he seeks, not to make a move in accordance with the rules of the game, but to comment on the rules. In doing that, he will of course be making a move in accordance with the rules of another game, or meta-game. And he will be engaging in an activity which can claim descent from the metaphysical speculation of the past. For although philosophers make statements which are immediately concerned with our conceptual scheme, they are nevertheless about certain general features of the world as it is known and understood through those concepts. Since there is no other world, for the concept of a world beyond the reach of the human mind is, it has been argued, unintelligible, metalinguistic or conceptual analysis, or at least that part of it which concerns the most general and enduring aspects of the human conceptual framework, is the legitimate heir to the metaphysical tradition.

This understanding of metaphysical issues depends upon the distinction between empirical and philosophical forms of knowledge. And it might be objected that that

distinction is unclear or even invalid. An attempt will therefore be made to clarify and defend it.

That there are empirical and philosophical forms of knowledge reflects the fact that there are empirical and conceptual realms of discourse, the fact, in other words, that we want to say things about the world and we also want to say things about the things we say about the world. And it is possible to accept realism in one sphere and idealism in the other. Indeed, that is just what has been advocated in the preceding sections. As Kant had it, 'We assert, then, the empirical reality of space ...... and yet at the same time we assert its transcendental ideality.'[23] But this combination of realism and idealism cannot be sustained unless there are two levels of discourse.

A helpful approach to the problem of clarifying the distinction between empirical and philosophical forms of knowledge is provided by Carnap's dichotomy between internal and external questions. Internal questions are those which are raised within a conceptual framework as part of its application to the task of understanding the world, while external questions are those which are asked about the framework.[24] The distinction is illustrated by Helm: '...... the question "Do material objects exist ?", considered as an external question, is about whether there is to be a system of rules governing a concept "material object", whereas "Does this paper exist ?", considered as an internal question, is to be answered in terms of the rules governing the use of

material-object concepts.'[25] Internal questions form part of the object-language; external questions, on the other hand, are partly constitutive of the meta-language. In using the object-language speakers are said to be employing the formal mode. The distinguishing mark of the material mode is the availability of empirical tests to confirm or disconfirm propositions expressed in this mode; propositions expressed in the formal mode do not admit of empirical testing.

Nevertheless, the suspicion may remain that these distinctions are all of them merely _ad hoc_ devices to enable a philosopher to have it both ways, to espouse both (empirical) realism and (metaphysical) idealism. Perhaps the most convincing reply to this charge is to set out an example of a conversation in which a proposition, while resembling a straightforwardly empirical one, is in fact of a metalinguistic, that is, metaphysical, character. Suppose _P_, looking at a small statue, says 'It appears to be made of marble. Yes, I'm sure it's quite solid. Kick it, if you don't believe me.' But _Q_ replies 'No, you're wrong. It isn't really solid.' He kicks the statue, which collapses: it was only jelly after all. A little later _P_ meets _R_, who is doing an Open University science degree. Putting down his textbook, _R_ points to the table at which they are sitting and says 'It isn't really solid.' In a sense what _R_ says is true; the table consists of tiny particles constantly in motion and with space between them; it is

perfectly reasonable to express one's newly acquired knowledge of this fact by saying of the table that it is not really solid. But in another sense what R says is false; for tables are paradigm cases of solid objects; if a table is not solid then nothing is. The point is of course that R is not denying this; he does not believe that if he kicks the table it will wobble and collapse, as the statue did when Q kicked it. So R and Q were not speaking at the same level. R was not suggesting that we should reallocate tables to the category of fluid things; his remark was intended to apply to all solid objects, to solid objects as such; it concerns the nature of solidity. P was not being invited to revise his application of the word 'table', nor indeed to do anything at all. When someone says 'It isn't really solid' in ordinary circumstances, that is, in empirical discourse or the object-language, what he says carries implications for action. For instance, it could constitute a premise in an argument for the conclusion 'You can kick it without hurting your foot'. But when R said 'It isn't really solid' it did not carry any practical implications at all. And so what he said belongs to the meta-language.

It might be objected that there is no real disagreement between realism of a Popperian sort and metaphysical idealism and that the dispute is purely terminological. For the empirical reality of the world has been accepted: it is agreed that the world is not imaginary, not a mere creation of the mind in the way that an hallucination is,

not, in Kant's phrase 'a mere phantasm of the brain.' And it is also agreed that science and language presuppose realism, in that asserting that S is p does not bring it about that S is p: the way the world is is independent of what we say about it. So it might be thought that if the Popperian were to amend the title of his doctrine to 'empirical realism' no dissensus whatever would remain. But empirical realism is only half of the position defended in this chapter and it seems probable that the Popperian would find the other half, metaphysical idealism, unintelligible. Once we have established the empirical reality of the world, there is nothing more to be said about it: so would he be likely to argue. To claim that the world cannot be specified except in terms which presuppose minds is, he would continue, obfuscatory.

That the world cannot be specified except in terms which presuppose minds is, however, a consequence of two of the metaphysical realist's own arguments. For the science and language arguments, which aim to establish that those institutions would be impossible if the world were not independent of minds, are transcendental. They are attempts to deduce what the world must be like if science and language are to be possible. And their shared conclusion is that the world must be causally independent of what we say and think about it, for science and language are more than possible; they are two of the most characteristic institutions of civilised

humanity and of mankind in general, respectively. It is clear that what these arguments prove is that the world presupposed by science and by language must be mind-independent in the required sense. And there is no other world (of things as they are in themselves). What the metaphysical idealist believes is that the world is the world presupposed by science and by language and that it is therefore both mind-independent in one sense (that it is causally independent of what we say and think about it) and mind-dependent in another sense (that its description must refer to features which it has as a presupposition of the mind-manifesting activities of science and language).

## 5.6 Metaphysical Idealism and the Human Form of Sensibility.

Metaphysics is the analysis of the most general and enduring aspects of the conceptual apparatus which informs our transactions with reality. Thus, to say that the world is mind-dependent in the sense that its specification involves reference to the actions and capacities of minds, or in other words to advocate metaphysical idealism, is to assert that the concept of such a world is part of the human form of sensibility and to imply that no other concept, such as that of a world of things as they are in themselves, could occupy such a position. The significance of this outcome is that it enables metaphysical idealism to be defended against the familiar charge that it leads to relativism. Hence its appeal to subjectivists: mistaking the mind-

dependence of the world for an empirical thesis, they hold that it entails that there is not one world but as many worlds as there are forms of life. The argument of this chapter has been that both the accusation and the attraction rest on a fallacious interpretation of metaphysics. It will now be contended that even if the mind-dependence of the world were an empirical thesis, and even if it were true, its reliance on the human form of sensibility rather than on forms of life would still preclude support for relativism. The argument will proceed by examining a defence of the objectivity of knowledge which (i) has much in common with metaphysical idealism, especially the notion of the human form of sensibility and (ii) shows some tendency to vacillate between the empirical and the metaphysical (meta-linguistic or conceptual) levels of discourse.

Hamlyn's account of the objectivity of knowledge represents an attempt to divorce the anti-relativistic merits of realism from its world-as-it-is-in-itself-postulating demerits. Initially he appears to adopt a straightforwardly realist position, in claiming that 'unless there were a world independent of ourselves, there could be no application to the notion of objectivity at all.'[26] And this impression is reinforced when he says that 'the possibility of success in the use of ..... forms of language and thought implies a reference beyond these forms to something concerning which there can be objectivity.'[27] Moreover, he defends the idea of truth as correspondence to fact and believes that it implies

realism 'in the sense that a necessary condition of there being objective truth is that there should be an independently existing world.'[28] But he goes on to qualify this commitment to realism by denying that there are any 'brute' facts, contending instead that 'what is to count as a fact depends on how we have come to see the world and upon the conceptual structure that is presupposed in our seeing it in this way.'[29] And that conceptual structure rests in turn upon our form of life or sensibility, which constitutes 'what is not a matter of convention, not simply a matter of agreement, and thus something not negotiable.'[30] The breach with realism is now plain: certainly, a Popperian realist would maintain that it is the independently existing world that is not simply a matter of agreement, because it is entirely beyond the influence of human thought and language.

But Hamlyn's break with realism does not weaken his opposition to relativism. This is not quite as clear as it could be, because he uses the terms 'forms of life' and 'form of sensibility' as though they were synonymous; so they are, on one understanding of the former phrase, but it is ambiguous. As used by Wittgenstein, it is open to two interpretations, which may be distinguished as the atomistic and the holistic.[31] According to the atomistic view, which may be found in Winch,[32] humanity exhibits a variety of forms of life; they occur at several levels, from what may be called 'macro-forms of life', such as science and religion, through middle-range forms associated with tribes, races, cultures or societies, to 'micro-

forms of life' centred on social institutions such as armies and monasteries. But, although the macro-forms transcend specific institutions and even societies, there is no distinctively human form life, that is, no form of life which is common to all mankind and to nothing else. That there is such a form of life is, however, just what the upholders of the holistic interpretation assert: the human form of life unites all human beings and differentiates them from all other creatures. The surface diversity of human conceptual schemes, they would say, conceals a deep invariant structure.

It is clear that Hamlyn adopts the holistic interpretation, for he elucidates the Wittgensteinian notion of a form of life in terms of the Kantian one of a form of sensibility. And he goes on to emphasise the anti-relativistic implications of the Kantian idea. The danger, it will be remembered, in the notion of forms of life, interpreted atomistically, is that they will be liable to constant change as their bearers - societies and social institutions of various sorts - are modified by social pressures. The point of the concept of a form of sensibility, or of the holistic interpretation of the concept of a form of life, is, by contrast, to limit the extent to which our conceptual framework can be altered: the 'form of sensibility is a "given" in the sense that it is something that has to be accepted.'[33] Hamlyn develops this idea in rejecting what he categorises as idealist attempts to undermine objectivity by showing that alternative conceptions

of the world are possible. Agreeing that our conception of the world is something which we have inherited, he nevertheless denies that this entails a weakening of objectivity: 'although it does make sense to speak of rival traditions of thought upon particular issues ..... it makes no similar sense in connexion with our conception of the world as a whole.'[34] Is this argument to be understood as an empirical or a metaphysical one ?

It is interesting to consider it first as an empirical argument, even if that interpretation must ultimately be withdrawn. It would then be a direct rival to the subjectivist claim that conceptions of the world are socially relative in that they arise within and are causally affected by forms of life which are themselves the products of social forces. Such an argument would evidently undermine the objectivity of knowledge, and it would do so in just the way the idealist, in Hamlyn's terms, endeavours. The subjectivist is advancing an empirical hypothesis: conceptions of the world are the effects of social conditions. And so it might be thought that Hamlyn is trying to counter this argument with a competing empirical claim: there is a distinctively human form of life or sensibility which is causally efficacious in shaping certain central features of conceptions of the world. There is a uniquely human conception of the world because there is a uniquely human form of sensibility which produces it. It follows that, even if idealism is understood as an empirical thesis, it does not entail relativism, as Popper assumed,

because some features of minds are shared by all human beings and so the world, at least in certain respects, is the same for everyone. As long as the idealist's insistence on the mind-dependence of the world is based upon the human form of sensibility rather than on forms of life, it lends no support to relativism. And so, even if Hamlyn were putting forward an empirical claim, he would not be undermining his own opposition to relativism.

But Hamlyn is not of course advancing an empirical hypothesis: to use the concept of the human form of sensibility is to subscribe to a broadly neo-Kantian enterprise. The best way to understand Hamlyn is to take him to be maintaining that the assumption that there is an independently existing world is part of our conceptual apparatus. The philosopher's task is to bring openly to consciousness the concepts and categories which are implicit in our thinking about the world. This interpretation of philosophy coincides with the Strawsonian picture of descriptive metaphysics, which aims to 'describe the actual structure of our thought about the world' and 'lay bare the most general features of our conceptual structure.'[36] The metaphysician must recognise the importance of the concept of an independently existing world in our form of sensibility, while at the same time remembering that this _causally_ independent world _is_ mind-dependent in another sense. And this conception of metaphysics is of course the one that has informed the defence of metaphysical idealism in this chapter.

It might be objected that Hamlyn's defence of objectivity is incoherent, in that an empirical element cannot be prevented from intruding into an otherwise metaphysical or conceptual project.[37] The objector would interpret Hamlyn's claim that certain matters are not negotiable as implying that the nature of the human brain and sense organs compel the use of certain concepts and modes of thought. In other words, the conceptual scheme which we employ in thinking about the world is in part the causal product of our brains and sense organs. And one constituent of that scheme is the concept of an independently existing world; we have a concept of something existing independently of ourselves as part of our conceptual framework. The human form of sensibility is, on this view, the causal product of human brains and sense organs; given that sensibility, we cannot help but suppose that there are things which exist independently of our thinking about them. So the concept of an independently existing world, of objective reality, is itself the creation of the brain and sense organs. But this presupposes the existence of objectively real brains and sense organs. And so, the objector concludes, Hamlyn's defence of objectivity is incoherent. The notion of the mind-independently real is held to be itself mind-dependent and the nature of the mind is then explained in terms of mind-independently real brains and sense organs.

The objection fails, however, because the relation between conceptual scheme and conception of reality is not, as the

objector assumes, a causal one. In describing our conceptual framework philosophers are not characterising the cause of the world, for the relation between a concept and what it is a concept of is not a causal one. There is therefore no inconsistency in believing both that our form of sensibility partially determines the way we see and think about the world and that the world, or more specifically those parts of it known as human brains and sense organs, partially determines our form of sensibility. For the first determination is conceptual, the second causal. It is not that our concepts bring the world into existence but rather that, without them, it would be impossible to speak of it. And so the philosophical and the empirical claims cannot contradict one another, for they are on different planes. That the nature of the brain and sense organs influences our concepts and modes of thought is no doubt true. But that proposition does not compete with the thesis that, in describing our conceptual framework, the philosopher is also characterising necessary features of the world as it is known to and experienced by us. He is therefore, to restate the main argument of this chapter, describing the world *simpliciter*, for no other concept of the world is intelligible.

## 5.7 Summary.

In the present chapter, the view has been defended that the world exists independently of minds. The aim was to secure the idea of truth as correspondence to reality. But this

aim has been pursued, not by defending metaphysical realism, the usual ally of the correspondence theory of truth, but by freeing metaphysical idealism from misinterpretation. Two sociological theses of idealist ancestry were discussed: it was agreed that social reality is mind-dependent, for this means no more than that many sociological propositions express institutional facts: but the claim that sociology creates the world it studies was rejected. Metaphysical idealism was then defended, by removing its relativist associations. It was noted that subjectivists are attracted to it and realists scorn it because both believe it to entail that uncongenial aspects of reality can somehow be conjured out of existence by a change in our habits of thinking and speaking. But this inference was shown to be invalid: metaphysical idealism is true, but not in a sense which entails, what is evidently false, that we can change the world in any way we wish. The forms of knowledge were again seen to be helpful, in showing how idealism can be true in a sense which is unencumbered by the implausible entailment and false in a sense from which the entailment cannot be detached. For the nature of metaphysical idealism is misconceived by some of its adherents and most of its opponents alike. They assume that it belongs to the empirical form of knowledge, or in other words that it is a thesis in the object-language, whereas it really belongs to the philosophical form of knowledge, as a thesis about the object-language within the meta-language. Metaphysical idealism is therefore consistent with empirical realism, for the former denies the mind-independence of the world within the philosophical form of

knowledge, while the latter asserts it within the empirical form. That is to say, the world is not the creation or causal product of the mind, but its specification must refer to mental acts and powers. The world as we know and experience it is the only world of which an intelligible concept can exist. The impossible consequences to which the realist objected are not after all entailed by metaphysical idealism, properly understood. Moreover, since the notion of truth as correspondence to reality presupposes empirical, not metaphysical, realism, the version of metaphysical idealism elucidated in this chapter can be accepted without prejudice to that important concept.

Summary of Part One

The conclusion of Part One is that the subjectivist critique of objective knowledge is invalid. For there is objective knowledge in the sense that there are bodies of propositions which it is rational to believe and which are true. The constituent theses of this general claim concern propositions, rational justification, criteria of rationality, truth and reality. It was first argued that an adequate theory of knowledge must include propositions as well as mental states and speech acts. The idea of objective knowledge as justified true belief was then elucidated and grounds were offered for thinking it to be epistemologically preferable to subjective knowledge as reliable true belief. Justification, as the distinguishing mark of objective knowledge, was analysed and found to consist in failed criticism. It was next argued that the criteria of rationality presupposed by this account of objective knowledge do in fact exist. The first step in the argument was that some beliefs belong to intellectual traditions, which incorporate criteria of rationality. This claim was then defended against the subjectivist objection that such criteria are socially relative and cannot themselves be rationally justified. In reply it was maintained that a distinction must be drawn between forms of life and the human form of sensibility; criteria belonging to the former are indeed socially variable and the justification of beliefs is limited to a particular form of life; but the latter embodies criteria which are indispensable to any sort of rational intercourse with reality, from which it follows both that they are universally applicable and that they can be rationally

justified. Attention then turned to truth, for the possibility of systematic dealings with reality involves the idea of correspondence between what we say and think about the world and the way the world actually is. In response to the subjectivist claim that truth consists, not in correspondence, but in coherence or pragmatic utility, an eclectic theory of truth was propounded. Truth was defined in epistemologically neutral terms, or rather in terms which do not differentiate between correspondence and coherence but which exclude pragmatic utility. The notion of forms of knowledge was introduced to explain how truth-criteria include both correspondence, understood as a family resemblance concept, and coherence: the former is characteristic of the empirical form of knowledge, while the latter is used in the mathematical and philosophical forms. The preservation of a central role for correspondence raised a metaphysical question, for the idea of correspondence between thought and reality is vacuous unless the two are distinct and mutually independent. It was argued that, while the idealist claim that reality is mind-dependent is true within the philosophical form of knowledge, the realist thesis that reality exists independently of thought is true within the empirical form, which suffices to meet the requirements of truth as correspondence to reality.

In Part Two some methodological issues arising out of this defence of objective knowledge will be discussed.

# PART TWO

# SUBJECTIVISM AND THE METHODOLOGY OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

## INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO

The main task of Part Two is to alleviate fears that objectivism threatens the integrity of sociology or places intolerable restrictions upon its practitioners. For if the thesis that justified true belief is objective knowledge were thought to carry unacceptable methodological implications, its position as the foundation for a rebuttal of the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge would be in jeopardy. And so, before the objectivist epistemology of Part One can be used in Part Three to establish the potential objectivity of the methods and content of education, it must be shown to be compatible with the practice of sociology.

In chapter six the question to be discussed is whether objectivism undermines the sociology of knowledge. There are two subjectivist arguments to be considered. The first is that philosophy claims access to a realm of superior knowledge, from which its methodological views are derived, and that, since this claim is unfounded, no philosopher is ever entitled to say anything about the procedures of sociologists. If this conclusion were true, the present task would be unfeasible. It will, however, be replied that the argument misinterprets the intentions and scope of philosophical inquiry. The second subjectivist argument is that the sociology of knowledge can establish itself only by denying the possibility of objective

knowledge. In reply it will be contended that knowledge is both objective and socially constructed, so that objectivism does not in any way curtail the sociological investigation of knowledge.

The position discussed in chapter seven is sociologism, the view that all beliefs, whether rational, irrational or ideological, are amenable to the same mode of sociological explanation. It will be contended in reply that, while sociology has a role to play in the explanation of all three classes of beliefs, its contribution to the explanation of rational beliefs is limited to the discovery of necessary conditions for their occurrence. In practice, however, this is neither a serious nor an unreasonable restriction on sociological inquiry.

Methodological relativism is examined in chapter eight. The argument is that there cannot be objective knowledge about actions and beliefs, because sociological explanations are relative to the rules and concepts of the agents and believers concerned. In reply, it will be suggested that, in so far as methodological relativism entails an uncritical acceptance of subjects' own explanations of their beliefs and actions, it must be rejected. Far from inhibiting the sociologist's investigations, objectivism widens their scope by justifying a critical attitude to the claims made by agents and believers.

The intention of Part Two is, then, to show that objectivism, while it entails the falsity of three subjectivist methodological views, does not place unreasonable restrictions on sociologists. Indeed, the methodological implications of objectivism are no more than an explication of the procedures followed by many social scientists. It is not that objectivism seeks to narrow the scope of sociological inquiry, but rather that subjectivism is based on a misunderstanding of its methodological assumptions.

# CHAPTER SIX. INCOMPATIBILISM.

## 6.1 Introduction : Philosophy and the Social Sciences.

It will be recalled that the ultimate aim of this thesis is to establish that certain subjectivist claims about education are unfounded. It has been seen in Part One that this cannot be done without first examining the epistemological foundations of subjectivism and showing them to be unsound. The main concern of Part Two is the methodological views implied by subjectivism. These views are interesting in themselves and they might be thought, if true, to entail, or at least support, the educational ideas propounded by subjectivists. Yet they are closely associated with the epistemological outlook favoured by subjectivists. And so their truth is rendered doubtful by the critique of subjectivist epistemology put forward in Part One. It is therefore clear that the implications of objectivism for the methodology of the social sciences must be made explicit and defended. This chapter will deal principally with the subjectivist account of the relation between epistemology and the sociology of knowledge, namely incompatibilism. According to this doctrine, epistemology and the sociology of knowledge are incompatible, in that traditional or objectivist epistemology entails the impossibility of sociological explanations of knowledge, from which it follows that sociologists of knowledge must establish the integrity of their own discipline by refuting objectivist theories of knowledge. The incompatibilist holds that the defence of the objectivity of knowledge undertaken in Part One renders

the sociology of knowledge superfluous, indeed impossible. It will be argued that, far from this being so, an objectivist epistemology is compatible with the assumption on which the sociology of knowledge is based, that some aspects of knowledge are socially conditioned. But a preliminary task must first be accomplished: it must be established that philosophers are entitled to criticise the practices and principles of social scientists.

For it has been contended that it is beyond the competence of philosophers to criticise the methods of social scientists. Hindess argues that philosophers claim to derive their methodological critiques from a realm of esoteric knowledge to which they alone have access: 'It is clear that methodology's claim to prescribe correct procedures to the sciences must presuppose a form of knowledge which is in some sense superior to that produced in the sciences ...... Access to this special kind of knowledge is thought to be provided by philosophy.'[1] But, he continues, philosophy cannot make good this claim, because it is vitiated by the inescapable circularity of epistemology. His argument in support of this contention resembles the criterion problem, for he maintains that 'the epistemological specification of the criteria of the validity of all knowledge must presuppose the validity of the prior "knowledge" from which the specification is derived.'[2] The similarity with the criterion problem is

also apparent in the example which Hindess provides of the allegedly circular reasoning characteristic of epistemologists. Referring to Mill's four methods of experimental inquiry, he argues thus: 'induction and the canons of inquiry provide a real knowledge of the world because the world is really structured by laws. And how do we know that ? By induction. The inescapable circularity and ultimate dogmatism of this position is evident.'[3] The conclusion at which Hindess arrives is that, since there is no supra-scientific epistemology to guarantee that what science produces is knowledge, criteria of rationality are always internal to a particular science. And so nobody outside that science, in particular no philosopher, is competent to criticise them. Nor is any outsider entitled to recommend that practitioners of a particular science adopt some procedures and abjure others.

This account of the relation between philosophy and sociology is untenable, because it is based upon unsound assumptions concerning the nature of truth in the social sciences and the intentions and capacities of philosophers. There is, to be sure, a superficial resemblance between Hindess's claim that rational inquiry is limited to the search for incoherence in explanatory theories and the argument advanced in chapter one to the effect that justification is unsuccessful criticism.[4] But the burden of Part One is that there is more to criticism than the quest for

incoherence. While coherence is the criterion of truth in the mathematical and philosophical forms of knowledge, empirical propositions are judged in terms of correspondence to reality. A rejection of correspondence is implicit in Hindess's criticism of Mill. But Mill's position is a methodist one[5] and so its refutation is no reason for believing that the objectivist defence of correspondence offered in Part One is invalid. Hindess is right in thinking that Mill's account of induction does not constitute a solution to the criterion problem, but wrong in concluding that no such solution can be found. Nevertheless, it could be argued that, while Hindess has not disposed of the idea of truth as correspondence to reality, he is correct to believe that it has no application in the social sciences.

Hindess's argument that coherence is the only criterion of truth in the social sciences is essentially an attempt to assimilate them to the mathematical or philosophical form of knowledge. Now it is true that some propositions in the social sciences are conceptual and stipulative and cannot therefore be evaluated in terms of correspondence to reality. For instance, it is a central proposition in microeconomics that under perfect competition the rational producer will supply the quantity of goods at which marginal cost equals marginal revenue. It would be quite mistaken to try to test this proposition against reality by finding out whether producers do in fact supply, or aim to supply, the quantity

at which mc = mr and concluding that the proposition is either confirmed or falsified. For the proposition that the optimal output is that at which mc = mr sets the standard of rationality in production. So if we discovered that in the real world no producers acted on, or even understood, it, the proper conclusion would be, not that the proposition is false, but that no producers are rational. And so the proposition that the optimal output is that which equates marginal cost and marginal revenue is not an empirical one. But by no means all propositions in economics are conceptual and stipulative. There are also many empirical propositions: for example, that the number of people registered as unemployed on 22nd December 1981 was just under three million, that there were more new cars registered last August than in the preceding month and that nominal interest rates were higher than real interest rates throughout 1981. It is of course true that these propositions incorporate institutional concepts, both methodological and causal. The level of unemployment is in a sense the product of a decision about the criteria to use in measuring it; for example, it would probably be higher if the survey method favoured in many European countries and in the USA were used. Nevertheless, it remains true that it is an objective matter of fact that a certain number of people satisfy a definition of 'unemployed', even if there are other definitions that could have been chosen and the actual figure is undiscoverable because the available techniques of measurement permit only an estimate.

So it is perfectly intelligible to speak of the proposition that just under three million people were unemployed in December 1981 as corresponding, or failing to correspond, to reality. That reality, the number of people out of work, however that condition is defined, is also the causal product of certain factors, such as government policy, the state of world trade and the competitiveness of British industry. And it is clear that propositions describing these factors will embody institutional concepts, such as those of government, policy, trade and Britain. Nevertheless, it remains true that it is an objective matter of fact that, for example, government policies have or have not added to the numbers of people who are unemployed. It is possible to imagine a world exactly like the real one except that different policies are followed; if unemployment were lower in that posited world, the proposition that government policies have added to unemployment would be verified. And so it is perfectly intelligible to speak of that proposition as corresponding, or failing to correspond, to reality, even though we can never carry out the comparative experiment that would enable us to know for certain which it does. It can therefore be concluded that the social sciences include propositions which are to be judged in terms of correspondence to reality. And in that case Hindess's claim that criticism can consist only in the search for incoherence must be rejected.

The second reason for believing Hindess's account of the relation between philosophy and the social sciences to be unsound is that it rests on an untenable assumption about the nature of philosophical inquiry. For he argues that philosophy claims access to a realm of esoteric knowledge, a claim that is surely far from the minds of contemporary analytic philosophers. It is, however, natural to assume, as Hindess does, that if philosophers criticise the principles and procedures of social scientists they must be doing so from the standpoint of a superior kind of knowledge. After all, philosophy _is_ a second-order discipline: it investigates the concepts and criteria we, or some specialist sub-group of us, employ in speaking and thinking about the world, rather than the world itself. But it does not follow, and is not true, that philosophy is 'the queen of the sciences' or that philosophers are entitled to pontificate on other branches of inquiry. The aim of the philosopher is to criticise rather than prescribe. The philosopher may criticise the social scientist for using concepts which are ambiguous or unintelligible or for adopting methodological principles which are incoherent or incomplete. He may also seek to identify the most fruitful explanatory procedures in use and to discover the limits of the applicability of some such procedures. None of this involves access to esoteric knowledge, for philosophical criticism is a contribution to the collective effort to make more consistent and systematic the criteria and methods of inquiry which are already in use. For, despite

Hindess's insistence that each science has its own peculiar canons of argument, there are concepts and criteria which are indispensable to rational inquiry as such[6] and some which characterise a form of knowledge rather than a particular discipline.[7] For instance, the concepts of action, meaning, rule and reason inform investigations in sociology, economics and history, and any attempt to explain human behaviour presupposes that it is not completely random but exhibits some regularities. It is therefore appropriate that methodological criticism should transcend the confines of a single academic discipline. And it is equally fitting that, in the division of academic labour, the philosopher should contribute to this endeavour. For he has a specialist's interest in, although no esoteric knowledge about, the precise use of language and the logic of arguments. The danger in Hindess's account is that it encourages the social sciences to stagnate; each science will atrophy if it is debarred from drawing on others for fresh perspectives and problems. Thus, Hindess's claim that each science be allowed to proceed in accordance with its own specific methods of inquiry echoes Erasmus's call to renounce the intellectual quest and conform to the customs of local society. Were this exhortation to be heeded, it is not the pretensions of philosophy that would suffer, but those of the social sciences.

Accordingly, the conclusion of this section is that there is no reason why philosophers should not criticise the

methodological principles of social scientists. One such principle, the alleged incompatibility of epistemology and the sociology of knowledge, will be examined in the next section.

## 6.2 Epistemology and the Sociology of Knowledge.

Incompatibilism is the assumption that the objectivity of knowledge precludes its amenability to sociological explanation. Since most epistemologists have traditionally believed in the objectivity of knowledge, it has been widely thought that the sociology of knowledge can establish itself only by undermining the position of epistemology. Thus Hamilton observes of it that 'the history of the discipline ..... has thus centred around its emancipation from epistemology.'[8] And Esland claims that objectivism, which is for him coextensive with the whole epistemological tradition, is 'directly challenged by the sociology of knowledge.'[9] The argument for incompatibilism is based on the premise that knowledge is a social phenomenon, that it is conditioned, perhaps even determined, by social antecedents and issues in social effects. If this were not so there could be no such discipline as the sociology of knowledge. That the sociology of knowledge flourishes therefore entails that knowledge is a social phenomenon, that sociologists investigate, among other things, the origins or sources of knowledge. But it is precisely the origins and sources of knowledge that have traditionally been studied by epistemologists. Since Bacon and Descartes established the

tradition, the central question of the theory of knowledge has been 'How do you know ?'. And this has been assumed to be synonymous with the question 'What are the sources of your knowledge ?'.[10] So the incompatibilist concludes that epistemology must concede its area of inquiry to the sociology of knowledge.

This argument overlooks the possibility that two academic disciplines may approach the same set of phenomena from different standpoints or with different interests. Certainly, the philosopher's interest in knowledge is not the same as that of the sociologist. A typical manner of initiating a philosophical inquiry into knowledge is to say, to someone who claims to know something, 'How do you know ?', intending the question to elicit a reason which supports the claim. This procedure reveals the philosopher to be a protagonist in a dispute. He and the knowledge-claimant are both participants in the same search for knowledge; they both have an interest in settling the question whether the claim is valid, that is, whether it is based on rational grounds (and perhaps, for the phrase 'valid claim to know' is ambiguous, whether it embodies a true proposition). And to settle that question they need, not to investigate, but to apply, criteria of right and wrong in rational argument. The sociologist's approach is rather different, for he regards a person who claims to know something as an object of study rather than an opponent in a dispute. His attitude is that of an observer rather than that of an adversary. The intention is not to criticise and evaluate, to

engage with the knowledge-claimant in an argument to determine whether he really knows what he claims to know, but to describe and explain, to understand why he has made this particular claim and what effects his having made it may have. So the sociologist is not interested in the claim itself or in the argument used to support it but in the motives that led to the claim's being made and in the consequences that the making of it may have. Accordingly, it is only at a superficial level that the philosopher and the sociologist study the same phenomena; it is becoming clear that one is interested in what is claimed, the other in the claiming of it.

The significance of this distinction lies in its being one of a family of distinctions which affect all the important terms in epistemology.[11] Thus, 'assertion', 'belief', 'knowledge', 'thought', 'statement' and 'claim' are all ambiguous between (i) what is asserted, believed, known, thought, stated or claimed, that is, a proposition, and (ii) the act or state of asserting, believing, knowing, thinking, stating or claiming. These ambiguities are interesting because, as Searle puts it, 'the conditions for the truth of the proposition are not the same as the conditions for the performance of the speech act of asserting that proposition.'[12] Speech acts, in common with all meaningful actions, are performed with certain intentions in mind and in accordance with certain conventions. And so the performance of speech acts is bound to be influenced by the social situations in

which speakers find themselves. What makes it appropriate to perform a given speech act is typically some aspect of the social context of performance. For instance, what makes it appropriate to assert that grass is green might be a parent's question during the course of a lesson on colour words. But what makes it appropriate for the child to respond by saying that grass is green must be distinguished from what makes it true that grass is green. What makes it true that grass is green is simply grass's being green, or, the fact that grass is green. And that is the way the world is regardless of whatever may or may not be said or thought about it. In the words of chapter five, language presupposes empirical realism; describing something (as green) presupposes that there is something to describe. The implication of this for the sociology of knowledge is that speech acts, the intentions and conventions surrounding them and their social consequences are proper and important objects of sociological inquiry, whereas propositions and their truth or falsity are not amenable to sociological explanation. Just as it would be a category mistake to claim that a speech act, or any action at all, was true in the sense that it corresponded to reality, so it would be similarly fallacious to suppose that the truth of a proposition could be socially determined or conditioned in any way.

Since so much depends on the distinction between propositions and speech acts, it is worth trying to clarify what, and what is not, involved in talk about propositions.

For the question whether propositions exist, and, if so, in what sense, is a controversial one. The danger is that the postulation of propositions is often thought to entail unwise ontological commitments. But anxiety that positing propositions is affording back-door entrance to Platonic Forms, Scholastic essences or quiddities or Hegelian Absolute Ideas is groundless. An inventory of the world must include many items whose ontological status is far from that of the medium-sized material objects which we think of as 'things': songs and symphonies, rainbows and smoke, after-images and unspoken thoughts, toothaches and numbers clamour for inclusion, though each is in its own way less than wholly material. To baulk at arguments and theories, to reduce books to marks on paper and debates to vibrations in the air, is therefore arbitrary as well as misguided. For a world without rational arguments is not the world in which we live. And we cannot explain how an argument differs from the sound or marks through which it may be expressed without introducing the idea of something common to different sets of sounds or marks. The ontological argument, for instance, is the argument that it is regardless of whether it is advanced by St.Anselm or criticised by Gaunilon. What makes it the argument that it is is the propositions that compose it and the logical relations between them, not the particular sounds or marks in which it may from time to time be made manifest.[13] Similarly, in the case of belief, we must distinguish what is believed from the mental states of those who believe it. As

Armstrong puts it, philosophers are 'landed with' talk about propositions, because 'it is clear that different people may all believe the same thing.'[14] Thus, if nine men all believe that the earth is flat, they believe the same proposition even though there are nine distinct belief states. And so the distinction between what is claimed and the claiming of it, or between the proposition and the speech act of asserting it, is only one of a family of such distinctions. The essential point implicit in them all is that what makes a proposition true or false, or an argument valid or invalid, is to be distinguished from what leads to, or prevents, a proposition's being asserted or believed, or an argument's being accepted or rejected. For propositions may be true or false, asserted or denied, believed or disbelieved, but they cannot be performed or omitted, nor can they be undergone or experienced. It is belief states that can be undergone or experienced and speech acts that can be performed or omitted.

The significance of this distinction between the truth of propositions and the antecedents of speech acts and belief states lies in its implications for traditional epistemology and the sociology of knowledge. The dichotomy between propositions and speech acts underlies that drawn between objective and subjective knowledge in chapter one.[15] The objectivist thesis that the goal of rational inquiry is objective knowledge and that traditional epistemologists have propounded subjectivist theories which cannot accommodate this

ideal has been put forward by Popper.[16] Epistemology, he argues, concerns the truth of propositions rather than the sources of claims to know propositions. But traditional epistemologists have conflated these questions, overlooking the fact that 'questions about origins or pedigrees have little bearing upon truth.'[17] Accordingly, the theory of knowledge must be reformed: 'the proper epistemological question is not about sources; rather, we should ask whether the assertion that has been made is true ....... that is to say, whether it agrees with the facts.'[18] In holding that it is the sources of a claim to know that makes what is claimed true or false, traditional theorists committed themselves to subjectivism. This Popperian interpretation of the history of epistemology is interesting because it contradicts a central assumption made by subjectivists, who repudiate traditional epistemology on the grounds of its alleged objectivism. Thus, Esland maintains that 'the objectivistic view of knowledge ..... is the view represented in traditional epistemology ..... One finds it difficult to disagree with the claim that this epistemology is fundamentally dehumanizing.'[19] It seems that Esland accepts that the truth or falsity of propositions is determined by their origins, but wants to insist that no propositions are really or absolutely true or false, because there are in fact no sources of knowledge uncontaminated by social pressures. If, for example, Bacon had been correct in thinking that truth is ultimately a matter of derivability

from sense experience, then the discovery that sense experience can be influenced by the social situation of perceivers would indeed entail the social relativity of truth. And so, if traditional epistemologists had been right in identifying the truth of propositions with the origins of claims to know them, then the argument for the social relativity of knowledge and the redundancy of epistemology would be unassailable. But that argument is vitiated by its reliance on the erroneous assumption that what makes a proposition true is the antecedents of its assertion.

It is now clear how epistemology and the sociology of knowledge can be reconciled. Questions about the truth or falsity of propositions and about logical relations between propositions can, and in fact must, be pursued quite independently of questions about the causes and effects of the performance of speech acts. This idea is implicit in Frege's remark on laws of thought: 'Error and superstition have causes just as much as genuine knowledge. The assertion both of what is false and of what is true takes place in accordance with psychological laws.'[20] It is more to the point in the present context to say that genuine knowledge (that is, knowledge such that if one knows that p then p is true), just as much as error and superstition, is arrived at in accordance with psychological (and, of course, sociological) laws. If this is so, then there is no reason

for the sociologist to be attracted to any form of relativism, subjectivism or scepticism. Subjectivists, such as Esland, seem to assume that truth and social conditions are competing explanations of knowledge understood as a series of speech acts and mental states. Explaining the performance of a speech act or the occurrence of a mental state in terms of its antecedent social conditions would then entail denying that it was true. But to suppose that a speech act or a mental state is the kind of thing that can meaningfully be said to be true (or false) is to commit a category mistake. The dilemma which the subjectivist sociologist imagined he faced - either knowledge is objectively true and so escapes the influence of social conditions or it is socially conditioned and therefore is not true, that is, is not genuine knowledge at all - is a false one. It arises only because the ambiguity of 'knowledge' and associated terms is overlooked, so that truth and amenability to social influence are assumed to be mutually exclusive attributes of one and the same thing. Once the ambiguity is acknowledged, the apparent dilemma vanishes.

In support of the argument that an objectivist epistemology is compatible with the sociological investigation of knowledge, some empirical questions posed by a subjectivist thinker will be reformulated in objectivist terms.

## 6.3 Objectivism in the Sociology of Knowledge.

It has been seen that some sociologists believe that objectivism must be refuted if the sociology of knowledge is to establish itself. Against this view it was argued in the preceding section that an objectivist epistemology is compatible with the sociological investigation of knowledge. In order to consolidate that conclusion, it will now be shown that the empirical questions raised by a subjectivist sociologist, namely Esland,[21] remain viable when reinterpreted on the assumption that objectivism is true.

There are two perspectives to Esland's empirical inquiry which lend themselves particularly well to objectivist translation. The first is what he calls the pedagogical perspective, which is concerned with teachers' assumptions about learning, the child's intellectual status and with teaching style. Within this perspective Esland asks the following questions :

(a) Which psychological theories - explicit or implicit - are dominant ?

(b) What assumptions are held about the qualities of responses from pupils which indicate whether learning is taking place ?

(c) How does the teacher define favourable outcomes - the 'good pupil' ?

(d) What is the definition of unfavourable outcomes - the 'bad pupil' ?[22]

The first question is clearly about speech acts and belief states; it implies that certain psychological theories are asserted by people whom teachers accept as authorities and that understanding these speech acts has, via belief states, certain perlocutionary effects on how teachers act.[23] This idea is developed by the second question; teachers understand speech acts, believe the propositions asserted in them and their belief states influence their expectations about, and conduct towards, their pupils. Neither question raises the issue of the truth or falsity of the proposition asserted; all that is required is that teachers believe them to be true, regardless of their actual truth-value. And so the investigation of the issues raised by questions (a) and (b) is compatible with the objectivist principle that questions about the truth or falsity of propositions are independent of those concerning the antecedents and effects of speech acts and belief states.

A further dimension of Esland's empirical inquiry becomes apparent in questions (c) and (d) : concepts like 'learning' and 'good pupil' are socially constructed in the sense that they embody institutional rather than brute facts.[24] While it is an objective matter of truth and falsity whether $X$ has attributes $A_1$ ..$A_n$, it is a matter of decision or convention that having $A_1$ ... $A_n$ is the criterion of $X$'s being $f$. In other words, what responses pupils make is a matter of fact, of truth and falsity, but it is a matter

of <u>institutional</u> fact that those responses count as evidence of learning. The notions of 'good pupil' and 'bad pupil' raise intractable philosophical issues, but, whatever analysis of 'good' is preferred, questions (c) and (d) are compatible with objectivism. Subjectivism in ethics, according to which a teacher who says '*X* is a good pupil' is not stating a fact at all but expressing a value judgement, has more philosophical respectability than subjectivist epistemology but it is not necessary as a presupposition of Esland's inquiry. Even if it is claimed that a teacher who says '*X* is a good pupil' *is* stating a fact, it is evidently an institutional fact he is stating, so that his judgement is ultimately relative to the values implicit in the decision about the criteria for being a good pupil.

The second perspective is concerned with the subject being taught and raises a new issue. Two of the questions Esland asks within this perspective are :

> (c) How strongly articulated is the utility dimension of knowledge - e.g. 'pure' v. 'applied'; the subject or its technology ?
>
> (d) What are criteria of utility - *extrinsic* : economic, humanitarian, world-improving, *social integration*: or, *intrinsic* : developing particular qualities of awareness ? [25]

These questions concern the criteria for the performance of speech acts and the view that such criteria are socially conditioned is of course compatible with objectivism, since it is a basic assumption that a distinction is to be drawn between

the conditions for the truth of propositions and the conditions for the performance of speech acts of asserting propositions. The propriety of raising questions such as (c) and (d) could be doubted only by someone who subscribed to what has been stigmatized elsewhere as Objectivist Dogma 1, that the truth of a proposition guarantees the appropriateness of asserting it.[26] A proponent of this doctrine might well assume that the only criterion to be used in selecting content for the curriculum was the truth or falsity of the propositions competing for selection. But truth is only a necessary, not a sufficient, condition for selection; other considerations, to do with pupils' needs and interests, manpower planning, changing society and so on, arise from the fact that asserting a proposition is a social action. And so the objectivist distinction between what makes a proposition true and what makes it appropriate to assert it clarifies rather than prohibits sociological inquiry.

It may be the case that Esland's sociological investigations would never have been formulated if he had not been convinced of the rightness of his subjectivist philosophical presuppositions. But it does not follow that empirical inquiry and theoretical assumptions stand or fall together. It often happens that a thinker adopts an extreme position in announcing his intentions only to pursue in practice a more moderate and flexible line. This is what seems to have happened in this case. Since Esland's

empirical questions are interesting and unexceptionable to the objectivist, and since subjectivism is unsound, it may be concluded that the subjectivist assumptions of his inquiry can be abandoned without loss of scope for sociological investigation and with a gain in philosophical credibility.

## 6.4 Summary

The aim of this chapter has been to refute incompatibilism, the thesis that philosophy and sociology must always be in conflict. Two forms of this doctrine were discussed. The first is that philosophers use their presumed access to superior knowledge to justify methodological recommendations to sociologists. In reply it was argued that this contention misunderstands the nature of truth in the social sciences and the intentions and abilities of philosophers. Philosophy is a second-order discipline with a legitimate interest in criticising the conceptual and methodological aspects of other academic subjects. The second version of incompatibilism is more specific: objectivism in epistemology attempts to prevent the full emergence of the sociology of knowledge, so that a necessary prelude to sociological inquiry into knowledge is the advocacy of subjectivist epistemological principles. But this overlooks the fact that knowledge is both objective and socially conditioned, a fact that is best

elicited by analysing the ambiguous crucial terms of the theory of knowledge. Knowledge as a body of propositions is objective and it is socially conditioned as a collection of speech acts and belief states. Empirical questions in the sociology of educational knowledge can be translated into objectivist terms with no loss of interrogative power and an increase in clarity.

Nevertheless, the subjectivist may feel uneasy about one aspect of this settlement: if all belief states and speech acts are amenable to sociological explanation, what becomes of the distinction, elucidated in chapter two,[27] between rational belief and ideology ? And this is a concern which the objectivist must share. It will therefore be the subject of the next chapter.

# CHAPTER SEVEN. SOCIOLOGISM.

## 7.1 Introduction

Sociologism is the contention that all beliefs, irrespective of whether they are rationally justified or ideological, are amenable to the same sort of sociological explanation. It is implicit in the subjectivist claim that human thought is ineradicably ideological, so that beliefs which are held to be rationally justified are really of the same epistemological status as ones which are acknowledged to be ideological.[1] It can also be found in a generalization attributed by MacIntyre to Trevor-Roper: '"Whenever the social structure is of a certain kind, beliefs of a certain kind will be generated independent of any rational support they may or may not have."[2] The methodological issue is whether the sociologist should precede his empirical inquiries with an evaluation of the beliefs he intends to investigate. Sociologism holds that he does not need to do so, because, as the subjectivist has shown, there are no rationally justified beliefs. But it will be argued that there are rationally justified beliefs and the sociologist needs to take cognizance of the fact. For these beliefs require explanation of a different kind from that which is appropriate to ideological or to irrational beliefs.

It is clear that this issue is related to the one discussed in the previous chapter. The question there was

whether knowledge can be both objective and socially constructed, while what is at issue here is whether a belief can be both rationally justified and socially generated. These questions are best understood as aspects of a single complex issue concerning knowledge as justified true belief. There are two ways in which it might be thought that the sociological explanation of knowledge is dyslogistic, undermining its pretentions to be knowledge. Firstly, it might be argued that a sociological account of someone's claiming to know that p entails that p is false. The argument of the previous chapter was a reply to this position: that someone's claiming to know that p can be explained as the outcome of social pressures is compatible with p's being true. The sociologist seeks to explain acts of asserting and states of believing propositions and so neither can, nor needs, to doubt the truth of those asserted propositions that are also true. Secondly, it might be maintained that a sociological account of someone's believing that p entails that his belief is not rationally justified. It is this claim that is now to be discussed.

An attractive strategy is to advance another compatibilist thesis. And indeed it will be argued that some beliefs are both rationally justified and socially conditioned. But there is more to it than that, for it must be recognised that some beliefs are socially generated in a way that excludes any efforts rationally to justify them. Such a belief is irrational in that it is the immediate product

of an emotion experienced in response to a social situation; the strength of the emotional response prevents any attempt to justify the belief; the truth-value of the proposition believed and the availability of grounds for thinking it true are simply not considered. Other beliefs are ideological, in the sense that efforts to justify them were imperfect; criteria which, wholeheartedly employed, would have revealed the unjustifiability of the belief were ignored or only superficially applied. For the belief to be ideological rather than the fruit of incompetence the failure must be a response to perceived social pressures or interests. Finally, some beliefs are rationally justified. Since rational activity is possible only under some social conditions, sociology has a part to play in the explanation of such beliefs. It is of this class of beliefs alone that compatibilism is true, for they are both rationally justified and socially conditioned.

The argument will proceed by considering a suggested answer to sociologism, which is found to be based on an unjustified premise and to present an over-simplified account of belief. From this critique the reply to sociologism foreshadowed above will be developed.

## 7.2 Social Pressures and Intellectual Traditions.

Sociologism is based on the assumption that a belief cannot be both rationally justified and sociologically explained, responding to this supposed fact by claiming that no beliefs can be rationally justified and all can be sociologically

explained. A suggested reply to this contention shares the initial assumption, responding to it by dividing beliefs into two mutually exclusive categories, namely those that can be rationally justified and those that can be sociologically explained. The reply is put forward by MacIntyre,[3] who argues that once a belief has been explained as the outcome of rational procedures any further explanation is superfluous. A belief can therefore be sociologically explained only if it was arrived at without reference to criteria of rationality.

A schema for the sociological explanation of beliefs is elicited by MacIntyre from Trevor-Roper's study of seventeenth century witchcraft. A social situation of a certain sort engenders an emotion, such as fear. Emotions are intentional, in that they presuppose beliefs and can be characterised only in terms of the object of belief. In the absence of an adequate intentional object, one will be supplied or even invented. Thus, belief in witches may be explained 'as brought into being by a need to supply a rationale for the emotion; and we explain the emotion as generated by the social structure.'[4] According to MacIntyre, this model of explanation is inappropriate for a certain class of beliefs, namely rational beliefs, which he defines as those which are arrived at in accordance with accepted canons of argument. Once a belief has been shown to be rational, explanation is at an end: 'The explanation of rational beliefs terminates with an

account of the appropriate intellectual norms and procedures.'[5] The assumption here is that it is impossible to give a sociological explanation of the intellectual traditions which are composed of these norms and procedures. MacIntyre defends this assumption by drawing an analogy between intellectual and artistic traditions: 'The notion of a causal explanation for the genesis of an intellectual tradition is like the notion of such an explanation for the genesis of a style of painting. All attempts to give such explanations have foundered.'[6] Only necessary, not sufficient, conditions for the emergence of a certain style can be specified.

The first objection which may be made to the argument that rational beliefs cannot be sociologically explained is that it is based on an assumption of uncertain status. The claim that all attempts to state necessary and sufficient conditions for the development of a style of thought or artistic expression have failed would be rejected as manifestly false by many historians of ideas. And in any case that claim, as it stands, leaves open the possibility that a causal explanation of the genesis of an intellectual or artistic tradition might yet be discovered. If MacIntyre's contention is, not merely that no such explanation has so far been given, but that none could in principle be formulated, then an argument must be offered in support of it. But no such argument is discernible in his paper. And so the assumption on which MacIntyre's argument is based is implausible irrespective of whether it is interpreted as a contingent or a

necessary proposition. Furthermore, even if it were true, it would not constitute a reason for accepting the conclusion that the explanation of rational beliefs must terminate with an account of the intellectual norms and procedures used in arriving at it. For the assumption is only that it is impossible to state necessary and sufficient conditions for the emergence of an intellectual or artistic tradition. It is evidently consistent with this claim that necessary conditions for such a development can be stated. And that is surely enough to justify the sociological investigation of intellectual and artistic traditions.

The scope and limits of the rational explanation of beliefs can be further examined by considering another attempt to understand the development of intellectual traditions.

## 7.3 The Concept of an Intellectual Field.

The concept of an intellectual field is introduced by Bourdieu,[7] who uses it to characterise the autonomy which, he claims, belongs to the pursuit of knowledge and other intellectual and artistic activities. The intellectual field has gradually achieved relative independence of external legitimating authorities, such as the aristocracy or the church; it has become 'a field of relations governed by a specific logic: competition for cultural legitimacy.'[8] The significance of this idea lies in its suggestion that the norms

and procedures characteristic of, among other things, academic disciplines are in part the product of intrinsic factors. The authorities who control the discipline 'select and consecrate' the criteria of rationality peculiar to it. To the extent that this is so, external factors, including social ones, are excluded from influence. But it should not be thought that Bourdieu's position supports the claim that intellectual traditions or fields are not amenable to sociological explanation. All that is suggested is the more restricted view that no such tradition or field can be explained solely in sociological terms, because intrinsic factors associated with the specific logic of a particular tradition also play a part. The development of an intellectual field is therefore the outcome of the interaction between intrinsic and external factors, between rational and sociological forces.

Indeed, rational explanation, as understood by Bourdieu, is itself a kind of sociological explanation, for the intellectual field is a social structure in its own right. His use of the notion of a creative project confirms this interpretation. A creative project is the work of an individual artist or intellectual within a given field. The intention informing his deployment of this concept is to transcend the familiar conflict between (i) intrinsic aesthetic theory, according to which the work of art is a self-contained system 'itself defining the coherent principles and norms necessary for its interpretation'[9] and (ii) external

aesthetic theory, which seeks to relate the work of art to the social and economic conditions of artistic creation, often at the cost of 'detrimentally diminishing' it. Agreeing that socio-economic conditions are important, Bourdieu maintains that external aesthetic theory fails to realise that they become a specifically intellectual influence only by 'being reinterpreted, according to the specific logic of an intellectual field in a creative project.'[10] The novelty of the concept of a creative project is that it constitutes an adjustment between determinism and a determination: 'All influence and constraint exercised by an authority outside the intellectual field is always refracted by the structure of the intellectual field.'[11] Thus, the intellectual's relationship with his social class is affected by his position within the intellectual field.

It is therefore clear that Bourdieu's account of the development of the intellectual field exemplifies the compatibilist position, in that, far from seeing rational and sociological explanations of belief as mutually exclusive, he presents rational explanation as itself a mode of sociological explanation. For the intellectual field, defined by the norms and procedures used in interpreting and evaluating creative projects, is nevertheless a social structure, which mediates the influence on creative projects of external social and economic factors. And so two criticisms of MacIntyre's account of intellectual traditions are appropriate

in the light of this discussion of the concept of an intellectual field. The first is that the conclusion of the previous section, that the explanation of rational beliefs does not end with a description of the norms and procedures used in arriving at them, is upheld. For external factors, including sociological ones, affect creative projects, although their influence may be distorted by the structure of the intellectual field. The second criticism is that the incompatibilist assumption shared by MacIntyre and the adherents of sociologism is false, in that the explanation of a belief as the outcome of rational inquiry is itself a form of sociological explanation.

There are, however, important qualifications to be made to this endorsement of compatibilism, the first of which reveals a valuable insight in MacIntyre's view of the rational explanation of beliefs.

## 7.4 Intellectual Traditions and Criteria of Rationality.

The question is whether compatibilism is true of all rational beliefs, or in other words, whether the rational explanation of belief is always a mode of sociological explanation. Bourdieu would say that it is: 'Any attempt to consider propositions arising from a synchronic study of a state of the field as essential, transhistoric or transcultural is ..... condemned.'[12] MacIntyre, on the other hand, regards all intellectual norms and procedures, not as belonging to any particular tradition, but simply as

<u>the</u> criteria of rationality: 'For the criteria are neither <u>ours</u> nor <u>theirs</u>, but simply <u>the</u> criteria.'[13] The issue can be reformulated in the terms used in chapter three:[14] are all criteria of rationality specific to various forms of life, as Bourdieu would claim, or are some of them constitutive of the human form of sensibility (a view which supports MacIntyre's position, though he does not commit himself to it in preference to other possible foundations for his ideas) ?

It has already been argued that both context-dependent and context-independent criteria of rationality exist.[15] Briefly, without postulating context-dependent criteria, which are specific to a particular form of life, we cannot understand the phenomenon of communication breakdown; equally, unless we posit universally applicable criteria of rationality, we will be unable to explain the more pervasive phenomenon of communication success. Indeed, without such criteria no rational intercourse with the world would be possible. It might also be argued that, without universal criteria of rationality, it would be impossible to justify the classification of criteria belonging to different forms of life as criteria of <u>rationality</u>, for that description presupposes that they have something in common. But this is not a conclusive argument, because it overlooks the possibility that 'criteria of rationality' signifies a family resemblance concept. It is nevertheless reasonable to assume that a case has been made out for the existence of

context-independent criteria of rationality.

There are two implications of this conclusion for the question whether compatibilism is true of all rational beliefs. Firstly, some beliefs are themselves constituents of the human form of sensibility. As such, they are necessary conditions of systematic transactions with the world. It might be thought that they cannot therefore be explained as the products of a particular social structure. For example, my belief that I am not the only conscious being in the universe is a presupposition of my having any interpersonal relationships at all. For unless the proposition that there are conscious beings other than myself is true, and unless I believe it to be true, I would be incapable of seeing anything as a person. And so my belief is a presupposition of social life and cannot therefore be the outcome of a particular set of social circumstances. Accordingly, we are entitled to use such a belief as a criterion of rationality and this is just what philosophers do in trying to decide whether the Cartesian Dualist is logically committed to solipsism. For to assume that if Cartesian Dualism entails solipsism then Cartesian Dualism must itself be false is to set up the belief that solipsism is false as a criterion of rationality. It cannot however be concluded that there are some beliefs of which it is true to say, with MacIntyre, that their explanation terminates with an account of the intellectual norms and procedures used in arriving at them. For to show that a

belief is presupposed by rational activity is not to establish that that belief is held and that rational activity is taking place. There are environments in which intelligent creatures capable of rational activity could never have developed. And there are people who do not engage rationally with their fellow human beings and the world in general. It is a philosophical question whether certain beliefs are presupposed by rational intercourse with reality; it is an empirical, and in part a sociological, question whether conditions exist in which such beliefs can be held and rational activity proceed. Thus, the absence of social pressures of a certain sort may be a necessary condition of rational engagement with the world. And so a complete account of rationally justified beliefs must include a sociological component, even if the beliefs are constitutive of the human form of sensibility.

The second implication is that the compatibilist thesis exemplified by Bourdieu's account of intellectual fields is true of a much larger class of beliefs. The beliefs which constitute the human form of sensibility, or which are entailed solely by its constituent principles, while of fundamental importance to our understanding of, and action in, the world, are small in number.[16] Many more beliefs are arrived at in accordance with criteria of truth and rationality which are specific to a form of knowledge or even to an academic discipline within a form.

An adequate explanation of these elaborate theoretical beliefs must refer to concepts and criteria peculiar to the form or discipline in question. Propositions and theories put forward in academic disputes (other than philosophical ones) and other formal situations may be assumed to have satisfied, if only tacitly, the criteria which the human form of sensibility embodies. The dispute between monetarists and Keynesians, or the question whether functionalism or Marxism gives a better account of religion in modern industrial societies, will not be settled by finding that one member of each pair of competing theories entails solipsism or the denial of the existence of space and time. Of course it is true that any one of those theories would be rejected if it were found to fail to correspond to reality or cohere with established knowledge. But what counts as correspondence or coherence depends upon the characteristic concepts and criteria employed in the discipline. Thus, it was argued in chapter four that correspondence is a family resemblance concept;[17] agreement between thought and reality means something different, in practice, for the economist and for the physicist, but there is nevertheless a family resemblance between consulting the retail price index and taking readings from a voltameter. These particular interpretations of features of the human form of sensibility, which are embodied in forms of life such as intellectual traditions, are unlikely to be immune from social influences.

The main lesson to be drawn from the preceding discussion is that it is important to distinguish between explaining a rational belief and explaining a tradition. The norms and procedures which constitute an intellectual tradition or field as the tradition or field that it is, that is, so to speak, <u>its</u> norms and procedures rather than the norms and procedures drawn from the human form of sensibility, are socially variable and likely to have originated in a response to social conditions. And so Bourdieu is correct in maintaining that an intellectual field can be influenced by external social and economic forces, mediated by the internal structure of the field itself. But MacIntyre is mistaken in holding that it is impossible to state necessary and sufficient conditions for, that is, to give a causal explanation of, the genesis of an intellectual tradition. However, what he says is true of a rational belief, as distinct from the tradition in accordance with whose criteria it was arrived at. For the complete explanation of a rational belief must include a reference to the fact that it has satisfied, even if only implicitly, the tradition-transcending criteria characteristic of the human form of sensibility. And so MacIntyre is right to draw attention to <u>the</u> criteria of rationality, but wrong in thinking that they are identical with the whole range of context-specific criteria. Finally, Bourdieu is wrong in eschewing context-independent, or 'transcultural', criteria altogether.

The results of the foregoing discussion, as they affect the classification of beliefs, may now be summarised. Two kinds of rational beliefs have so far been identified, on the basis of the generality of the criteria used in justifying them. If we observe a person's actions and conclude that he believes in the existence of other minds, we impute to him no more than is indispensable if he is to lead a fully human life. His belief is rational in that it is part of the human form of sensibility. It cannot be explained as the product of a particular set of social conditions. For, while the absence of social pressures of a certain sort may be a necessary condition of the occurrence of a given belief-state, no set of social circumstances constitute the necessary and sufficient conditions for its occurrence. It has been seen that the same is also true when the criteria used in assessing the belief are characteristic of a specific form of life, as they will be if the belief concerns objects or events whose existence or occurrence presupposes that certain descriptions are taken seriously.[18] Since the belief could not have been judged in terms of the criteria actually used if the requisite social conditions had not obtained, and since it is also rational, it follows that a rational belief of this kind can be partly explained in sociological terms. But only partly, for social conditions do not cause rational beliefs. A comprehensive account of the necessary and sufficient conditions for holding a rational belief of either kind must therefore include a sociological element. And so compatibilism is true of rational

beliefs: all rational beliefs are amenable to sociological investigation, albeit of limited scope, particularly in the case of beliefs which are indispensable to rational intercourse with reality.

Having delineated two sorts of rational beliefs, it is now appropriate to turn to irrational and, later, ideological beliefs. What, then, are the implications for sociological investigation of distinguishing rational from irrational beliefs ?

## 7.5 Irrational Beliefs.

It is clear that a distinction must be drawn between rational and irrational beliefs, for to explain someone's believing that p as the outcome of rational procedures is very different from explaining it as the immediate product of an emotion. Some linguistic analysis will enable the subsequent argument to be more readily understood. To refer to rational and irrational beliefs is, some would insist, to perpetrate a solecism. MacIntyre seems to make this point in saying that it is truth and falsity rather than rationality and irrationality that may properly be predicated of beliefs. 'Rationality', in contrast, 'is predicated of the attitudes, dispositions and procedures of those who believe.'[19] And Reddiford expresses the same view: 'the propositions that we assert when we express our beliefs may be false .... .. consistent or inconsistent with other beliefs ..... and may, or may not, be supported by the evidence. But it is we who

have reasons ..... who act rationally ..... in holding beliefs.'[20] It would therefore be better to substitute talk of rationally held beliefs for talk of rational beliefs and better still to speak of someone's rationally believing something. However, apart from being cumbersome, this suggestion is based on a false premise. For it is perfectly proper to predicate rationality and irrationality, as well as truth and falsity, of beliefs, because 'belief' is ambiguous between the proposition believed and the mental state of the believer.[21] And so the locution 'rational belief' may be employed without misgivings, as long as it is recognised as an elliptical way of speaking about someone's being rational in believing something.

It follows that beliefs are neither intrinsically rational nor intrinsically irrational; in other words, the same proposition can be believed on rational grounds or without grounds at all. Suppose that a certain sort of social situation gives rise to the emotion of fear and that members of the social group in question supply an object for their fear by forming the belief that there are witches. Evidently this is an irrational belief; there are no grounds for believing the proposition that there are witches to be true. But the original belief may be elaborated into a complete belief-system, internally consistent and equipped with criteria for applying the concept 'witch'. It would then be possible to argue in accordance with generally accepted canons about the

truth or falsity of the belief that, say, Susan Nonsuch is a witch. Moreover, belief in witchcraft might explain otherwise mysterious phenomena and be consistent with all the other beliefs held by members of the community. There would therefore be rational grounds for holding not only particular beliefs of the form 'S is a witch' but also the general and fundamental belief that witches exist, even though it had originated as an irrational response to a social situation. And so a system of beliefs, an intellectual tradition, may have an irrational and sociologically explicable genesis. Theological speculation, for instance, is a rational activity, yet it is possible that it developed out of emotional needs occasioned by the intransigence of the natural and social worlds.

A corollary of the fact that beliefs are intrinsically neither rational nor irrational is that the same belief may be rational for one person but not for another. The same proposition may be believed by one person on rational grounds, while someone else believes it for the emotional satisfaction that ensues. Thus, _A_ might believe in God because he is convinced of the validity of the argument from design and has what appears to him to be compelling evidence for the truth of its premises, while _B_'s belief is prompted by a need for consolation. Again, _C_ might believe that Susan Nonsuch is a witch because there is evidence that she has done things that only witches can do; he reasons in accordance with the only criteria available to him. So he can hardly be convicted of

of irrationality, even though his belief is false. Certainly he cannot be blamed for his belief in the way that D, who believes that Susan Nonsuch is a witch out of sheer fright at her appearance, could be censured for stereotyping. A belief can be arrived at in all manner of ways, of varying degrees of rationality: the same proposition may be believed after valid inference from true premises or from false premises; after invalid inference from true, or from false, premises; after hunch or guesswork, haruspication or divine afflatus; after wishful thinking; or after any of a wide range of emotions. Thus, there is no such thing as an intrinsically rational belief.[22]

MacIntyre's attempt to show that the distinction between rational and irrational beliefs coincides with that between non-socially generated and socially generated beliefs therefore fails. For it is not true that the class of rational beliefs and the class of socially generated beliefs are mutually exclusive. This is true in the sense that the same proposition may be believed on rational grounds or from irrational motives, as explained in the preceding paragraph. But it is also true if 'belief' is taken to refer to a mental state. A belief state may have as its object a proposition which is consistent with the believer's other beliefs and has survived attempts to falsify it. But the rationality of believing this proposition may be only a necessary condition of the believer's believing it, because there could be another proposition which is inconsistent with the first but equally

consistent with his other beliefs and unfalsified. And so there is room for a socially generated emotion to tip the balance, so to speak, between the two propositions, in which case the resultant belief state will be the joint product of rational procedures and irrational processes. It follows that, whether we interpret 'belief' as proposition or mental state, MacIntyre is wrong in thinking that there are beliefs which are 'intelligible only in terms of an antecedent process of reasoning and could only be generated as the outcome of such a process.'[23] For there are no such beliefs; all beliefs can be the product either of reasoning or of the emotions or of interaction between reason and feeling.

Nevertheless, the distinction between rationality and irrationality in believing is a crucial one for the framing of sociological inquiries. For it is possible for a belief state to be the outcome of rational procedures alone; _E_'s believing that _p_ may be perfectly rational and quite untainted by emotional pressures, while _F_'s believing that _r_ may be an impulsive response to a social situation. Where MacIntyre errs is in implying that we could tell by inspecting the two belief states which is rational and which irrational. Rationality and irrationality are predicates, not of propositions nor even of belief states in themselves, but rather of belief states _taken together with the procedures or processes that led up to them_. An irrational belief is a belief state plus the emotional response which caused it.

Another class of beliefs, which is of particular interest in the sociological investigation of educational knowledge, is that of ideological beliefs. They are best thought of as occupying a position between rational and irrational beliefs.

## 7.6 Ideological Beliefs.

Ideological beliefs have already been defined.[24] They differ from irrational beliefs in that an attempt to justify them has been made and from rational beliefs in that the attempt was unsuccessful or incomplete. The two main points of the definition are as follows: a belief is ideological if, and only if: (i) it has not been justified, either because it has failed the appropriate critical tests or because it has not been submitted to all the tests available; and (ii) it differs from other unjustified beliefs in that the errors or omissions of reasoning are not the product of mere incompetence but are necessary conditions for success in convincing someone of the truth of the proposition believed. Thus, a socially generated motive, the need to persuade someone to share one's belief or even to believe something one does not oneself believe, overrides the rational pursuit of knowledge. Clearly, the sociological investigation of beliefs must be guided by an awareness of the distinctive nature of ideological beliefs. An attempt to define ideological documents will now be examined in the light of the tripartite distinction between rational, ideological and irrational beliefs. The question is whether the sociologist,

in framing such a definition and in investigating beliefs so defined, needs to take account of this distinction.

It has been argued that sociologists must recognise the fact that 'valid and invalid knowledge is problematic in different ways.'[25] Smith and Stockman take this to imply that it is mistaken to consider the social processes generating knowledge in isolation from questions concerning its validity. A work by Berger and Luckmann is held to exemplify this fallacy: 'the philosopher is driven ..... to differentiate between valid and invalid assertions about the world. This the sociologist cannot possibly do.'[26] Sociological inquiry need not be preceded by an evaluation of assertions as valid or invalid, because both sorts of assertions are proper objects of such inquiry. 'The sociology of knowledge must concern itself with whatever passes for knowledge in a society regardless of the ultimate validity or invalidity (by whatever criteria) of such knowledge.'[27] Against this, Smith and Stockman hold that the sociologist cannot formulate problems precisely until he has distinguished valid from invalid knowledge in terms of 'standards that are generally accepted by the scientific community of the day.'[28]

The appearance of a disagreement between Smith and Stockman and Berger and Luckmann is misleading, for their views are in fact quite compatible. They seem on the face of it to be contradictory only because Smith and Stockman

assume that valid and invalid knowledge are the same things as valid and invalid assertions about the world. If this were so, Smith and Stockman would be denying what Berger and Luckmann had asserted. But what Smith and Stockman present as a single issue, whether valid and invalid knowledge are problematic in different ways, is more perspicuously exhibited as two distinct questions: (i) whether true and false propositions (or, as Berger and Luckmann would have it, valid and invalid assertions about the world) are problematic in different ways; and (ii) whether rational and ideological beliefs are problematic in different ways. There are two reasons for thinking that Berger and Luckmann address themselves to question (i). Firstly, they use the phrase 'valid and invalid assertions _about the world_'. The term 'assertion' is ambiguous between the proposition and the speech act of asserting it.[29] It is only in the former sense that an assertion can properly be said to be about something, for to say of an action, whether it is one of asserting a proposition or opening a door, that it is about something lacks any clear sense. Secondly, Berger and Luckmann claim that the philosopher, but not the sociologist, seeks to establish 'the ultimate status of what the man in the street believes to be "reality" or "knowledge".'[30] Since judgements about the rationality of beliefs are inescapably provisional, because a proposition it is rational to believe to be true may turn out to be false, 'the ultimate status' of what the man in the street believes can only be its truth or falsity. Smith and Stockman, on the other hand, are evidently concerned with

question (ii); 'valid knowledge' seems to be used, or rather misused, by them as a synonym for 'rational belief', for its definition omits any reference to truth. It may therefore be concluded that the appearance of a disagreement between the two pairs of writers is deceptive. Since true and false propositions alike are asserted in accordance with sociological laws,[31] the sociologist is not called upon to differentiate them, and Berger and Luckmann are vindicated. But explaining a rational belief, while it may involve reference to the social conditions which permit rational activity to take place, is different from explaining an irrational belief. And both can now be seen to be different from explaining an ideological belief. For only in the case of ideological beliefs is it necessary to consider the interaction of reason and socially generated emotion in order to explain why the generally accepted criteria of rationality were not adhered to. Since this insight is shared by Smith and Stockman, they too are vindicated; only their interpretation of Berger and Luckmann was at fault.

## 7.7. Summary.

Sociologism, the view that all beliefs are problematic in just the same way, is a corollary of the subjectivist claim that no beliefs can be rationally justified. In reply the variety of beliefs has been emphasised. A three-fold division has been proposed. Firstly, there are

rational beliefs, which are arrived at after a competent application of criteria of rationality; this class of beliefs may be sub-divided into those assessed in terms of criteria drawn from the human form of sensibility and those evaluated in accordance with criteria belonging to specific forms of life, as well as the universal ones. Secondly, there are irrational beliefs, which arise out of emotional responses to social situations. Thirdly, there are ideological beliefs, which result from efforts to apply criteria of rationality which are vitiated by needs arising from social pressures. A by-product of the argument is the realisation that 'rational', 'irrational' and 'ideological' are predicated, not of propositions nor of belief states _simpliciter_, but rather of belief states together with their antecedent procedures and processes.

The main conclusion of this chapter is, then, that all beliefs are amenable to sociological explanation. However, only in the case of irrational beliefs can sociology, together with other subjects, such as psychology, offer a complete explanation. Social pressures frustrate the proper application of reason to give rise to ideological beliefs. And sociology has only a limited role to play in the explanation of rational beliefs, in discovering the social conditions without which reason cannot flourish.

Thus, chapters six and seven, taken together, have shown that the sociological investigation of knowledge and belief is

perfectly feasible on objectivist methodological assumptions. There is no conflict between objectivism and sociology as such, but only between objectivism and the erroneous subjectivist view of sociology. It will be argued in the next chapter that there is indeed one area in which objectivism can free sociology from unnecessary constraints which subjectivism would impose upon its inquiries.

# CHAPTER EIGHT. METHODOLOGICAL RELATIVISM.

## 8.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter the discussion concerned the implications of the subjectivist claim that there are no rational beliefs for the sociologist to investigate. More specifically, it was the form of such explanations that was under examination; the question was whether there is one form of sociological explanation that is appropriate for all beliefs or whether the sociologist is obliged to differentiate several kinds of beliefs and tailor the form of his explanation accordingly. In this chapter attention will be focused on the content of sociological explanations; the question is whether the nature of a social scientist's subject matter imposes any restrictions on the propositional content of his explanations. And it is actions rather than beliefs that constitute the primary objects of the sociological explanations to be considered, with beliefs being of interest only as reasons for action. Thus, the central question of this chapter is to be formulated in terms of what the sociologist can say about what people do, and why.

## 8.2 The Limitations of Methodological Relativism

The subjectivist argues that the fact that the sociologist seeks to understand what people do, rather than what material objects and other non-human constituents of the world are like, imposes important restrictions on what he can say about the objects of his investigations. The question he raises is what we should do when the social scientist's

explanation of an action is not the same as that offered by the agent himself. A cardinal tenet of subjectivism is that there are no universally applicable, or context-independent, criteria of rationality. It is held to follow from this that the social scientist will frequently, perhaps even normally, find that the criteria and concepts he employs in trying to explain a person's actions are not shared by the agent, because agent and social scientist inhabit different forms of life, each with its own criteria of rationality. Do we prefer the social scientist's explanation or do we accept instead the agent's own reasons for acting as he did ? The customary subjectivist response to this dilemma is to take what the agent says as authoritative and to insist that sociological explanations of actions cannot be acceptable unless they are confined to the use of the concepts and criteria actually employed by the agent in explaining why he acted as he did. Whereas the natural scientist is free to study phenomena which he has identified in accordance with 'his own' criteria, the social scientist cannot do the same in investigating social phenomena, because, as Winch puts it, 'their <u>being</u> ..... social .... depends entirely on their belonging in a certain way to a system of ideas or mode of living.'[1] Thus, on this view, the truth of sociological explanations is relative to the concepts and criteria, to the form of life, of those whose actions are being explained, in that employing only those concepts and criteria is a necessary condition of the truth of the explanations. Before evaluating this claim it is important to distinguish it from a more extreme version of methodological relativism.

This is the view that the exclusive employment of agents' concepts and criteria is, not just a necessary, but also a sufficient condition of the truth of sociological explanations of action. This is an extreme statement of methodological relativism in that it entails an uncritical acceptance of agents' own explanations of their actions. This radical form of relativism has been attributed to Winch by two critics. But, while it is indeed untenable, the argument which shows that it is is available to the methodological relativist as well as his critics. And so this criticism calls only for caution or moderation in propounding methodological relativism, not for its repudiation. The first critic, MacIntyre,[2] appears to interpret relativism (as expounded by Winch in op.cit., note 1) as entailing the exclusive appropriateness of the interview in the understanding of social life. He argues that the social scientist must go beyond the ideal native informant's views, because such an approach would produce no more than 'a lifeless body of laws, regulations, morals and conventionalities which ought to be obeyed but in reality are often only evaded.'[3] Thus, we must distinguish the professed or acknowledged rules of a society from the actual behaviour of members of that society. Since Winch takes the object of sociological inquiry to be precisely such behaviour as rule-governed, he has, according to MacIntyre, conflated a vital distinction. The second criticism is put forward by Lukes,[4] who maintains that relativism renders the concepts of false consciousness and ideology unusable in sociological research. It is impossible,

he claims, to characterise a person's beliefs about his society as false or distorted without 'reliable, non-relative means of identifying a disjunction between social consciousness or collective representations on the one hand and social realities on the other.'[5] These are powerful objections, but they apply only to an extreme formulation of methodological relativism, not to the doctrine as such.

It is true, as MacIntyre and Lukes assume, that a theory which entails an uncritical acceptance of agents' explanations of their actions and renders the notions of false consciousness and ideology useless is unacceptable. But it does not follow that methodological relativism must be repudiated, because its critics seem to be reading more into it than its more cautious proponents intend. For methodological relativism can be divested of its alleged implications while remaining recognisably itself. The point is that the objections apply only to the view that the employment of agents' criteria and concepts, and no others, is a sufficient condition of the truth of sociological explanations, as well as a necessary one. A judicious statement of methodological relativism can meet the objections by drawing out some implications of the universalizability of rules, principles and criteria.[6] In so far as _A_ is a rational agent, then, if _A_ acted in accordance with principle _p_ in circumstances _C_, and if _C_ resembles _C_*in all relevant respects, then _A_ will act in accordance with _p_ in _C_*.[7] Principles of action, in common with criteria of rationality in believing, go beyond

the circumstances in which they were originally implemented. What is interesting in the present context is the fact that someone might fail to perceive that what he did on a past occasion commits him, on pain of inconsistency, to do the same on a future occasion, the circumstances of the two occasions being alike in all relevant respects. An agent who acts differently on two such occasions in a sense disagrees with himself; there is a contradiction between what he does at time $\underline{t}_1$ and what he does at time $\underline{t}_2$, in that a general principle extracted from his action at time $\underline{t}_1$ will contradict a general principle elicited from his action at time $\underline{t}_2$. And if he professes to be guided by the general rule implicit in his action at time $\underline{t}_1$, then he is guilty of deception.[8] It is now becoming clear how universalizability allows the methodological relativist to accommodate criticism of agents' explanations and the concepts of false consciousness and ideology.

The general argument is that universalizability is enough to enable the methodological relativist to question the accuracy of agents' explanations of their actions. In reply to the first objection, that relativism entails an uncritical acceptance of whatever the agent, or informant, says, it can be pointed out that he may be unaware, or only imperfectly aware, of the general rules of conduct implicit in his actions. The interviewee can err or attempt to deceive; he may profess, sincerely or insincerely, to be guided by a rule but fail to act in accordance with it when the circumstances are appropriate.

And so a reply to the second objection emerges: evidently there is scope for a sociological explanation of the discrepancy between professed and effective principles. If the discrepancy arises out of the agent's self-deception, the explanation will make use of the notion of false consciousness. People _have_, for instance, extolled the liberty of the individual while owning slaves or living in a society based on slavery. If the discrepancy appears to be part of an attempt to promote certain social interests, then the concept of ideology, understood in terms of the analysis offered in the previous chapter and in chapter two,[9] will be of use. If, for example, the act in question is that of asserting a proposition _p_, then a sociological explanation will be appropriate if (i) _p_ is not what would be asserted if the purpose of the speech act was simply to speak the truth, and (ii) asserting that _p_ is believed by the agent to be uniquely conducive to the furtherance of the interests he supports. So, if the discrepancy between what a rational inquirer would assert and what is actually asserted can be explained as the outcome of certain interests, the utterance is an ideological one. It is therefore clear that methodological relativism need not be committed to the implausible view that a necessary _and sufficient_ condition of the truth of a sociological explanation of an action is that it should use only those concepts and criteria employed by the agent.

But it is possible that the objections urged by MacIntyre and Lukes have been answered at too high a price. For it might

be suggested that the universalizability counter-argument, deployed on the methodological relativist's behalf to meet those objections, seeks to support relativism by means of a notion that is inconsistent with it. And indeed it is true that universalizability applies indifferently to any form of life, except the rudimentary one of people whose behaviour is so unpredictable that it ceases to be rule-governed at all. Either rationality, in the sense of a sustained attempt to live one's life according to rules, is merely one form of life among others or it is a constituent of the human form of sensibility, in which case there is something over and above forms of life. Clearly, only the first disjunct is compatible with a thorough-going relativism, but it cannot be accepted, bec-use it implies that one could belong to a form of life without being rational, without trying to follow rules. And this is evidently impossible: it is an integral part of the concept of a form of life that it defines a pattern of _rule-governed_ behaviour. The second disjunct, on the other hand, involves a concession by the methodological relativist, but is acceptable. Indeed it has already been put forward as an explanation of communication success and a presupposition of any systematic intercourse with reality.[10] If the methodological relativist still wishes to make use of the universalizability counter-argument, he must admit that, just as communication breakdown is by no means inevitable or even common, so it is far from universally true that agent and social scientist do not have any shared concepts and criteria.

This, the methodological relativist might maintain, is not the fatal concession it might appear to be, for the shared criteria of rationality are insufficient to enable agent and social scientist to agree on a description of the action. The case might resemble that of the monk and the soldier,[11] in which what, to the monk, is a shrine is, to the soldier, a barricade. What, from the monk's point of view, is an act of sacrilege is, in the soldier's eyes, a tactically sound offensive move against his enemy. And so the methodological relativist might conclude that there will be occasions when agent and social scientist cannot agree how to describe the action, let alone how to explain it. However, this does not establish the relativist's main principle, that a necessary condition of the truth of a sociological explanation of an action is that it should employ only those concepts and criteria used by the agent. For no reason has yet been given for conferring a privileged status on the concepts and criteria of the agent.

There is, however, an argument available to the methodological relativist which constitutes a <u>prima facie</u> case for just such a decision. The argument concerns the concept of a social action. In general an action is something someone does, as distinct from something that happens to him: for instance, jumping off a cliff is an action, but being pushed off or falling off a cliff are not. There are some actions the social context of which is of little significance in explaining why they were performed; turning round to look at a

beautiful sunset or brushing away a wasp are examples of such actions. The social scientist is interested in another class of actions, those that are given a meaning by the context of rules and conventions in which they are performed. These are social actions: 'A social action may be said to have a meaning for the agent performing it.'[12] And Skinner shows how widely this definition is accepted among social scientists of different schools of thought. The importance of this concept of social action to the methodological relativist is that it entails that a social scientist cannot be said to be trying to explain the action that _A_ performed unless he describes it in terms of _A_'s own criteria and concepts. For unless he does so, he will not be considering the meaning that the action has for _A_, and so, since a social action is defined in terms of its meaning for the agent who performed it, he will not be addressing himself to _A_'s action at all. The methodological relativist will insist that, if the social scientist interprets _A_'s behaviour in terms of his, that is, the social scientist's, concepts and criteria, he necessarily _mis_interprets what _A_ did. If a social action is the action that it is only by virtue of the meaning it has for the agent who performed it, then a social scientist who seeks to explain it in _his_ terms is doomed to misunderstand it. He will explain a fiction of his own making, not the action that the agent performed.

The question is whether this argument establishes the methodological relativist principle that a necessary condition

for the truth of sociological explanations of actions, that is, social actions, is that they use only those concepts and criteria employed by the agents themselves. It will now be argued that this principle cannot after all be accepted as it stands, but that an approximation to it is tenable. There are three ways of interpreting the principle. Firstly, it can be taken literally and strictly, as asserting that a sociological explanation cannot be true unless it confines itself to the reasons for action actually used by the agent A in giving an account of his action to an observer O, who simply records what A says without comment. Secondly, it might be interpreted more liberally, as insisting that the explanation must be restricted to reasons for action either volunteered by the agent, as in the first reading, or accepted by him after O has introduced them. Thirdly, a still looser interpretation of the principle allows the sociologist to employ reasons for action neither already in use by A nor accepted by him as long as they are intelligible to him. An example of a social action will now be constructed and the three interpretations tested against it.

Suppose O wishes to explain why A goes for a long walk every Sunday afternoon. He asks A, who replies that he believes that walking will help to preserve his health and that Sunday afternoon is his only spare time. O then discovers that A's mother-in-law visits A and his wife every Sunday afternoon and that A and his mother-in-law do not get on with each other. It naturally occurs to O that A might be

be lying or deceiving himself and that an alternative explanation of his conduct should be considered. Accordingly, he frames an inductive generalisation to the effect that _A_ goes for a walk whenever his mother-in-law visits his wife, adding a _ceteris paribus_ clause to take account of _A_'s broken ankle, 'flu, snowstorms and so on. This new explanation would be perfectly intelligible to _A_, who might even accept it and use it himself in reply to future inquiries about his habit of walking for miles every Sunday afternoon. Reflection upon one's own experience suggests that it is not unusual to have more than one reason for doing something. Human nature being what it is, it is only to be expected that someone should sometimes offer the 'wrong' reason in telling someone else why he did something; in other words, he may offer a reason that was in his mind but was not the effective reason on that occasion. The three interpretations can now be examined in the light of this example.

The first is evidently untenable, for it entails the extreme statement of methodological relativism already dismissed. Restricting explanations of social actions to professed reasons entails that the use of agents' concepts and criteria, to the exclusion of all others, is a sufficient condition for the truth of such explanations, not just a necessary one. And, just as it is incompatible with the application of the concepts of false consciousness and ideology, so, in the example described above, is it inconsistent with increasing self-knowledge, exemplified by A's realisation,

after talking to _O_, that he was really avoiding his mother-in-law rather than taking fresh air and exercise. An agent may be an unreliable witness of his own actions and any methodological principle which fails to recognise this cannot be accepted. The universalizability of rules of conduct allows the methodological relativist to acknowledge the unreliability of people's explanations of their own behaviour, at the cost of renouncing this first interpretation of his central principle.

The issue, then, is between the second and third interpretations. What is to be decided is whether _O_'s explanation of _A_'s action must be accepted by, as well as intelligible to, _A_. It is difficult to imagine grounds for insisting that the explanation must be endorsed by _A_ if it is to be established as the correct explanation of what he did. For this would be to imply that claims to knowledge in the social sciences are ultimately to be adjudicated, not by those who are qualified in these disciplines, but by those who may be quite untutored in their procedures. There must be a better way of preventing social scientists imposing their criteria on the agents whose actions they are studying than allowing agents to impose _their_ criteria on social scientists. It is surely clear that flexibility and discretion are called for: whether an agent's tenaciously defended explanation should be overruled by an observer must be decided on the merits of the particular case. Suppose, for instance, that _A_'s mother-in-law switches her visits from Sunday to Saturday afternoons. If _A_ also alters

his routine so that he goes for walks on Saturdays and stays indoors on Sundays, _O_ will be entitled to disbelieve his asseverations that his sole reason for walking is a desire to safeguard his health. But in practice the situation will often be less clear than this. Thus, _A_'s mother-in-law may simply stop visiting his wife altogether and _A_ may subsequently drop his afternoon walks. If he still insists that the only reason why he used to go for long walks was in order to preserve his health, _O_ is entitled to be sceptical. But it is not certain that _A_ is being disingenuous. It is possible that after all these months he has become thoroughly bored with walking and prefers to run the risk of obesity and ill-health. This change of heart could simply have coincided with the cessation of his mother-in-law's visits. And _A_ himself may be sure in his own mind about the purity of his motives, while being embarrassed about appearances. In view of circumstances such as these it seems unwise to lay down an _a priori_ principle that either the agent or the observer is always in the right. Consequently, the second interpretation is untenable.

What, then, of the third interpretation ? Is a necessary condition of the truth of sociological explanation of actions that they be confined to concepts and criteria which are intelligible to the agents who performed them ? In answering this question it is important to distinguish between the technical terms and investigatory procedures of social scientists on the one hand and criteria for identifying actions

on the other. There is surely nothing to be said for prohibiting the use of concepts such as alienation, anomie and ideology on the grounds that they are beyond the capacity of some agents to understand. But this is not true of criteria for identifying actions. For it follows from the definition of a social action that what makes such an action the action that it is is the meaning it has for the agent performing it. The mistake implicit in the extreme version of methodological relativism is that of conflating the meaning an action actually has with the meaning the agent professes it to have. So it is sometimes appropriate to identify a social action in terms of concepts and criteria other than those used by the agent. But, if the aim of such identification is to elicit a meaning which the agent has overlooked or concealed, then it is plain that only concepts and criteria which are intelligible to him can be used. For a meaning that cannot be understood is no meaning at all. This can be illustrated by returning to the case of _A_'s Sunday afternon walks. Although _A_ and _O_ agree on a minimal description of _A_'s action as 'going for a walk', this does not capture its social meaning. As a _social_ action, what _A_ does is identified by _O_ as 'avoiding his mother-in-law' and by _A_ himself as 'looking after his health'. It does not follow that, because the two descriptions do not coincide, whatever _O_ might claim to be talking about, it is not _A_'s social action, for actual and professed meanings may diverge. If, however, _A_ did not know

what a mother-in-law was, then O's description of A's social action as 'avoiding his mother-in-law' could not designate a possible but unacknowledged meaning for A. Accordingly, it must be concluded that a necessary condition for the truth of an explanation of a social action is that it should only employ criteria which are intelligible to the agent.

## 8.3 Summary

It has been argued that, while an extreme form of methodological relativism is untenable, the doctrine does contain an important truth concerning the explanation of social actions. In its extreme version it entails an uncritical acceptance of agents' professed meanings, of *their* explanations of their actions in preference to the accounts offered by social scientists. The theory can however be reformulated so that this entailment is discarded, for the universalizability of principles of action allows a distinction to be drawn between actual and professed meanings. Reliance on the notion of universalizability, and a recognition of context-independent criteria of rationality, constitute a retreat by the methodological relativist. But he can still assert his central belief: that a necessary condition of the truth of an explanation of a social action is that it should employ the agent's concepts and criteria. This claim is ambiguous, but analysis reveals a sense in which

it is true: a necessary condition for the truth of an explanation of a social action is that it should use only those concepts and criteria which are intelligible to the agent.

This version of methodological relativism is consistent with objectivism, as expounded in this thesis, but not with subjectivism, because it depends on context-independent criteria of rationality. Thus, objectivism allows the sociologist to question, and on occasion to reject, the explanations of their actions offered by agents. And it thereby reinforces the conclusions of the previous two chapters, namely, that subjectivists have misunderstood sociology and that, once both objectivism and sociology are correctly interpreted, there is no conflict between them.

Summary of Part Two.

It has been argued in Part Two that objectivism does not threaten the position of sociology, particularly the sociology of knowledge. Subjectivists distrust objectivism in part because they believe that its methodological implications are hostile to sociology. And it is true that, if objectivism entailed the illegitimacy or impossibility of sociological investigations into knowledge, or if it permitted them only under cripplingly restrictive conditions, then there would be rational grounds for questioning its validity. It was therefore important to establish that the objectivist epistemology put forward in Part One is free of unacceptable methodological implications.

Two conclusions were reached in chapter six. The first was that philosophy, as a critical discipline, is able to make valid comments upon the conceptual and methodological aspects of other disciplines. The second was a compatibilist thesis to the effect that, knowledge being both objective and socially constructed, there is no reason to think that epistemology, as the critical study of objective knowledge, comes into conflict with the sociology of knowledge, as the empirical study of the social context of subjective knowledge.

Many sociologists would,of course, agree with the compatibilist view. It is the erroneous subjectivist interpretation of sociology, not sociology itself, which was attacked in chapter six.

Another subjectivist misunderstanding was exposed in chapter seven. The subjectivists' mistrust of rationality leads them to hold that the presence of reason does not make any difference to the sociological explanation of belief. At the root of this conviction is the fear that to admit that some beliefs are rationally justified would be to place them altogether beyond the scope of sociological inquiry. In response it was concluded that three classes of beliefs must be distinguished, not to place one (or more) of them outside the competence of sociologists, but to show the appropriateness of a different mode of sociological explanation in each case.

The subjectivist claim discussed in chapter eight was that, if objectivism were true, sociologists would have to impose their own concepts and criteria on the people whose beliefs and actions they sought to understand, thus failing to do justice to their subject-matter. Opposed to this view is the extreme methodological relativist argument that agents' accounts of their own actions and beliefs must be uncritically accepted. The conclusion reached in chapter eight was that both extreme positions are untenable: a moderate version of methodological relativism affords the valuable insight that a necessary condition for the truth of a sociological explanation of an action is that it should use only those concepts and criteria which are intelligible to the agent. Accordingly, sociologists are entitled to question, and on occasions to overrule, agents' explanations of their own actions and beliefs.

Thus, the conclusion of Part Two is that the objectivist epistemology put forward in Part One does not constitute an obstacle to the sociological investigation of knowledge, belief and action. And so Parts One and Two have set out an epistemologically and a methodologically defensible version of objectivism. That doctrine can now be used as the foundation for an examination of the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge, which is to be undertaken in Part Three. In particular, two points can be carried forward. The first is that it follows from what has been said in Part One that there is no general epistemological reason for thinking that there cannot be objective educational knowledge. Secondly, the implication of what has been shown in Part Two is that, while educational institutions are amenable to sociological explanation of one sort or another, this does not in itself undermine their claims to be the guardians of knowledge and reason.

The validity of the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge cannot therefore simply be inferred from a general epistemological or methodological position. The ground has now been prepared for an examination of educational knowledge on its own merits, a task that will be undertaken in Part Three.

# PART THREE

# THE SUBJECTIVIST CRITIQUE OF EDUCATIONAL KNOWLEDGE

## Introduction to Part Three

The purpose of the subjectivist attack upon objective knowledge was to show that knowledge in general cannot be objective, from which it would follow that educational knowledge could not be objective. Educational methods and content would thereby be revealed as instruments of indoctrination and exploitation. It was established in Part One, however, that there can be objective knowledge, in the sense of justified true belief. And in Part Two the fear that objectivism would restrict sociological inquiry was shown to be groundless. Consequently, the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge cannot be accepted on general epistemological or methodological grounds. The subjectivist must therefore produce arguments concerning educational knowledge in particular. It is the aim of Part Three to evaluate such arguments. In order to do so, two sorts of educational knowledge must be distinguished : (i) there is the knowledge expressed, or claimed, in teachers' and examiners' judgements about pupils; and (ii) there is the knowledge which teachers are employed to impart to their pupils.

The first sort of educational knowledge is examined in chapter nine. The subjectivist claim is that the categories and standards used by teachers in assessing the performance of their pupils are arbitrary, reflecting the interests of the dominant class rather than expressing objective facts about pupils. Three formulations of this general claim are discussed: Performativism and Relativism are rejected, but

Institutionalism is found to contain an important truth. This is that facts about pupils are institutional rather than brute facts. The question is whether the interests they reflect are those of a form of life (that of the dominant class) or of the human form of sensibility.

The possibility of answering this question in terms of the other kind of educational knowledge is explored in chapter ten. If the curriculum can generate purely educational categories and criteria, they could be used as the basis of impartial judgements about pupils. The subjectivist argues that the curriculum is nothing more than a means of social and political indoctrination, for even objectivism is an ideology, that of educators. The claim that the nature of knowledge forms an objective foundation for educational judgements is, the subjectivist alleges, the professional ideology of teachers.

The reply is given in chapter eleven. The aim is to establish a conceptual connexion between objective knowledge and rational action. The idea of acting for a reason is found to presuppose five principles, which constitute the rational form of sensibility. These principles give rise to five forms of knowledge, which constitute the pre-conditions of acting for a reason in the world as we know it. It follows that objective knowledge, organised in accordance with the forms, is a precondition of rational intercourse with reality.

The conclusion of Part Three, and of the thesis as a whole, is, then, that there can be objective educational knowledge. Rational action is impossible without access to objective knowledge. Accordingly, educational institutions, to the degree that they accumulate and transmit objective knowledge, serve the interests, not of a particular social group, but of all human beings in so far as they are rational agents.

# CHAPTER NINE. EDUCATIONAL JUDGEMENTS

## 9.1 Introduction

The subject of Part Three is the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge, which aims to unmask education, revealing it to be a process, not of discovering, but of manufacturing facts about pupils. A major element in this critique is the claim that the concepts and categories teachers use in assessing pupils are social artefacts rather than parts of the unchanging fabric of the universe. Two main points will be made in reply to this claim. The first is that some expressions of the subjectivist claim are intellectually unsound: in particular, two statements of it, namely performativism and relativism, incorporate ratiocinative errors. The second point is that the claim, admittedly true in a sense, simply does not have the implications its proponents believe it to possess: to show that something is a social creation, rather than a natural process, is not *ipso facto* to prove its undesirability.

The issue to be discussed in this chapter is, then, the subjectivist claim that teachers' judgements about their pupils are based on criteria and concepts which are socially constructed. Thus, Young contends that 'existing categories that for parents, teachers, children and many researchers distinguish home from school, learning from play, academic from non-academic, and "able" or "bright" from "dull" or "stupid", must be conceived of as socially constructed, with some in a position to impose their construction or

meanings on others.'[1] The imposition of meanings may, another writer suggests, have a very immediate social goal, concerned with classroom interaction: 'The imputation of normal attributes to pupils by teachers does not tell us objectively about pupils .... For the teacher, social control may depend on his being able in the classroom to maintain publicly his definition of the situation.'[2] But of course the exigencies of teacher-pupil confrontation do not exhaust the social significance of educational classification. Edgley, for instance, claims that 'the evidence points strongly to the suspicion that behind the current industrial demand for a <u>more educated</u> workforce lies the hope that more education <u>of the kind suggested</u> will help to restore among students the discipline needed in the subordinate ranks of industry's political hierarchy.'[3] And, according to Althusser, schools constitute an Ideological State Apparatus whose function is 'the reproduction of the relations of production, i.e. of capitalist exploitation.'[4] In transmitting knowledge, schools, it is claimed, also transmit exploitative social relations, which are manifested in the criteria used by teachers to assess and control pupils.

This view of the social significance of schooling is based on the thesis that the knowledge which teachers claim to have about their pupils is socially constructed. The first version of this thesis will now be discussed.

## 9.2 Performativism.

Performativism is the view that teachers and examiners, in claiming to know certain things about pupils, are not asserting anything at all, but doing something.[5] When for example, a teacher says 'Julie is a B stream pupil', he does not state a fact about Julie but does something to her, in this case, allocates her to a stream. This interpretation of the claim that teachers manufacture rather than discover knowledge about pupils is based on a distinction between constatives and performatives, that is, between utterances in which a proposition is asserted and those in which something is done. Thus, an observer who says 'The Admiral's daughter named the ship Virago' is reporting a fact, or asserting a proposition, whereas the Admiral's daughter, in saying 'I name this ship Virago' is not reporting a fact, or asserting a proposition, about what she is doing, but actually doing it. She is not saying that she is naming a ship but actually naming it. Similarly, when a referee says 'Keegan is offside', he 'is not asserting a true or false proposition; he is making a proposition true or false in the context.'[6]

This argument may then be extended to the sphere of education. An examination board's list of successful and unsuccessful candidates does not report a collection of facts about the candidates; rather is it the case that its publication counts as passing some and failing others. The board does something to candidates instead of reporting

facts about them. The conclusion is then drawn that whether a candidate passes or fails an examination does not depend upon his or her possession of certain characteristics, but results from the examination board's having performed one action rather than another. And, if its decisions are unconstrained by the facts, as they now appear to be, they are arbitrary and merely reflect the interests and prejudices of members of the examination board. Accordingly, the knowledge that candidate _C_ has attained standard _S_ is the knowledge that some authority has performed a certain action, not the knowledge that _C_ possesses certain characteristics. Just as the Admiral's daughter's naming a ship _Virago_ does not reflect pre-existing facts about it but brings into being the new fact that it is called _Virago_, so the board's passing _C_ does not tell us anything about _C_ except that the board have performed a certain action with respect to him.

There are grounds for rejecting this argument in the fact that the distinction between constatives and performatives on which it is based is unsound. Having introduced the dichotomy, Austin abandoned it on finding himself unable to discover a criterion for differentiating between constatives and performatives as discrete classes of utterances.[7] Instead, he came to see the constative and the performative as aspects of utterances in general, introducing the notion of illocutionary force to delineate

the performative dimension. For instance, a referee who utters the sentence 'Keegan is offside' in the appropriate circumstances is saying something which is true or false, that is, he is asserting a proposition; he is also performing an illocutionary act, in this case, giving Keegan offside. And in general whenever someone in authority says that someone has measured, or failed to measure, up to some standard, he is both asserting a proposition and performing a further illocutionary action, such as pronouncing a verdict or passing or failing an examination candidate.

The utterance of someone in authority who says that C measures up to S can be divided into a proposition and an illocutionary act. The proposition can be assessed for truth or falsity: the judgement that C measures up to S must be made on the basis of C's having attributes $A_1 \ldots A_n$, possession of which is the defining characteristic of the class of things which measure up to S. The proposition that C measures up to S is true if and only if C has $A_1 \ldots A_n$. Whether or not C has $A_1 \ldots A_n$ is an objective matter of fact; nothing the authority can do or say can make it true that C has $A_1 \ldots A_n$, can bring it about that C has $A_1 \ldots A_n$, if C does not already possess those attributes. It follows that nothing the authority can say or do can make it true (or false) that C measures up to S; the only proposition he can make true is the proposition that C was deemed (rightly or wrongly) to measure up to S. But the proposition that C was deemed by the appropriate authority to measure, or fail to

measure, up to S does not entail that C actually does measure, or fail to measure, up to S, because authorities can err.

However, the possibility that authorities can err cannot arise if it is denied that, in issuing a verdict or pronouncing a judgement, they assert a proposition. If, in pronouncing that C measures up to S, an examination board makes it true that C measures up to S, then it is in principle beyond criticism. Of course it will often be the case that a particular judgement, once issued, cannot in practice be challenged: what matters for the conduct of the game is the decision the referee actually made, regardless of its rightness or wrongness. But the futility of dissent in a particular case is no reason to deny the possibility that authorities are in general fallible. Unless this possibility is admitted, it is difficult to see the point of the activities of external assessors, moderators, HMIs and LEA advisers, not to mention FA assessors of referees. For none of these activities would make sense if it were not for the fact that authorities, in issuing verdicts and pronouncing judgements, assert propositions which may be true or false.

It can therefore be concluded that teachers, in making educational judgements about their pupils, are asserting propositions as well as doing things. And so, it may be thought, their judgements are constrained by the facts, by the way things objectively are, by external reality.

## 9.3 Relativism.

The second unacceptable interpretation of the subjectivist claim seeks, however, to undermine this conclusion. Relativism is the view that there is no objective or external reality which is the same for everyone; there are as many 'realities' as there are forms of life. On this view, the claim that propositions are constrained by the way things objectively are must therefore be rejected. This extreme statement of conceptual relativism was discussed and rejected in chapter three.[8] It is now appropriate to consider an attempt to apply this extreme form of relativism to the question of the epistemological status of educational judgements.

The main problem the relativist encounters in applying his theory to specific issues is that it restricts the grounds he can have for rejecting opposing views. Take, for instance, Esland's repudiation of 'the objectivistic theory of knowledge', which he characterises as follows: 'The individual consciousness recognises objects as being "out there", as coercive, external realities. Their continuing presence provides the probabilities on which rational action can be based .....'[9] It is clear that he wishes entirely to dispense with the concept of truth as correspondence to fact, for it presupposes the existence of external reality.[10] And so he cannot dismiss the objectivistic theory of knowledge on the grounds that it is false, that is, fails to correspond to reality. Accordingly,

he seeks to justify his rejection of objectivism by adverting to its allegedly repugnant social consequences: 'Objectivism has been firmly embedded in the norms and rituals of academic culture and its transmission ...... Educational psychology has been a powerful legitimating agency and rationalisation for objectivism. As such, it has become an important form of social control.'[11]

This appeal to the educational and social effects of objectivism undermines the relativist case against it, because it presupposes the very notion of truth that has, putatively, been discarded. The claim is that objectivism has been used to warrant certain educational policies and that these policies have had wider social effects. What makes it true, if it <u>is</u> true, that objectivism has had these consequences is not that people say that certain things have happened as a consequence of objectivism but that these things have actually happened. The relativist claim can be true only if there is an external world which is the same for everyone, not just for those who inhabit the same form of life. Since this is just what the relativist, on this extreme interpretation, denies, his doctrine is incoherent.

Nevertheless, it does not follow that there is nothing of value in relativism. It has already been argued that the truth lies in objectivism with respect to the material world and relativism with regard to some aspects of the human social

world.[12] This compromise view will now be examined in an educational context.

## 9.4 Institutionalism.

Institutionalism is a compromise position which recognises the influence of social factors on educational selection and assessment, while acknowledging the fact that, as Flew puts it, 'teachers' perceptions may be in part veridical.'[13] It builds upon a point made by Pring: 'That we distinguish between cats and dogs may be due to certain social conditions; that we can so distinguish has something to do with cats and dogs.'[14] Similarly, our classification of pupils into A, B and C streams or into GCE and CSE groups or into examination passes and failures is no doubt influenced by the power structure of society; that we can so classify them has something to do with the pupils themselves. In clarifying this interpretation of the claim that teachers' knowledge about their pupils' performance is socially constructed, it will be helpful to recall the distinction between brute and institutional facts.[15]

It will be remembered that institutional facts presuppose the existence of a social institution, whereas brute facts do not. For instance, someone who says 'The sky is blue' or 'I saw a great spotted woodpecker in the trees this morning' states a brute fact, because the sky, birds and trees existed long before human beings and their institutions

and may well survive their demise. By contrast, examples of institutional facts include the following: 'Mr. Smith married Miss Jones; the Dodgers beat the Giants three to two in eleven innings; Green was convicted of larceny; and Congress passed the Appropriations Bill.'[16] It is clear that concepts such as 'marriage' and 'larceny' are institutional, in that saying that Prince Charles married Lady Diana or that someone was convicted of larceny does not make sense in the absence of the relevant institution. And this fact enables a sense to be given to the claim that teachers' knowledge of their pupils' performance is socially constructed such that the claim is true: this knowledge makes use of concepts which presuppose the existence of social institutions; it is knowledge of institutional facts.

Not all of the things that are said about pupils are statements of institutional facts. Some such things are concerned with individuals as physical objects rather than people; for instance, 'Christopher is taller than Paul'. Others, such as 'Alison has twisted her knee' or 'Caroline does not get enough sleep', refer to them as biological organisms. Still others, such as 'It was Simon who made Robert's nose bleed', are about people as participants in rudimentary forms of social interaction. But the ones that are most interesting in the present context are those that are concerned with pupils as pupils, that is, as members of a particular social institution and so as objects of teachers'

and examiners' evaluations. Examples of such judgements include 'Julie is a B stream pupil', 'C stream pupils are not expected to pass "O" level History','Pupils from working-class backgrounds cannot work autonomously', 'Nigel is "A" level material' and 'Jessica is an articulate and conscientious girl'.

If a teacher knows an institutional fact about a pupil, then *a fortiori* he knows something about that pupil. Mackie makes a similar point, albeit in another context: 'Given any sufficiently determinate standards, it will be an objective issue, a matter of truth and falsehood, how well any particular specimen measures up to those standards.'[17] But the teacher's knowledge is socially constructed, for the truth or falsity of what he says is relative to the standard used in grading pupils. Thus, when he says 'Julie is a B stream pupil', he asserts a proposition which is objectively true or false relative to a given standard of evaluation. Whether Julie has or has not attained a certain standard of educational performance is an objective matter of fact; if it is true that she has attained such a standard, then it is true 'for anyone', that is, it is true *simpliciter*. But acknowledging that fact does not in itself endorse the standard of evaluation employed.

## 9.5 Objectivity and Standards.

The conclusion of the previous section was that recognising that someone meets a certain standard does not

necessarily commit one to approving of the use of that standard. If the implications of this point are to be appreciated, the notion of a standard must briefly be analysed. On some occasions the usage of 'standard' is purely descriptive, meaning no more than usual, customary, normal or expected; for example, a social survey might reveal a standard distribution of some attribute among a sub-group, by which is meant simply that the distribution among the sub-group is the same as that among the population as a whole. When 'standard' carries evaluative connotations, they are sometimes deprecatory, as in the case of a motoring writer who sums up a new model as 'a standard 1½ litre hatchback', implying that it does not merit any particular attention from car buyers, that there is nothing special about it, that it is ordinary, of no more than average quality. But when the word 'standard' occurs in educational contexts, it generally bears a favourable evaluative import. We speak of pupils or students as having reached or attained a given standard, implying that meeting a standard is an achievement rather than a lapse or a failure and so that standards are worth meeting. A book might be referred to as the standard work on a certain subject, suggesting, not that it is average, but that it surpasses all other works on the subject and is therefore worthy of imitation and of being accepted as an authority. Thus, the typical use of 'meets or measures up to a given standard' in educational discourse is to commend.

Nevertheless, the use of such locutions has a descriptive as well as a prescriptive dimension. There is no

contradiction in holding both that Julie is a B stream pupil and that classifying pupils as A, B or C stream is a worthless, and even damaging, practice, although a disclaimer would be needed to override the usual presumption that making use of a standard implies acceptance of its appropriateness or desirability. It is simply that those who report the outcome of a test are normally those who have devised and administered it and who may reasonably be presumed to be satisfied with it. The point is that deciding to judge something in terms of a certain standard and reporting the fact that something measures up to that standard are distinct. The difference between standards and facts is elucidated by Popper in the following words: '..... through the decision to accept a proposal .... we create the corresponding standard; yet through the decision to accept a proposition we do <u>not</u> create the corresponding fact.'[18] To adopt an example from Mackie, it is a factual question how well a particular sheepdog has performed in trials, but, if one wants to keep the dog only as a pet, the results of the trials can reasonably be ignored in choosing the animal.[19] What is <u>not</u> a factual matter is our choice of standards of assessment, for values are ultimately involved. We <u>could</u> choose to commend pupils for being inarticulate, unpunctual, lazy, morose, untidy and academically incompetent and to classify them as A stream. We do not do so because we do not regard such attributes as valuable.

And so there is some truth in the claim that teachers' knowledge about the educational performance of their pupils is socially constructed, in that such knowledge rests ultimately on the values which inform our choice of standards. It might be thought that this conclusion concedes the main issue to the subjectivists. But this is not so. For to show that educational judgements are based on standards and values is not to prove that there is anything wrong with them. To establish that educational standards are not part of the natural order of the universe but are instead social creations is not to demonstrate that they are corrupt. Those who think otherwise are guilty of the extreme misanthropic prejudice with which Rousseau opened _Emile_: 'God makes all things good; man meddles with them and they become evil.' This is not a sentiment that accords well with subjectivists' distaste for the supposedly 'dehumanising' effects of objectivism.

To this the subjectivist will probably reply that standards are not indicators of merit but merely arbitrary ways of excluding children of certain backgrounds from certain social benefits. They are chosen, not because they reflect objective qualities, but because they are most likely to be achieved by white middle class children. It must be admitted that in one respect standards are arbitrary: there is no law of nature that underwrites the decision to fix the pass mark for an examination at, say, 40% rather than 30% or 50%. But this sort of arbitrariness is a feature of many non-

educational laws and standards and is surely better understood as the most that human ingenuity can do in the face of the complexity of life. For the age of consent, the voting age, speed limits and the maximum permissible level of alcohol in the blood for driving are all arbitrary in just the same way. 39% from a pupil from a disadvantaged background on a bad day may represent a greater achievement than 45% from a pupil from a favourable home background in optimum conditions. Similarly, a fifteen-year-old girl may be more emotionally mature than one who is sixteen, and travelling at 40 mph in a roadworthy car may be less dangerous than driving at 30 mph in a vehicle with deficient brakes and bald tyres. A great deal can be, and is, done to mitigate the worst effects of imposing sharply defined boundaries on the shadowy patterns of real life. The more we can replace the simple pass/fail, guilty/not guilty and child/adult dichotomies with more sensitive instruments of selection and assessment, the better and less arbitrary will our judgements be. Nevertheless, to ensure that subtle discriminations supersede crude ones, to substitute the gradations of a spectrum for the opposite sides of a binary division, presupposes that there are real discriminations there to be recorded. And this is just what the subjectivist denies. It is therefore clear that applying standards with greater sensitivity will not get to the root of the subjectivist's misgivings about them.

If the criteria used by teachers and examiners in selecting and assessing pupils are to be defended against the subjectivist critique, it seems, then, that they must be shown to have some sort of objective basis. Since it has been found that such criteria reflect human values and interests, it follows that they can have an objective foundation if, and only if, these values and interests are themselves objective. The general theme of Part One was that the basis of objectivity is the human form of sensibility. And so the direction the argument must now take is clear: the task is to discover how, if at all, the human form of sensibility can be used as a foundation for educational standards. It is natural to begin by considering educational knowledge of the second sort, namely the curriculum. For the nature of knowledge itself, as manifested in the school curriculum, might provide a bridge between the human form of sensibility and the knowledge of pupils professed by teachers. Educational criteria and categories could then be shown to transcend merely social interests and subjectivists would no longer be able to argue that we are faced with a choice, unconstrained by rational considerations, between ultimate values: education for or against industrial society ? This line of thought merits serious attention and the next chapter will be devoted to a critical examination of it.

## 9.6 Summary.

Three versions of the subjectivist claim that educational standards are socially constructed have been discussed. Two

of them have been rejected, Performativism because it is based on an unsatisfactory philosophy of language and Relativism because it is incoherent. But a compromise position has been accepted: Institutionalism is the view that teachers' knowledge of their pupils' performance is knowledge of institutional rather than brute facts. The standards embodied in educational institutions reflect values and interests. This is not necessarily a vindication of the subjectivist view that schooling reflects the interests of the dominant class, because it may be possible to base educational judgements upon values and interests which belong to the human form of sensibility.

# CHAPTER TEN. THE CURRICULUM.

## 10.1 Introduction

The question to be investigated in this chapter is whether the curriculum can underwrite the objectivity of educational judgements by generating criteria of assessment which are unaffected by outside social pressures. The subjectivist returns a negative answer to this question. Young, for instance, argues that the 'curriculum as fact', by which he means the curriculum seen as reflecting the structure of objective knowledge, is 'a historically specific social reality expressing particular production relations among men.'[1] Similarly, the traditional curriculum, arising out of the forms of knowledge and divided into subjects, is an important part of what Friere calls the 'banking concept' of education, which, he claims, 'is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquility rests on how well men fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.'[2] Another writer has drawn attention to 'the hidden curriculum of schooling': Illich contends that the experience of being taught the traditional curriculum in the accepted way 'develops the habit of self-defeating consumption of services and alienating production, the tolerance for institutional dependence, and the recognition of institutional rankings.'[3] And so, according to these writers, the curriculum, overt and hidden alike, is nothing but a means of social and political domination. Yet, ironically, the traditional curriculum has

also been criticised on the grounds that it does not do enough to produce the managers and technologists that industry requires.[4] It seems that the structure of the controversy about the curriculum and social interests is not as simple as it might at first appear to be.

## 10.2 Ideologies in Educational Debate

An interesting attempt to understand the nature of the curricular debate has been made by Evetts, who distinguishes between idealist and progressive educational interpretations.[5] These consist of theories, attitudes and opinions which 'hang together in such a way as to make them alternative schemes or models of the relationship between man, education and society.'[6] The educational idealist believes that education is an effective social and occupational selector (p.118); he maintains that education is being corrupted by the introduction of technical, as distinct from practical or traditional, knowledge (p.44); and he favours the existence of an intellectual elite entrusted with the preservation of a realm of high culture, which can only be debased by efforts to propogate it. The idealist interpretation comprehends an objectivist epistemology, which is used to warrant a view of the pupil as a passive receiver of bodies of knowledge (p.49). By contrast, the educational progressive sees 'the knowledge-ideal' as a repressive influence and places a higher priority on the development of unique individuals than on the maintenance of academic traditions (p.49).

This typology of educational interpretations is over-simplified in that it conflates two distinct and historically significant polemical standpoints in the idealist interpretation. The schism is latent in the idealist view of educational selection, which is justified sometimes on the grounds that it is necessary for industrial efficiency and sometimes because it is claimed that academic standards cannot otherwise be maintained. It becomes manifest in the idealist account of knowledge. Oakeshott criticises one idealist belief, namely that educational standards must be maintained for the sake of economic efficiency, from the standpoint of another, that the infusion of technical knowledge into education corrupts it.[7] Consequently, it is not clear whether the true position of the educational idealist is that high educational standards are a means to economic efficiency or that the intrusion of technical knowledge constitutes a decline in those standards.

It seems, then, that the idealist-progressive dichotomy does not faithfully reflect the structure of the debate about the curriculum, which involves three distinct view-points. Certainly, three separate interests can be identified: the economy, which uses the output of the education system, pupils, who are, so to speak, processed by it, and teachers, who provide its input of knowledge. These interest groups correspond to the three schools of educational thought distinguished by Williams: industrial

trainers, public educators and old humanists.[8] This tripartite division of educational opinion reflects the impact upon a traditional educational system, whose purity the old humanists sought to defend, of two major socio-economic changes which occurred during the nineteenth century in Great Britain. The first development was the growth of industry and the consequent demand for literate, numerate and technically competent personnel, while the second was the extension of the franchise to the working class and its consequent insistence on education as a basic human right. Williams suggests that the industrial argument was challenged from two sides: the public educators maintained that the curriculum should reflect the needs of pupils as future citizens rather than those of pupils as future operatives; the old humanists emphasized man's development as a spiritual being as well as his place in the material world.[9] But, although both the public educators and the old humanists resisted the subservience of the education system to the needs of the economy, their views were ultimately incompatible, because the old humanists feared the vulgarisation of high culture if it were made more widely available.

It is clear, then, that the subjectivist thinkers who argue that the curriculum cannot underwrite purely educational judgements are the heirs to the tradition of progressive educational thought. The position of the objectivist is less certain, for the dissolution of the idealist interpretation appears to necessitate a choice between the old humanists and

the industrial trainers. Perhaps the more obvious ideological home for objectivism is old humanism. For objectivism seems to imply an attractive argument to the effect that the human form of sensibility gives rise to the forms of knowledge, which in turn determine the structure of the curriculum. Thus, educational judgements would ultimately rest on considerations of what is presupposed by rational intercourse with reality. And so they would transcend the limited concerns of the public educators and the industrial trainers. It can however be argued that the forms of knowledge cannot be derived in this way from the human form of sensibility and accordingly that old humanism cannot be presented as the expression of an objectivist approach to education. Instead it is revealed as the affirmation of an ideology, which differs from those of the public educators and the industrial trainers only in representing the interests of a group within the education system, namely teachers.

Would this outcome mean that the exposition of an objectivist epistemology was in vain ? Would not the human form of sensibility have been shown to be useless as a foundation for the curriculum and so for the supposed objectivity of educational judgements ? It would be premature to draw such conclusions. For it will be contended that there is an alternative way of using the human form of sensibility and the forms of knowledge to underwrite the objectivity of

the curriculum and of the educational judgements based upon it. This argument will be expounded in the next, and last, chapter.

The immediate task is to show that the debate over the objectivity of the curriculum is possible. For any attempt to provide foundations for such objectivity presupposes that it exists, or, in other words, that there is a distinction to be drawn between teaching and indoctrination. And so in the next section it will be argued that such a distinction can indeed be sustained by the considerations adduced in defending the possibility of rational belief and criteria of justification in Part One.

## 10.3 Teaching and Indoctrination

The correct analysis of the concept of indoctrination is a subject of considerable dispute. In recent years controversy has centred on the question whether indoctrination is a matter of content, method or intention.[10] The view to be argued for in this section is that intentional indoctrination occurs to the extent that a teacher's utterances are deliberately ideological. The way will then be open to argue in the next section that a teacher's utterances will be non-ideological as long as they are based upon an objective curriculum and that an objective curriculum is one which is organised in accordance with the forms of knowledge. The task of the final chapter will then be to justify the claim that the forms of knowledge confer objectivity on the curriculum.

The view that intentional indoctrination occurs to the extent that a teacher's utterances are ideological would be disputed by subjectivists, who hold that all allegedly rational beliefs, and the utterances that express them, are in fact ideological.[11] This denial that there are any rational beliefs and utterances entails that genuine teaching is impossible. All a teacher can do is to add his voice to the influences affecting pupils' beliefs, such influences being ineluctably irrational or ideological. An argument of this form is put forward by Helm, who rejects two suggested definitions of indoctrination, as coming to hold a belief without evidence and holding a belief for which there is no possible justification, on the grounds that distinguishing justifiable from unjustifiable beliefs presupposes a 'presumably objective yardstick' when 'there cannot be objectivity with regard to value systems.'[12] Applying this general principle to teaching and indoctrination, Helm rejects the conventional account of the distinction, according to which indoctrination differs from teaching in 'presenting a one-sided view of the world', because 'we necessarily do this anyway.'[13] A more appropriate definition of indoctrination is, he claims, 'the moulding of behaviour and opinions in accordance with external influences essentially biassed in nature.'[14] This definition encompasses 'the indoctrination we receive as a result of the value system we are subject to in society.'[15] Consequently, 'indoctrination is a process that is occurring

all the time by means of the value systems intrinsic to all social institutions ..... The teacher must necessarily attempt to affect the pupils' beliefs as part of the learning process.'[16]

This account of indoctrination is unsatisfactory, because it fails to distinguish between the different ways in which people come to believe that certain things are true. The last sentence quoted, to the effect that teachers cannot help but affect their pupils' beliefs, is perfectly true but does not entail that teachers cannot help but indoctrinate their pupils. In chapter seven[17] it was argued that people can come to hold beliefs in three different ways: as a result of rational thought, as the consequence of an emotional response to a social situation or as the result of an attempt at rational thought which is flawed by the intrusion of social pressures. To claim that teaching is no different from any other way in which beliefs can be affected is to overlook these important distinctions. There are two aspects to these differences in how people come to hold their beliefs: intention and reason. Teaching and indoctrination are alike, and unlike other ways in which beliefs are acquired, in involving intention; they differ in that teaching, but not indoctrination, takes place in accordance with appropriate criteria of rationality. These two claims will be examined and defended in the rest of this section.

The concept of indoctrination comprehends the indoctrinator's intentions: if a speaker S is to be said to have indoctrinated a hearer H, it is not enough that H came to believe something as a consequence of S's having said it. S has indoctrinated H into the belief that p if, and only if, S intends to induce in H the belief that p. The presence of an intention is therefore a necessary condition of indoctrination; the necessary and sufficient conditions will be stated in full towards the end of this section.

The intention condition is of course controversial. White, for example, while eventually concluding that indoctrination must be deliberate, is attracted to the idea that a person indoctrinates 'not only if he intends to implant a belief unshakably, but also if he is merely responsible for such implanting, even without intending this.'[18] Degenhardt goes further, giving three reasons for rejecting the intention condition.[19] Firstly, it is not helpful for a teacher who wants to know what to do in order to avoid indoctrinating his pupils. Secondly, a teacher might be so biassed that he cannot help slanting his presentation, even though he does not intend to do so. Thirdly, covert ways of influencing beliefs may be more effective than open attempts to exert such influence.

These reasons for relaxing the intention condition are unconvincing. An adequate answer to the first argument is that intention is only a necessary, not a sufficient,

condition of indoctrination. A complete account will include a reference to criteria of rationality from which the indoctrinator has departed. It will certainly be helpful to the teacher anxious to avoid indoctrination to know what the appropriate criteria are. Thus, a teacher of economics seeking to detect any elements of indoctrination that might be affecting his teaching must ask himself questions of the general form 'Has this theory been falsified ?' or 'Are there other explanations of the same phenomena that have better withstood critical tests ?'. And to answer such questions he must know what evidence and what critical tests are appropriate in economics.

The second and third reasons offered by Degenhardt for discarding the intention condition resemble the points made by Helm, for they say in effect that indoctrination is so pervasive that retaining intention as part of its definition will oblige us to remove the stigma of indoctrination from some of the most powerful, and perhaps dangerous, ways of affecting beliefs. The road to indoctrination may be paved with good, that is, non-indoctrinatory, intentions. That people mean well is no guarantee that their actions will not have harmful effects. So, it seems, would the argument against the intention condition proceed.

Now it must be agreed that teachers and others can influence pupils' beliefs without intending to do so. But

affecting pupils' beliefs in this way does not amount to indoctrination. It certainly does not follow that such influences are unimportant or harmless, for they may have far-reaching effects, beneficial or damaging, on pupils' self-esteem and future prospects. Teachers must therefore be sensitive to the unintended side-effects which their educational judgements may have. Nevertheless, it is important to distinguish unintentionally affecting pupils' beliefs from intentionally indoctrinating pupils. This general argument will now be elaborated in connexion with the particular claims made by Degenhardt.

The second reason for relinquishing the intention condition is that a teacher may, from bias, unintentionally slant his presentation of a theory or an idea. What is being suggested here is that the concept of bias should be subsumed under that of indoctrination. Indoctrination occurs both when a teacher intentionally sets out to induce a belief which cannot be rationally justified and when his bias for or against a theory leads him to present it in a way that exaggerates or overlooks its claims to be accepted. It is far from clear that anything is gained by classifying both cases as indoctrination. There is a real difference between someone who intentionally sets out to get someone else to believe something even though he knows that there is no evidence for its truth and someone whose prejudice leads him to do what he does not intend to do. The paradign case

of indoctrination is the inculcation, typically by rote learning, of a religious or political dogma. This is a very different thing from the actions of a teacher who, while making every effort to be impartial, is betrayed by bias of which he is unaware into doing less (or more) than justice to a theory he is teaching. It should not be assumed that indoctrination is necessarily more reprehensible than bias, for a teacher might be guilty of culpable negligence in refusing to acquaint himself with new research which refutes a favoured theory. The difference between indoctrination and bias is not that one is more blameworthy than the other, nor that it is more capable of causing harm, but rather that only indoctrination involves intention.

The third reason for abandoning the intention condition is that implicit and unacknowledged influences may be more powerful than overt efforts to proselytize. This may well be true, but it does not follow that covert attempts to affect beliefs should be classified as indoctrination. An example cited by Degenhardt concerns the administration of a school, which embodies judgements about pupils, such as that pupils 'categorised on the basis of exam performance should be thought of and educated in very different ways,'[20] which are influential precisely because they are undetected and so cannot be resisted. There is a sense in which it is not only unobjectionable but positively worthwhile that pupils should be treated differently on the basis of exam performance. For example, a requirement that pupils be

allowed to embark on GCE 'A' level courses only if they have passed a minimum number of subjects at 'O' level is perfectly reasonable. Of course the different treatment pupils receive is different in educationally relevant ways. The problem is that pupils will become imbued with certain ideas and assumptions about themselves, perhaps about their worth as human beings, as a result of being categorised on the basis of exam performance and treated accordingly. There is no doubting the serious effects educational judgements can have on pupils' self-respect and attitudes. But it is possible to recognise these effects without subsuming them under the concept of indoctrination. What is happening is that pupils notice certain aspects of educational arrangements and draw conclusions about themselves. They are learning unofficially, by finding things out for themselves rather than by being taught them. Perhaps in many cases they are acquiring false or groundless beliefs about themselves. Anyway, they are not being indoctrinated. If a teacher saw what was going on and preserved or even strengthened the arrangements which induced the pupils' beliefs with the intention of reinforcing those beliefs, then he would be indoctrinating them. But until such an intention is formed pupils are simply being influenced by their environment.

It might be objected that this is a rather negative line of argument: all that has been said is that we can identify the phenomena pointed out by Degenhardt without having to

classify them as cases of indoctrination. But, since they do have something in common with indoctrination, in that they involve the acquisition of beliefs which have not been rationally justified, it might be thought more appropriate to accommodate Degenhardt's insight by distinguishing intentional from unintentional indoctrination. And indeed this suggestion is acceptable, as long as it is not thought to entail that indoctrination can be either intentional or unintentional without it making any difference. Intentional indoctrination is a distinct phenomenon. Moreover, it is one which is particularly interesting in connexion with classroom teaching, for both activities are intended to influence beliefs. Thus, the importance of the concept of intentional indoctrination is that it enables a clear distinction to be drawn between genuine teaching, based on rationally justified beliefs, and abuses of teaching, or intentional indoctrination, based on beliefs which have not been rationally justified. There are therefore three distinct phenomena: (i) teaching; (ii) the abuse of teaching, or intentional indoctrination; and (iii) the unintended effects on pupils' beliefs of the social institutions within which teaching takes place, or unintentional indoctrination. It has been argued that intention differentiates (ii) from (iii): it will now be maintained that reason distinguishes (i) from (ii).

The difference between teaching and indoctrinating intentionally is that the speech acts of the teacher are non-ideological utterances, whereas those of the intentional

indoctrinator are ideological. The distinction between ideological and non-ideological utterances was explained in chapter two. Ideological utterances are defined as follows :

*A*'s assertion that *p* is ideological iff

(1) *A* is attempting to convince *H* that *p*
or that *p* and therefore *r*
or that *p* and therefore *H* ought to do *x*

(2) *A* asserts that *p*, thereby implying that he has evidence for the truth of *p*

(3) *A* does not have evidence for the truth of *p*.

There is of course more to the concept of intentional indoctrination than this; otherwise, it would be superfluous, merely another name for ideological utterances. In fact intentional indoctrination is a sub-species of ideological utterance in general, characterised by two further features.

The first feature which distinguishes intentional indoctrination from other ideological utterances concerns the nature of the non-ideological utterance from which it is an aberration. Intentional indoctrination occurs only in contexts which are ostensibly educational, in which, that is to say, someone professes to be teaching or instructing or initiating. There is the implication that the indoctrinator is superior to his audience in terms of knowledge, experience or authority. The ideologue, on the other hand, need have

no such pretensions; any authority he may have is likely to be charismatic rather than institutional. And so intentional indoctrination is the sub-class of ideological utterances which occurs when the corresponding non-ideological utterances would amount to teaching. In other words, if it were true that _A_ had evidence for the truth of _p_, _A_ would then be teaching _H_ that _p_, rather than simply trying to prove to _H_ that _p_ by rational argument.

The second feature which converts an ideological utterance into a case of intentional indoctrination involves the ascription to _A_ of a perlocutionary intention. If someone is to be said to be asserting something, there are certain intentions which he must be presumed to possess; he must, for example, intend his audience to understand what he says and to grasp the illocutionary force of his utterance, that is, to recognise that it is a statement rather than a question or the expression of a wish.[21] But he might have the further intention of producing an action or state of affairs by means of the assertoric act he has performed. For instance, _A_ could not be said to have asserted that smoking is bad for your health unless some _H_ understand his words and recognise that _A_ intends him to believe that smoking is bad for his health. But, supposing that _A_ has the further perlocutionary intention of persuading _H_ to give up smoking by telling him that it is bad for his health, it is not necessary that this intention be fulfilled for _A_ to be said to have asserted that smoking is bad for _H_'s health. Thus, perlocutionary intentions

concern the merely contingent effects that utterances may have. The interesting thing about intentional indoctrination is that it involves a perlocutionary intention, in addition to those implicit in the assertoric act which is the vehicle of indoctrination. The nature of this intention is accurately reported by White: the indoctrinator intends to implant a belief unshakably.[22] For it is clear that indoctrination involves, not just inducing beliefs for which there is no evidence, but implanting them so strongly that they will be immune to criticism.

Two further conditions may therefore be added to the definition of intentional indoctrination :

(4) The context of A's utterance must be such that, if conditions (3) and (5) are not satisfied, then A teaches H that p

(5) A intends unshakably to implant in H the belief that p.

This definition of intentional indoctrination evidently presupposes the existence of criteria of rationality, in terms of which the evidence for or against a belief can be assessed. Subjectivists repudiate the distinction between justified and unjustified beliefs, on the grounds that there are no objective criteria of rationality. It has already been argued that there are universally applicable criteria

of rationality.[23] If this were not so, rational discourse, and indeed any systematic transactions with the world, would be impossible. Since teaching, as distinct from intentional indoctrination, is a form of rational discourse, it too would be impossible. And so the distinction between teaching and intentionally indoctrinating depends upon those criteria of rationality which are constitutive of the human form of sensibility.

The human form of sensibility is, then, the foundation of the distinction between teaching and intentional indoctrination. But to establish the possibility of teaching as a mode of rational discourse is very far from showing that the teaching of school curricula as they actually exist exemplifies such discourse. For those curricula may not provide adequate safeguards against intentional indoctrination and other irrational ways of affecting beliefs. The mere fact that teaching is conceptually distinguishable from intentional indoctrination is no guarantee that teaching is what actually takes place in schools. If educational curricula are such that pupils from certain social backgrounds cannot but pick up certain beliefs about themselves which adversely affect their attitudes and expectations, then some of the misgivings of writers such as Young, Friere and Illich would surely be vindicated. It might be replied that the acquisition of certain beliefs by pupils is an unavoidable by-product of educating them. This answer will deserve to

allay subjectivist and progressive anxieties only if the educational judgements which give rise to such effects are seen to be founded on the presuppositions of teaching as a mode of rational discourse. They must, that is to say, be based upon curricula which embody the presuppositions of rational discourse and systematic dealings with the world. But how is this transition from the human form of sensibility to the curriculum to be effected ? The forms of knowledge might seem to provide a promising route: the human form of sensibility generates the forms of knowledge and the forms of knowledge structure educational curricula. An attempt to follow the first stage of this path, the derivation of the forms of knowledge from the human form of sensibility, will be examined in the next section.

## 10.4 An Attempted Transcendental Deduction of the Forms of Knowledge.

It might be thought that objective knowledge is a simple accumulation of propositions, all of which can be tested against each other and against experience in just the same way. This view is denied by philosophers who hold that knowledge can be differentiated into forms or disciplines, into spheres or universes of discourse, into modes of experience or realms of meaning. According to a leading exponent of this doctrine, propositions belong to forms of knowledge, each of which has its own characteristic central concepts, a distinctive logical structure, a set of criteria

for testing its expressions against experience and particular methods of exploring experience.[24] A theory of this kind might seem to provide a means of ensuring the objectivity of the curriculum: forms or disciplines of knowledge would serve as a bridge between objective knowledge and the school curriculum. This suggestion faces two difficulties: the objectivity of the forms must first be established and they must then be related to the curriculum. It is the first problem which will occupy the rest of this thesis; in the present section an attempted transcendental deduction of the forms from the reactions of primitive consciousness will be examined and ultimately rejected; in the next chapter the thesis will conclude with a proposal for an alternative deduction, from the rational form of sensibility. A brief comment on the second problem is, however, appropriate before considering the objectivity of the forms.

It would be difficult to deny that, if there are forms or disciplines of knowledge, education, which is at least in part concerned with the transmission of knowledge, must in some way take account of the fact. But it certainly does not follow that a school curriculum can be satisfactory only if its structure reflects that of the forms; for example, it does not follow that if there are seven forms pupils should be taught seven subjects, one from each form. Some such misinterpretation of the forms of knowledge doctrine seems to underlie the objection that the forms are

nothing but a rationalisation for the 'traditional' grammar school curriculum.[25] This view of the forms, whether as the basis of advocacy or criticism, cannot be sustained, for there are significant discrepancies between the traditional academic curriculum and the forms of knowledge. Geography and foreign languages are hard to place, while sociology belongs to a form of knowledge but is not part of the traditional curriculum.[26] Moreover, skills which are characteristic of one form may be acquired and exercised while learning subjects belonging to another; statistical techniques, for instance, are used in the natural and in the social sciences as well as in mathematics. So it is clear that there is no isomorphism between the forms and the curriculum.

There is, however, a more promising way of using the forms of knowledge in curriculum theory. Official documents concerning the school curriculum often use the forms as a framework of analysis. Curriculum 11-16,[27] for instance, gives a checklist of 'areas of experience', intended to guide the construction of a common curriculum, which corresponds rather closely to a typical statement of the forms of knowledge.[28] It is argued that there are certain areas of experience which an adequate curriculum must cover, but it is not suggested that each area must be correlated with a curricular subject. Thus, concepts which are characteristic of one form of knowledge or area of experience may be introduced in subjects belonging to another.

Concepts such as specialization, mutual dependence, co-operation and competition are constitutive of the 'other minds' or historico-sociological form of knowledge. But their use in the curriculum need not be restricted to history and the social sciences, for they may appropriately occur in literature, religious education and commerce, not to mention subjects which are designed to cut across traditional boundaries, such as world studies, environmental science and community studies. It seems, then, that the forms of knowledge, or something resembling them, can be used in analysing the curriculum. But a curriculum which covers all the forms will be objective only if the forms are themselves objective. An attempt to establish the objectivity of the forms will now be examined.

The leading exponent of the forms of knowledge theory maintains that the basis of their objectivity is our language and form of life. Hirst repudiates the approach envisaged at the end of the previous section, which sees the forms as emerging from the human form of sensibility: 'That there exist any elements in thought that can be known to be immune to change, making transcendental demands upon us, I do not accept.'[29] Yet he goes on to say that rationality is 'a matter of developing conceptual schemes by means of public language in which words are related to our form of life, so that we make objective judgements in relation to some aspect of that form of life.'[30] It is not altogether clear what Hirst means by 'our form of life'. While it cannot be

the human form of sensibility, which states the conditions of any rational intercourse with reality and is therefore immune to change in response to social developments, it is equally plain that it cannot be the socially variable forms of life of conceptual relativism.[31] Perhaps Hirst has in mind a sort of mezzanine floor between these two storeys: our form of life would be susceptible of change, but only very gradual change; and although it would also be less than universal, it would still be widespread rather than local. This interpretation of the phrase 'our form of life' does seem to be implicit in another comment on the forms of knowledge: 'That other domains might, in due course, come to be distinguished, is in no sense being prejudged; for the history of human consciousness would seem to be one of progressive differentiation.'[32]

This position is still, however, a form of relativism, for, if the forms of knowledge change as our form of life develops, they are unlikely to remain unaffected by social conditions. For social change is by no means exclusively localised and short-lived: the rise of modern science and its impact on society is an example of a broad social phenomenon stretching over several centuries and many societies. And large-scale developments of this kind are among the targets of the subjectivist critique. Young, for instance, implies that scientific inquiry itself is no more than one form of life among others: ' ..... like the feudal,

clerical and market dogmas of earlier centuries, the dogmas of rationality and science become open to enquiry: the necessary preliminary to conceiving of alternatives.'[33] And so it might be argued that, if the forms of knowledge are to provide a genuinely objective basis for the school curriculum, they must be grounded in something less mutable than our form of life. They must be shown to be the one possible manifestation of the permanent and universal human form of sensibility. It is this line of thought that seems to inform Brent's attempt at a transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge.[34]

Brent claims that the forms of knowledge are 'necessary to any valid human construction of reality.'[35] In order to establish this, he adopts a Kantian strategy of the sort rejected by Hirst. The question which Brent sets out to answer is: 'In other words, how- to use our classical Kantian terminology - can we move from a metaphysical exposition, which describes the conceptual order by means of which we make objective judgements, to a transcendental deduction, which justifies this order?'.[36] In view of what was said about truth, the forms of knowledge and the human form of sensibility in chapter four,[37] two comments are appropriate. Firstly, Brent's metaphysical exposition of the forms is consistent with the syncretistic account of truth-criteria put forward in chapter four. What correspondence and coherence amount to in practice is not constant over all academic disciplines; the treatment of correspondence as a family resemblance concept is

particularly consonant with the view that truth-criteria vary from one form of knowledge to another.[38] Secondly, and in sharp contrast to the first point, the idea of a transcendental deduction of the forms receives no support at all from the syncretistic theory of truth. Far from it, for it seemed that only two forms of knowledge could be shown to be derivable from the human form of sensibility.[39] These are the empirical and the mathematical, which are developments of the ideas of correspondence and coherence, respectively. Thus, implicit in the argument of Part One is a presumption against the viability of Brent's planned transcendental deduction.

The transcendental basis of the forms of knowledge is, according to Brent, the human form of sensibility. A form of knowledge is an elaboration of a primitive reaction; the rudimentary human consciousness is progressively differentiated into the forms of knowledge. There are only so many reactions a man looking at, say, a mountain can give; each reaction gives rise to a question; the kind of question he asks in turn determines what can be accepted as an appropriate answer; and efforts to arrive at an answer generate a form of knowledge. Thus, the basis of the empirical form of knowledge is the following reaction-question set :

'(a) How curious ! There is white on top, green underneath and purple in the centre.

(i) What causes the white, green and purple, and why do they appear as such ?'[40]

And so Brent concludes that it is such 'reactions that constitute the primitive differentiation of consciousness, which has become developed and refined into the empirical/mathematical/religious/ethical/aesthetic/historical-sociological schema as we have it today.'[41]

This attempted transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge has recently been exhaustively criticised.[42] Two of the many objections made by Marshall _et al._, are of particular interest: these concern the lack of uniqueness proofs and the differentiation of the primitive consciousness into reactions. Marshall _et al._, take Brent to be trying to establish that 'the forms of _K_ _necessarily_ lie at the foundations of any truth judgements.'[43] And so, they maintain, it is not enough to show that the forms do in fact underlie our truth-judgements; it must be proved that they are the only possible foundation of such judgements. In Brent's terms, a metaphysical exposition of the forms is not enough; they must also be transcendentally deduced. But, according to Marshall _et al._, Brent's transcendental deduction does not include a uniqueness proof, that is, an argument to show that a particular form is the only possible foundation for the truth-judgements which, it may be accepted, are in fact characteristic of it. This verdict is just what would be expected in the light of what was said in chapter four. But why are there no uniqueness proofs in Brent's argument for the forms ? Is their omission merely an over-sight and, if so, could it be rectified ?

A consideration of the second objection makes it clear that the answer to that question must be no. It is clear that, given Brent's strategy, the only way in which the forms could be shown to be the one possible foundation for our truth-judgements would be to prove that the reactions out of which they develop are the only possible reactions available to primitive consciousness. Marshall *et al.*, appear to be correct in thinking that Brent fails to establish this. Indeed it is difficult to see how he could do so. For, in the first place, there does not seem to be a one-to-one correlation between reaction and form. Consider the following list of forms with their parent reactions:[44]

| Reaction | Form |
|---|---|
| How curious ! | Empirical |
| How vast it is ! | Mathematical |
| How beautiful it is ! | Aesthetic |
| How good it is ! | Ethical |
| How old it is ! | Historical-sociological |
| How awesome it is ! | Religious |

As Marshall *et al.*, point out, curiosity could initiate the mathematical and the historical-sociological forms as well as the empirical form.[45] And it is far from obvious that the mathematical form has its origins in a reaction concerned exclusively with size and not at all with number. Again, an appreciation of the beauty of the natural world is characteristic of a major tradition in religious thought. Similarly, the reaction expressed by 'How good it is !' is just as likely to lead men to worship what produced it as is

a recognition of awesomeness; primitive people's gods include beneficent providers as well as uncontrollable and dangerous forces. In the second place, the number of possible reactions on looking at a mountain scene is much greater than those listed by Brent. Marshall *et al.*, draw attention to the many emotional reactions overlooked by Brent: indifference, favourable reactions such as excitement, pleasure and joy, and unfavourable ones, such as 'frustration, resentment, confusion, defiance, suspicion, disgust, anger, contempt , etc.,'[46] It is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the main criterion Brent used in selecting the reactions listed above is that they should each express a central concern of one of the forms of knowledge. In the absence of a criterion of selection that is independent of the forms, it is inevitable that the transcendental deduction collapses into circularity.

Thus, Brent's transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge fails. Either the reactions of primitive consciousness on which they are said to be based are an arbitrary selection from the whole range of possible reactions or they have implicitly been chosen because they reflect the characteristic concerns of the forms. In the first case the forms lack any systematic foundation and in the second case the argument is circular. In both cases the lack of an independent criterion for the selection of reactions vitiates the transcendental deduction.

Thus, the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge remains so far unanswered. But the failure of one attempt to provide a transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge does not entail that such a deduction is in principle impossible. Indeed it will be argued in the next chapter that the forms can be transcendentally deduced from the rational form of sensibility.

## 10.5 Summary.

Two positive conclusions have been reached in this chapter. Firstly, it has been shown that teaching is conceptually distinguishable from intentional indoctrination. Secondly, it has been found that one way of ensuring that pupils are taught rather than intentionally indoctrinated is to construct a curriculum capable of generating objective educational judgements. However, an attempt to use the forms of knowledge to guarantee the objectivity of the curriculum collapsed when it became clear that the forms cannot be transcendentally deduced from the reactions of primitive consciousness. And so an answer to the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge remains attainable but so far unachieved.

# CHAPTER ELEVEN. A TRANSCENDENTAL DEDUCTION OF THE FORMS OF KNOWLEDGE.

## 11.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to propose a transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge, or something resembling them, from the rational form of sensibility. Forms of knowledge or areas of experience would then be available as an objective foundation for the school curriculum. A curriculum which covered all the forms or areas could in turn give rise to objective educational judgements. In this way criteria would be generated for distinguishing teaching from intentional indoctrination and the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge would be answered. This chapter is, then, an attempt to establish the truth of the first premise in an argument put forward as a reply to the subjectivist critique: that something resembling the forms of knowledge can be shown to have an objective basis. It will be remembered that an attempt to do this was examined and rejected in the previous chapter. Accordingly, the first task of this chapter is to analyse the reasons for the failure of Brent's transcendental deduction of the forms from the reactions of primitive consciousness. The requirements of a valid transcendental deduction will thereby be clarified. The chapter will conclude with a proposed transcendental deduction of the forms from the rational form of sensibility.

## 11.2 The Requirements of a Transcendental Deduction of the Forms of Knowledge.

Why, then, did Brent's transcendental deduction of the forms collapse ? The reason given at the end of the previous chapter was that it lacked an independent criterion for selecting the reactions of primitive consciousness out of which the forms were said to have developed. Without such a criterion there could be no uniqueness proofs, that is to say, there could be no arguments establishing that the forms embody, not merely the criteria we in fact use in making truth judgements, but the only set of criteria we could use in making such judgements. This diagnosis of the failure of Brent's argument raises the question whether uniqueness proofs are an indispensable part of a transcendental deduction of the forms.

Brent's critics, Marshall*et al.*, would insist that they are, for they take him to be trying to show that 'the formsof *K* lie at the foundations of *any* truth judgements.'[1] And indeed Brent claims that the forms are 'necessary to any valid human construction of reality.'[2] It might be objected that this does not commit Brent to offering uniqueness proofs, because there might be more than one 'valid human construction of reality' or more than one coherent and comprehensive set of truths. Admittedly, the objector might continue, it is true if there *is* only one valid human construction of reality (or

coherent and complete set of truth judgements) and if the forms of knowledge do underlie any such construction then there can be only one set of forms. But why, he asks, assume that only one human construction of reality can be valid, and why impute this belief to Brent ? Perhaps he thinks that there is a disjunction of equally valid constructions of reality, each uniquely related to its own set of forms. It would then be enough to establish the unique relation between each construction and a set of forms and to show that each set of forms arises from reactions available to primitive consciousness. There would be no need to prove that the reactions themselves are the only ones to be found in primitive consciousness. And so the problem of an independent criterion for their selection would not arise.

The objector's interpretation cannot, however, be accepted, for it is quite at variance with Brent's announced intention to refute relativism. Thus, he denies that the claims to truth of different interest groups are irreconcilable and that knowledge is culture-bound on the basis of the claim that there is 'at the basis of all human speech acts a common and universal framework of judgement that enables assessment to be made of particular truth claims that emanate from particular societies and social groups.'[4] Moreover, Brent's main criticism of Hirst's account of the forms of knowledge is precisely that it is an inadequate defence against relativist attacks on the objectivity of the

curriculum. Hirst's interpretation of objectivity as linguistic inter-subjectivity entails that 'his theory can solve nothing, produce no new consensus on curriculum planning that can command rational assent across cultures; rather it simply justifies our traditional curriculum by an inadequate conventionalist strategy.'[5] And so Marshall *et al.*, are correct in thinking that Brent is committed to offering uniqueness proofs as part of his transcendental deduction of the forms.

Yet there are occasions when Brent seems to adopt a strategy that is almost indistinguishable from Hirst's. Having accepted Hirst's view that the forms of knowledge are to be defined in terms of very general categorial concepts, he also agrees that these 'categorial concepts are liable to change.'[6] It is not clear whether there is a significant difference between saying that there is one set of forms which is liable to change and saying that there are several sets of forms, each of which eventually gives way to its successor. What matters is the rate of change. Suppose that the unique set of forms of knowledge are thought to change so gradually that most of its constituent forms remain substantially unaltered over a period of time measured in historical epochs rather than generations. There is evidently a real difference between this single evolving set of forms and forms which change so quickly that few persist throughout a generation, for in the latter case it is

appropriate to speak of many sets of forms in rapid succession, albeit with some overlap. So there are three possible interpretations of the forms of knowledge: a single unalterable set, a single slowly evolving set or a series of sets.

These interpretations may be classified as transcendental, evolutionary and relativist. Brent's position is evolutionary, despite the initial appearance to the contrary, for it is now clear that there are two ways of denying relativism. Thus, he maintains that the 'development of this agreement in a human form of life, as Wittgenstein describes it, or this form of sensibility, as Kant describes it, can be set in an evolutionary perspective.'[7] Yet it is just this interpretation which he presents as a transcendental one. 'It should not be thought,' he suggests, 'that, if the form of human sensibility is subject to evolutionary change, then it cannot form the <u>transcendental</u> basis for the curriculum.'[8] Since this view is inconsistent with the threefold typology of interpretations just introduced, either that typology must be revised or Brent is wrong in thinking that his argument for the forms can be both evolutionary and transcendental.

And so a return is made to the question whether a transcendental deduction must involve uniqueness proofs. For it is now clear that Hirst would say that it must and that therefore his own argument for the forms is not a

transcendental one, whereas Brent would say that it need not and that his argument for the forms is not therefore precluded from being a transcendental one. Clearly, if Brent has a good reason for describing his argument as transcendental, the triune typology and, more importantly, the uniqueness requirement must be relinquished. And in that case it might be thought that the verdict of the previous chapter would have to be reversed: it would have to be admitted that Brent's transcendental deduction had succeeded in providing an objective basis for the curriculum. That deduction failed, it was argued, because it lacked an independent criterion for the selection of reactions of primitive consciousness. But, if the uniqueness requirement is dropped, the arbitrariness of the chosen reactions does not invalidate the deduction. It is enough that the reactions be common and enduring; they do not have to be unique and immutable. It will, however, be argued in the next section that this suggestion is untenable.

### 1.3 Subjective Reactions and Objective Reason.

It will be argued in this section that the requirement that a transcendental deduction must include uniqueness proofs cannot be abandoned without jeopardizing the refutation of relativism. For the lack of an independent criterion for the selection of reactions of primitive consciousness entails that there are no grounds for excluding impulsive actions and subjective experiences from a list of such reactions. And so the reactions of primitive consciousness may occur involuntarily

and a *fortiori* without rational deliberation. Moreover, unconsidered actions and mental states are likely to be influenced by the social circumstances in which the agent or subject finds himself, no matter how rudimentary and undeserving of the title 'society' they may be. Thus, Brent's transcendental deduction fails because it attempts to ground the forms of knowledge in subjective reactions rather than objective reason. An alternative argument for the forms emerges from this conclusion: a transcendental deduction must seek to derive the forms of knowledge, not from the particular and contingent reactions of individuals, but rather from the universal and necessary presuppositions of rationality. In this way the uniqueness requirement will be satisfied and a relativist interpretation of the forms refuted. Furthermore, the forms of knowledge can then be used as the link between the human form of sensibility and the curriculum.

The first stage in this argument concerns the concepts of action and reaction. It would be generally agreed that actions are to be distinguished from events on the grounds that an action is the bringing about of something whereas an event is merely a happening. Actions, but not events, involve the idea of agency, of the exertion of power. But there is more than the idea of agency to the concept of *human* action. 'The paradigm case of a human action is,' according to one influential account, 'when something is done in order to bring about an end.'[9] Two distinct ideas are implicit in this definition: firstly, the agent must have a goal or an

end in view; secondly, he must believe that the action he is to take constitutes an appropriate means to that end. In relating means to ends, and, more controversially, in choosing ends, an agent must follow rules, including linguistic and logical rules, rules of evidence, moral norms and social standards. 'Man is,' as Peters says, 'a rule-following animal.'[10] Man is also, as an earlier philosopher said, a rational animal. And indeed the concept of acting for a reason has been analysed in a broadly similar way to that of human action as defined by Peters. According to Davidson, 'Whenever someone does something for a reason ..... he can be characterized as (a) having some sort of pro attitude towards actions of a certain kind, and (b) believing ..... that his action is of that kind.'[11] The pro attitudes consist of a variety of wants, desires, urges, moral views, principles, prejudices, goals and values, from which it is clear that reason is accorded only a limited part in the determination of preferences. But the question whether an action is of one kind rather than another is one that is to be settled entirely on the basis of reason. It can therefore be concluded that action, if it is to be human action, must involve acting for a reason at least to the extent that the agent is capable of identifying his action as an action of a certain sort or as a means to an end he wishes to bring about.

The concept of reaction can now be examined in the light of the preceding analysis of the idea of human action or acting for a reason. The word 'reaction' is ambiguous, having

three main meanings. In the first place, a reaction may be a considered reciprocal or responsive action, that is, an action taken for a particular kind of reason, namely, a desire to complement or reply to an action already taken by someone else. For instance, when a journalist asks a politician for his reaction to some recent event, the politician's utterance will typically have a certain illocutionary force and perlocutionary intention. If he says what he says in order to win votes or reassure foreign opinion, he is reacting to the event in a deliberate, perhaps a calculated, manner. A fortiori he is acting, or reacting, for a reason. The paradigm case of this sense of reaction is when someone is asked for his reaction to something that someone else has said about him, for then the question has the form 'What is your reply ?'. In its second meaning a reaction is an immediate or first impression. In some circumstances, for example, a television news reporter may ask a public figure for his reaction to some recent event, intending to elicit an expression of emotion, such as anger, resentment, indignation, shock, outrage, regret, surprise, delight or amusement. Here the interviewee acts for a reason in reacting, or replying, to the reporter's question, but in doing he also expresses his emotional reaction to the event. To the degree that the mental state in question is a first impression, it will resemble an event or occurrence rather than an action. In expressing what he felt, the interviewee is drawing attention to something that happened to him rather than to something that he did. And the stronger or more

genuine the feeling, the more clearly is it an event, over which the subject of experience has no control, rather than an action-for-a-reason, which must be within the agent's capacity to perform or withhold. This leads to the third sense of reaction, in which a reaction is a response to a stimulus. Thus, a reflex action is a reaction but not an action-for-a-reason, because it was not taken for a purpose; indeed a reflex action is not, strictly speaking, taken at all, because it cannot be withheld. Similarly, a reaction in this sense may be no more than a bodily change, as when a patient suffers a reaction to penicillin. What are the implications of this analysis of the notion of a reaction for Brent's transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge ?

The conclusion must be that the reactions of primitive consciousness are not genuinely transcendental, for they are either socially conditioned rather than primitive or primitive but merely subjective and accidental features of consciousness. The reason for claiming that the reactions of primitive consciousness are socially conditioned is that their complete expression involves utterances having illocutionary force and perhaps perlocutionary intent. And so they are reactions in the sense of responsive actions-for-a-reason: the agent has a goal or end in view and is following rules. For instance, empirical questions are said to arise out of the reaction expressed as follows: 'How curious ! There is white on top, green underneath and purple in the centre.'[12] Clearly, this utterance presupposes the existence of a language complete with rules for identifying colours and spatial locations. Further,

its illocutionary force is that of an act of describing something and the utterer may reasonably be presumed to intend, _via_ a perlocutionary effect, to arouse his hearer's interest in, or at least draw his attention to, what he is describing. And this presupposes a form of social life, even if it need not be so complex and organised that it can properly be called a society. Then there is the question of which reaction would be evinced on a particular occasion. Why, for example, does a man looking at a mountain react to it by expressing intellectual curiosity rather than awe, or find himself asking practical questions rather than experiencing its beauty ? Take the reaction that gives rise to ethical questions: 'How good it is ! Under its shadow men grow corn and feed one another.'[13] Such a reaction presupposes a settled agrarian community; it could not occur in a nomadic way of life based on hunting. So the reactions of supposedly primitive consciousness are in fact reactions of socially conditioned consciousness and are not therefore transcendental even in the limited sense preferred by Brent.[14] And they certainly cannot constitute the foundation of forms of knowledge which are 'necessary to any valid human construction of reality.'[15]

It might however be objected that this criticism of Brent's reactions doctrine applies only to an incautious statement of it. The expression of reactions was too elaborate and should be confined to the initial exclamations. If the reactions of primitive consciousness are taken to be no more than what is expressed in utterances such as 'How curious !' or 'How good it is !', then it will be seen that they _are_ primitive and

transcendental in that they presuppose nothing but human nature. Their articulation in sentences such as 'Under its shadow men grow corn and feed one another' belongs to a later stage of consciousness. Perhaps, the objector might go on, reactions give rise to questions and questions to forms of knowledge in a similar way to that in which, according to a suggestion of Wittgenstein, primitive expressions of pain give rise to exclamations and exclamations to sentences.[16] But the objection cannot save Brent's argument. On the objector's interpretation, the reactions of primitive consciousness are reactions in the second, and possibly in some cases the third, sense. Thus, the reaction expressed by saying 'How beautiful it is !' is a first impression, that is, a mental state occurring on the occasion of seeing the mountain and without any intervening deliberation. And if this is not yet absolutely primitive, a reaction could be said to be what is expressed by, say, 'Ah !', just as the most primitive expression of pain is, in Wittgenstein's account, a child's cry of 'Ouch !'. Reactions of these sorts are subjective in that they may vary from person to person, depending on the individual's psychological constitution. That reflex actions are much the same for everybody is merely a matter of contingent regularity; there is no necessity about it. And so, while it is true that reactions now presuppose only an isolated human consciousness, not a form of social life, it is equally true that they presuppose only its subjective aspects. If the reactions of primitive consciousness are merely subjective feelings, then anger, frustration or boredom have as much right

to be included in Brent's list as intellectual curiosity or aesthetic experience.

It is therefore clear that Brent's transcendental deduction fails because it is based on features of human life which are either socially conditioned or subjective. The source of the trouble seems to be that Brent's argument is essentially anthropological, in that it considers men only as members of a biological species. A genuinely objectivist argument for the forms of knowledge must be based on the concept of man as a rational being or, in Peters' words, a rule-following animal. The first step of such an argument will elucidate the idea of the human form of sensibility, not in the sense of the reactions of primitive consciousness, but rather as the form of sensibility of a rational or rule-following being. The question is not what reactions people happen to have but what the conditions of rationality, of rule-following, must be.

## 11.4 The Rational Form of Sensibility.

It has been argued that Brent's transcendental deduction of the forms of knowledge fails because it is anthropological; it is based on contingent, that is to say, either socially conditioned or subjective, features of human consciousness. Now it is true that knowledge, considered as speech acts and mental states, is causally dependent upon certain contingent features of human beings as biological organisms,

such as their possession of sense organs and nervous systems. But these features of our human constitution are not conceptually connected with our capacity for rational thought. A distinction must be drawn between two sorts of constituents of the human form of sensibility: the causal conditions of the acquisition of knowledge and the presuppositions of rationality. Brent's mistake was to try to ground the forms of knowledge in the former instead of the latter. It is no doubt true that if people had never experienced curiosity or awe or any of a range of other psychological states knowledge would not have developed as it has. But it does not follow, nor is it true, that, once those reactions occurred, knowledge _had_ to evolve as it has. And knowledge as it is could have developed out of other reactions than those that actually initiated its evolution. A transcendental deduction of the forms must however be based upon 'the fundamental structure of ideas in terms of which alone we can make intelligible to ourselves the idea of experience of the world.'[17]

In view of the anthropological nature of Brent's interpretation of the human form of sensibility, the phrase 'the rational form of sensibility' will be used to denote the presuppositions of rationality. The intention is to specify the form of life or sensibility of a rational being, that is, of man in so far as he is a rational or rule-following animal. What belongs to an individual human being

in virtue of his own psychological and biological constitution and the particular social circumstances in which he finds himself will therefore be excluded. All that matters for a specification of the conceptual framework without which a rational engagement with reality would be impossible is what belongs to a person as a rational or rule-following being. The paradigm case of rationality is acting-for-a-reason. And so the rational form of sensibility must elucidate what is implicit in the idea of acting-for-a-reason. It will now be argued that five concepts or principles constitute the rational form of sensibility: (i) the concept of an intrinsic good: (ii) the principle of induction; (iii) the concept of an instrumental good; (iv) the principle of universalizability: and (v) the concept of other minds.

I.4.1 The concept of an intrinsic good. Rationality is, it is assumed, essentially a matter of *acting* for a reason.[18] Acting for a reason typically involves the selection of means to ends: *A* performs action *m* because he believes it will bring about end *e*. But *A* might want to bring about *e* only because he believes it will enable him to achieve some further end *e**; so *e* is not an end in itself but only an intermediate end. Evidently, if an infinite regress is to be avoided there must be an end that *A* desires for its own sake. And so acting for a reason presupposes the existence of intrinsic goods, objects or states of affairs which are desired for their own sake.

This is still true if acting for a reason is defined, as Davidson defines it, in terms of performing an action because it is an action of a certain type. A performs action a because it belongs to type t; t can be defined either as the bringing about of an end to which performing a is a means or simply as the type of which a is a token, in which case a is an example of an action performed for its own sake. This account of acting for a reason corresponds to Weber's typology of rational action.[19] Zweckrational action is action taken to bring about a goal; thus, A performs m to secure e, where m is the lending of money to B and e is the earning of interest. Wertrational action is the class of actions performed because they exemplify a value; for instance, Captain Langsdorff, having ordered the scuttling of the Graf Spee, committed suicide because it was the only honourable thing to do. Both sorts of rational action presuppose the existence of intrinsic goods, either as the ultimate end which an action is intended to bring about or as the reason why an action is seen as an end in itself.

It is, as so often in philosophy, important to be clear about what is not being said. It is not being asserted that acting for a reason presupposes that some things are intrinsically desirable, that is, that some things are worthy of being desired for their own sake. All that is being claimed is that it is necessarily true, true by virtue of the meaning of 'acting for a reason', that some things are in

fact desired for their own sake. It might therefore be objected that the pursuit of intrinsic goods in this neutral sense subordinates reason to subjective or irrational preferences. A neutral account of intrinsic goods entails, in Hume's famous words, that 'reason is, and ought only to be, the slave of the passions.' And so it might be argued that a specification of the rational form of sensibility must include a normative account of intrinsic goods, that is, a statement of what things are worthy of being desired by a rational being. A complete answer to this objection, which raises one of the central questions of moral philosophy, is beyond the scope of this thesis. But a brief reply must be made. It is true that, while reason can place limits on what can be desired for its own sake, it cannot stipulate an exhaustive list of what a rational being ought to desire as ends in themselves. Thus, it is irrational to try to achieve two goods if the attainment of one entails the loss of the other. But this restriction leaves many combinations of intrinsic goods as complex goals for the rational being to pursue. As Rescher puts it, 'the range of human purposes cannot be settled on theoretical, _a priori_ grounds.'[20] And he cites Kant as saying that 'all elements which belong to the concept of happiness are empirical, i.e., they must be taken from experience.'[21] Nevertheless, it does not follow that rationality is in any sense relative to, or dependent upon, irrational factors. This can be seen by considering the idea of an instrumental good. In order to do this it is

necessary first to understand the place of the principle of induction in the rational form of sensibility.

**I.4.2.** The principle of induction. A complete account of the rational form of sensibility must go beyond the properties of acting for a reason and deduce what the world must be like if a rational being desiring intrinsic goods is to be able to flourish in it. If a rational engagement with the world is to be possible, the world must conform to the principle of induction. It must be the case that the world exhibits a substantial degree of regularity. For without some pattern and uniformity in nature it would be impossible to form rational expectations about the future course of events and acting for a reason would therefore be inconceivable. In a world where the principle of induction did not apply, in 'the chaotic universe', even everyday actions such as walking would be unfeasible.[22] So unless the persistence of external objects and a certain constancy in the capacities of one's own body can be taken for granted, instrumental reasoning even of so rudimentary a nature as 'I shall walk to the bus stop in order to catch the next bus to the station' would be impracticable. Rational action therefore presupposes the principle of induction. But, important though it is, this conclusion by no means exhausts the significance of the principle of induction.

Instrumental reasoning presupposes, not only a certain degree of regularity on the part of nature, but also at least a modicum of recalcitrance. For the attempt to find an effective means to the end that is desired for its own sake would not be made if the end were attainable immediately and without the slightest effort. A rational being will choose the most direct path to its goal; rational action is efficient in that it seeks the maximisation of intrinsic goods from the minimum use of resources, including effort and ingenuity. If the desire for an intrinsic good somehow caused its own immediate gratification, if wishful thinking made it so, then there would be no need for instrumental reasoning at all. That it occurs, that much effort and ingenuity goes into the discovery or invention of effective means to desired ends, entails that the world inhabited by rational animals poses problems and erects obstacles to their will.

The non-chaotic universe is therefore both an opportunity and an obstacle to the rational being. Without some regularity in nature reasoning about means-end relationships would be impossible; without some particular regularities such reasoning would be unnecessary.

I.4.3. <u>The concept of an instrumental good</u>. It has been argued that rational beings desire intrinsic goods and that the world prevents the easy satisfaction of such desires. Techniques

for circumventing the barriers that obstruct the way to such goods must therefore be found; that is to say, there is a need for instrumental reasoning. And so, granted that there are intrinsic goods and that the world makes their attainment difficult, there must be instrumental goods. There must, in other words, be actions that are performed not for their own sake but because they are believed to be helpful in bringing about states of affairs which _are_ desired for their own sake. It is now possible to understand why it is that the extra-rational nature of intrinsic goods does not detract from the rationality of instrumental thinking.

Three points can be made in reply to the relativist argument, to the argument, that is, that instrumental thinking is irrational because it is ultimately directed towards the achievement of an irrational, or extra-rational, end. Firstly, relativists tend to exaggerate the diversity of ends and so over-estimate the likelihood of deadlock in moral argument (that is, argument concerning what is good, intrinsically or instrumentally). There are generally several possible means to a given end, from which it follows that there are fewer intrinsic goods than there are instrumental ones. Thus, even if the relativist case were to be accepted it would not follow that rational argument about morality is impossible. For there would still be scope for rational argument about instrumental goods, about the most efficient means to an agreed end or

about whether an end should be abandoned in view of the cost of the means of attaining it. Moral disagreement would not at once degenerate into expressions of dogmatic commitment to irreconcilable ends. Secondly, the need for instrumental goods is often overlooked, so that it seems that moral debate consists entirely of the advocacy of conflicting ends. Once again, there is much scope for rational discussion before intrinsic goods, pursuit of which cannot be rationally justified, enter the debate. Thirdly, and most importantly, the relativist case is based upon a false assumption: that the end governs the means in such a way that reasoning about a suitable means to a certain end is relative to that end. It then seems that the truth of a principle of action, of the form 'Doing m* is the most reliable way of bringing about e*', is relative to the desired end. And this may be taken to entail that certain propositions, about means, are true only for those who desire the end to which they are said to be conducive. But in fact means-end generalizations are true, if they are true at all, for everyone. And that is just to say that true means-end generalisations are true _simpliciter_. If, for instance, it is true that reflating the economy by £5,000,000,000 will reduce unemployment by half a million, then it is true, not just for those who see reducing unemployment as an intrinsic good, but for everyone. Its truth is not relative to the ends of those who wish to assert it as part of an argument for reflating the economy by £5,000,000,000 in order to bring down unemployment. Of course, if no one wanted to reduce

unemployment the generalisation might never have been discovered. But this entails only that the intrinsic goods we desire determine how we use reason, not that what reason tells us is similarly determined. Thus it is the regularity of the world in the face of the human desire miraculously to by-pass its established ways that underwrites the rationality of moral argument by obliging us to reason about instrumental goods.

11.4.4 The principle of universalizability. It has been argued that rationality presupposes the possession of certain properties by rational beings (desires for intrinsic and instrumental goods) and on the part of reality (some degree of regularity). Since acting for a reason involves following rules, it is also true that rationality presupposes the existence of rules. What, then, is essential about following a rule ? This again is a major philosophical issue in itself and only a brief answer, drawing on material introduced in Part One, can be given.

If instrumental reasoning is to take place it is clear that the rational being must be able to identify similar situations as similar and to act in the same way in the same circumstances. Reasoning involves rule-following and both descriptive rules and prescriptive rules have the property of universalizability. If two situations are to be recognised as similar in all relevant respects, the rational animal must be able to use and understand general terms,

terms, that is, which apply to more than one particular. Thus, if R says that x is f because it has characteristics c ...c*, then R is committed, on pain of inconsistency, to saying that y is f if y possesses c...c*. And R would not be so committed were it not for the universalizability of descriptive rules. Similarly, a rational being R will be guided by universalizable rules of conduct. If R performs action a in circumstances C, then R will perform a in C* as long as C and C* are alike in all the relevant respects. And so in general it can be said that any rule, whether of meaning or of conduct, is, necessarily, universalizable. For unless it applies beyond the particular occasion on which it was first used it is not a rule at all.

11.4.5 The concept of other minds. The last feature of the rational form of sensibility can be derived from another property of rules, namely the fact that they are necessarily public. From this it follows that the world of the rational being must include other rational beings, for one could not be said to be following a rule unless there were other rational beings to check one's putatively rule-governed behaviour. If the idea of following a rule is to make sense, if, that is, the idea of performing an action or a series of actions as conforming to a rule is to be intelligible, it must be possible, in principle, for someone trying to follow a rule to distinguish actually following it from only, and sometimes mistakenly, believing that he is following it. And so it

must further be possible for him to check his belief that he really is following the rule he is trying to follow against an independent criterion, that is, a criterion independent of his beliefs about his actions. For it is not simply that another belief, most probably a memory about a past action, may just as easily be mistaken as the original one, but rather that, if a person's beliefs are the only way he has of checking whether he is successful in trying to follow a rule, then mistakenly believing that one is following a rule would be indistinguishable from correctly believing that one is doing so. A rule one can inadvertently make up as one goes along is not a rule at all. There must therefore be at least the possibility of a public check on one's actions. This of course is a statement of the private language argument associated with Wittgenstein, who summed it up as follows: '..... it is not possible to obey a rule "privately": otherwise thinking one was obeying a rule would be the same thing as obeying it.'[23] If this conclusion is accepted it follows that there must be a community of rational beings and that any one of its members must possess the concept of other minds, must, in other words, be aware of rational beings other than himself if he is to be able to distinguish thinking he is following a rule from actually following it.

These, then are the five presuppositions of rationality. Without these postulates acting for a reason would be

impossible. The brief arguments in support of the presuppositions are not claimed to constitute a conclusive case for them; to do that would be the work of a thesis in itself. But it is claimed that enough has been done to establish a *prima facie* case for them as the complete set of presuppositions of rationality. Acting for a reason has been seen to presuppose (i) intrinsic goods as the ultimate goals of action; (ii) a non-chaotic universe which obstructs their immediate attainment yet is the condition of their eventual achievement; (iii) instrumental reasoning, made both possible and necessary by the non-chaotic universe, in accordance with (iv) universalizable descriptive and prescriptive rules; and (v) a community of rational beings as the basis of such rules. There is nothing subjective about these presuppositions; they are not reactions of primitive consciousness which may vary from one individual to another. For they depend, not on empirical matters, such as the psychological constitution or the social circumstances of the individual, but rather on the necessary presuppositions of acting for a reason. They are therefore true of any individual in so far as he is a rational being. And so the rational form of sensibility constitutes an *objective* foundation. But a foundation for what ? Can anything resembling a set of forms of knowledge be based upon it ?

## The Rational Form of Sensibility and Forms of Knowledge.

It was argued in the preceding section that the concept of rational action gives rise to five postulates which constitute the rational form of sensibility. In this section

it will be maintained that these five postulates in turn generate something akin to a set of forms of knowledge. The idea of acting for a reason is an extremely exiguous one, relying on the notion of a rational being existing in a minimal environment. Consequently, the rational form of sensibility states the presuppositions of acting for a reason only in the most schematic terms. It does not tell us what is presupposed by acting for a reason in a world approximating to our own. And so it seems that, while acting for a reason presupposes the rational form of sensibility, acting for a reason in the world as we know it presupposes a concrete version of the rational form of sensibility. It will indeed be argued that this is just what forms of knowledge are. Just as acting for a reason in the world as we know it is an application of the formal idea of acting for a reason, so a set of forms of knowledge can be seen as a specification of the purely formal notion of the rational form of sensibility.

To state the argument so baldly is to risk appearing to be more convinced of its validity than its speculative nature would warrant. It is not being suggested that a particular list of forms of knowledge, whether put forward by Hirst or implicit in The Curriculum 11-16, is the one and only possible objective foundation for the school curriculum.[24] What is being suggested is, firstly, that there must be an objective foundation for the curriculum if there is to be teaching rather than intentional indoctrination and objective

educational knowledge rather than educational ideologies; and secondly, that something resembling forms of knowledge, areas of experience or realms of meaning can be presented as a strong candidate for such a role. Accordingly, the task of the subsequent argument is, so to speak, exploration rather than settlement.

Nevertheless, a significant degree of correspondence will be found between the principles and concepts which constitute the rational form of sensibility and a widely recognised set of forms of knowledge. The argument will again take the form of a transcendental deduction: the aim will be to establish what must be true if acting for a reason in a world approximating to our own is to be possible. We can ask what a rational being would be unable to do if a particular form of knowledge did not exist or was inaccessible to him. And if it is found that he would be unable to apply one of the concepts or principles which constitute the rational form of sensibility we can conclude that acting for a reason in a world approximating to our own presupposes that form of knowledge. Thus, acting for a reason is the formal equivalent of the concrete notion of acting for a reason in the world as we know it and the rational form of sensibility is the schematic counterpart of the substantive idea of a set of forms of knowledge. It was found that five principles and concepts are presupposed by the idea of acting for a reason: intrinsic goods, induction, instrumental goods, universalizability and other minds. There are usually said to be seven forms of knowledge: empirical, logico-

mathematical, ethical, aesthetic, religious, historico-sociological and philosophical.

11.5.1 <u>The principle of induction and the empirical form of knowledge.</u>
The argument for the empirical form of knowledge is relatively unproblematic and has already been foreshadowed in Part One. It was maintained in chapter three that in the chaotic universe, in a world where the principle of induction does not hold, everyday activities such as walking, as well as more complex ones such as scientific inquiry, would be impossible.[25] If the empirical form of knowledge is the elaboration of the principle of induction, there must be an indispensable aspect or area of rational action in the world as we know it which could not exist without it. The empirical form may be defined in terms of its characteristic ideal, namely truth as correspondence to empirical reality. What would rational beings in a world approximating to our own be unable to do if there were no such thing as truth in this sense and so no empirical form of knowledge ? It was argued in chapter four that if there were no means of dividing propositions into those that correspond and those that fail to correspond to empirical reality, then asserting one proposition would be just as good as asserting any other, from the standpoint of saying how things are in the world of objects existing in space and time.[26] People could have only emotional or expressive motives for saying things; all utterances would be greetings or expressions of feeling such as 'Hi', 'Ouch', or 'Ah'. Even 'Oh what a beautiful

morning !' would be incapable of being said or understood, because of its propositional content. Fact-stating discourse would be impossible in the absence of the empirical form of knowledge and no one would be able to form rational expectations about the future on which to base his actions. And so it can hardly be denied that rational intercourse with the world as we know it presupposes the empirical form of knowledge.

11.5.2 The principle of universalizability and the logico-mathematical form of knowledge. The principle of universalizability has been seen to be presupposed by the basic idea of acting for a reason: acting for a reason involves following rules and a rule is not a rule unless it is universalizable. The logico-mathematical form of knowledge may be defined in terms of its characteristic criterion of truth, namely coherence, which is a necessary condition of truth in general but a necessary and sufficient condition only of logico-mathematical truth. The question is whether there is an indispensable area of rational action in the world as we know it which could not take place without truth as coherence. It should not be thought that in the absence of coherence rational discourse would be altogether impossible. A rudimentary form of reasoning could still occur, for the use of general terms presupposes consistency alone, not coherence, which comprises consistency and comprehensiveness.[27] And so forms of knowledge other than the logico-mathematical would be severely curtailed but not inconceivable. The logico-

mathematical form would however be entirely incomprehensible, for the expressions of logic and mathematics are defined solely in terms of the rules governing their use in the formal systems to which they belong. And the notion of a system, a complex whole, evidently involves the ideas of consistency and comprehensiveness. In the absence of the logico-mathematical form of knowledge no one would be able to use a calculus and measurement would be impossible. And so it can be concluded that rational activity in the world as we know it presupposes the logico-mathematical form of knowledge.

11.5.3 The concept of other minds and the historico-sociological form of knowledge. It has been argued that the concept of other minds is presupposed by the idea of acting for a reason, in that acting for a reason involves following rules and rules are necessarily public. The historico-sociological form of knowledge has been defined by Hirst and Peters in terms of knowledge of other minds.[28] It is clear that a significant area of rational activity would be impossible if there were no such thing as the historico-sociological form of knowledge. The concept of a rational being is an artificial one, abstracting from the many characteristics of human beings those they have by virtue of the fact that they follow rules. The purely formal notion of a rational being excludes everything that might differentiate one such being from another. And so it does not make sense to suppose

that there could be only one rational being. Without the concept of other minds a rational being is an absurdity. Similarly, without the historico-sociological form of knowledge a human being would be unable to see himself as responding to his environment in a way that transcends his own idiosyncracies. It is only through the systematic understanding of why other people act as they do that one can comprehend one's own actions. And this would be impossible if we were wholly irrational beings, for in that case nobody would have anything in common with anybody else. It can accordingly be concluded that rational intercourse between human beings presupposes the historico-sociological form of knowledge.

11.5.4 The concept of an instrumental good and the ethical form of knowledge. The argument for the ethical form of knowledge raises considerable difficulties, mainly because there is deep disagreement amongst philosophers over the nature of ethics. Some deny that ethics is a form of knowledge at all, holding that utterances such as 'X is good' or 'You ought to do x' are not propositions but merely expressions of emotion. And among cognitivists there is controversy concerning the special features of moral knowledge: some insist that morality without consideration for human welfare and injury is incomprehensible, others that ethical matters are by definition those of overriding importance. Another view is that ethics is essentially a matter of practical reasoning, that is to say, reasoning about what ought to be

done. This interpretation of ethics enables it to be seen as the elaboration or concretization of one of the constituents of the rational form of sensibility, namely the concept of an instrumental good. For without the concept of something that has to be done if a desired end is to be achieved it would be impossible to evaluate the merits and demerits of alternative courses of action. And so it seems at first sight reasonable to conclude that reasoning about what ought to be done, evidently an indispensable area of rational activity in the world as we know it, presupposes the ethical form of knowledge.

However, to see the ethical form of knowledge in such terms is unsatisfactory, because it fails to differentiate genuinely ethical questions from merely technical ones. Building a bridge, for example, involves practical reasoning, about materials, siting, design and so on, but it is obvious that how to build a bridge is not a moral problem but an engineering one. But there is no reason to abandon the account of the ethical form of knowledge as the systematization of the concept of an instrumental good, for it can be supplemented by drawing on two other constituents of the rational form of sensibility, namely the principle of universalizability and the concept of an intrinsic good.

The relevance of universalizability arises out of the fact that many ethical problems take the form of a conflict between the self-interest of the agent and the interests of

those people who will be affected by his actions. In so far as this is true the ethical form of knowledge can be understood as practical reasoning in the context of conflicts between self-interest and the general interest. An action cannot be morally justified if it serves the agent's own interest but damages the interests of others. Since rules are necessarily universalizable, enjoining the same actions in the same circumstances, arbitrary exceptions to protect the agent's own interests are excluded. And so there is a conceptual connexion between universalizability and morally right action.[29] It might be objected that, since virtually all rules are qualified in some way, it is consistent with the universalizability requirement that a non-arbitrary or systematic exception be added to a rule, suspending its applicability whenever it conflicts with self-interest. A full discussion of the problems of self-interest and morality, of rules and exceptions, is unfortunately beyond the scope of this thesis.[30] But it is clear that there cannot be a non-arbitrary exception in favour of self-interest. For, if it was to exempt the agent and no one else, it would have to be expressed in a proposition using indexical terms, such as 'I', 'here', 'now', or 'this', as, for instance, in 'The person performing _this_ action ....'. No general formula, such as 'Rule r applies to everyone except those possessing attributes a...a*', would exempt only the individual agent wishing to further his own interests. Either the formula must name the agent or refer to him by an indexical term, in which case it

forfeits its claim to be non-arbitrary, or the whole class of agents possessing a...a* is exempted, in which case the exception is not <u>self</u>-interested. Thus, self-interest cannot override a rule without detracting from its universalizability and so the connexion between universalizability and morality is preserved. It follows that the principle of universalizability can supplement the concept of an instrumental good to show that the ethical form of knowledge is presupposed by practical reasoning in situations of conflict between self-interest and the general welfare.

The concept of an intrinsic good provides a means of differentiating moral from technical reasoning in the absence of such conflicts. The nearer is an instrumental good to an intrinsic good, the more clearly is reasoning about it moral rather than technical. The bridge-building example alluded to earlier will be further developed in order to try to vindicate this claim. A bridge can serve as a means to a wide variety of purposes, which may be commercial, humanitarian, social or military. The builder evidently needs to know what the bridge is going to be used for; his choice of materials, design and so on will vary according to the sort of traffic expected to use it. But the purpose for which a bridge is built is generally only an intermediate end; the builder chooses one instrumental good (a suspension bridge) in order to achieve a further instrumental good (a bridge capable of carrying heavy goods vehicles). A bridge capable of carrying heavy goods vehicles is not an intrinsic

good: the ultimate end for which the bridge was built may be the happiness of the majority, human welfare or some equally general value, to which the increased trade engendered by the construction of the bridge is itself only a means. It seems that rational action in the world as we know it involves a series of instrumental goods whose attainment leads to the achievement of an intrinsic good. Instrumental reasoning belongs to the ethical form of knowledge only if it concerns an instrumental good which is the more or less direct means to an intrinsic good. Thus, the decision whether to build the bridge is a moral or political rather than a technical one; the question is whether an intrinsic good, such as maximising welfare or treating people as ends in themselves, is best served by building the bridge or by achieving some other instrumental good, such as constructing a hospital, a warship or a prison or reducing taxes through not building anything. It is therefore arguable that the ethical form of knowledge is presupposed by practical reasoning about intermediate ends which are closely related to ultimate ends or intrinsic goods.

The argument for the ethical form of knowledge is, then, that it is to rational action in the world as we know it what the concept of an instrumental good is to the formal notion of acting for a reason. But the nature of the world as we know it leads to the development of two sorts of instrumental reasoning, ethical and technical. What makes

instrumental reasoning ethical is its use of the principle of universalizability in cases of moral conflict and its proximity to the attainment of intrinsic goods.

11.5.5 The concept of an intrinsic good and the aesthetic form of knowledge. It was argued in the previous section that the concept of an intrinsic good is presupposed by the idea of acting for a reason. It will now be contended that the aesthetic form of knowledge is characteristically concerned with intrinsic goods and that it is presupposed by an important aspect of rational activity in the world as we know it.

The aesthetic form can be defined in terms of its central concept, that of beauty. The first step in the transcendental deduction of the aesthetic form is therefore to establish a connexion between beauty and intrinsic goodness. That the two qualities are related can scarcely be disputed; what is controversial is whether the affinity is sufficiently close to justify the claim that the aesthetic form is the concretization of the concept of an intrinsic good. The claim would clearly be justified if it could be shown that beauty is the only thing desired for its own sake, but the nearest any philosopher has come to propounding this is Moore's argument that beauty is one of only two intrinsic goods: 'No one... has ever doubted that personal affection and the appreciation of what is beautiful in Art or Nature,

are good in themselves; nor ... does it appear probable that any one will think anything else has <u>nearly</u> so great a value.'[31] Indirect evidence for classifying beauty as an intrinsic good is that it is commonly thought of as being not merely different from but inimical to instrumental goods. Thus, Elliott points out that 'aestheticism is valuing the aesthetic above the practical' and goes on to suggest that 'we make the attribution more confidently when we can make it more definitely pejorative.'[32] Moreover, when beauty <u>is</u> used as an instrumental good, as when, for example, the director of a television commercial uses a beautiful sunset to help to sell cigars or lager, a natural reaction is that it has thereby been <u>mis</u>used.

However, it must be admitted that the enjoyment of beautiful objects and the pleasures of friendship are by no means the only intrinsic goods. Few philosophers would object to the inclusion of wisdom, knowledge, truth, love, love of God, pleasure, happiness, virtue and 'the greatest happiness of the greatest number' as at least plausible candidates for such status. And indeed it has already been agreed that there is in principle no limit to the range of things which can be desired for their own sake.[33] If beauty is only one among indefinitely many intrinsic goods, the connexion between the concept of an intrinsic good and the aesthetic form is seriously weakened. But a 'special relationship' might be preserved by modifying both terms. Thus, beauty might be shown to enter into a complete

specification of at least some of the other intrinsic goods: the happiness of the majority might be analysed in terms of the availability of opportunities for the enjoyment of beautiful objects; the fact that theories are sometimes appraised in terms of elegance and simplicity might indicate that there is an aesthetic aspect to the desire for knowledge as an end in itself. And the aesthetic form might be defined a little less narrowly, as being concerned with what is desired for its own sake; beauty would be the paradigm case of the form's characteristic concept rather than that concept itself. In this way a sufficiently close connexion between the aesthetic form of knowledge and intrinsic goodness could probably be established and the first step in the argument for the form accomplished.

The second and final step in the argument is to show that the aesthetic form is presupposed by an aspect of acting for a reason in the world as we know it. Evidently, the more widely the form is interpreted, the easier it will be to establish its indispensability. If it were to be defined in terms of intrinsic goodness, with beauty having no special status among many examples of intrinsically good things, then no one could ever have a reason for doing anything. But that argument merely reiterates what was put forward in section 11.4.1, where it was maintained that the notion of an intrinsic good is presupposed by the schematic idea of acting for a reason.[34]

A more restrictive definition of the aesthetic form must therefore be assumed, with beauty as the paradigm case of something desired for its own sake. The question is whether, if there were no such thing as beauty, rational action in the world as we know it would be significantly curtailed. Artistic creation would be impossible in such circumstances and that in itself would be a serious loss. But virtually all actions have an aesthetic dimension and few would survive the demise of beauty unchanged. In the absence of beauty, acts aimed at satisfying wants (in the economic sense of basic needs for food, clothing and shelter) would still be performed, but they would be carried out very differently from the way in which they are executed today. For it is plain that such actions are not purely functional; much more goes into them than mere biological survival would warrant. Once subsistence is assured, biology is supplemented by aesthetics. In the case of clothing, sartorial considerations, ultimately aesthetic in nature, become as important as those of warmth, modesty and protection.

There are, therefore, grounds for believing that a transcendental deduction of the aesthetic form of knowledge could succeed. It would show that an important aspect of rational action in the world as we know it presupposes the aesthetic form even when it is quite narrowly defined, with beauty being accorded a privileged position among intrinsic goods.

11.5.6 The religious form of knowledge. The problem confronting an attempt transcendentally to deduce the religious form of knowledge at this stage is plainly that there is no constituent of the rational form of sensibility available on which such a deduction could be based. There seem to be three possible reactions to this situation.

The first response is simply to draw what some philosophers would regard as the obvious conclusion and to discard the religious form. The argument would be that the religious form cannot be shown to be presupposed by an indispensable area or aspect of rational activity in the world as we know it. True, if the religious form of knowledge did not exist, rational beings would be unable to engage in practices such as worship and confession; what is for many people a major part of their lives would never have come into being. But religious belief is by no means a universal phenomenon. Indeed, the secularization thesis in the sociology of religion - the view that religion has declined in modern industrial societies - has been criticised on the grounds that genuine religious conviction has always been only a minority concern.[35] On the other hand, it is clear that religious questions, such as whether God exists, whether He necessarily exists, whether the existence of evil is compatible with that of an omnipotent, omniscient and benevolent God, whether there is an afterlife and so on, can be rationally discussed. And it has been argued that the religious form of knowledge can

be identified in terms of its own characteristic criteria of truth and categoreal concepts.[36] So the religious form cannot easily be abandoned.

The second reaction might therefore seem attractive: perhaps the religious form can be shown to have a better claim to be considered the concretization of a constituent of the rational form of sensibility than one of the forms already, apparently, deduced. Given that there can be non-religious ethical systems, the only plausible strategy would be to use the religious form to supplant the aesthetic form as the systematic elaboration of the concept of an intrinsic good. After all, the love of God appeared in the list of widely recognised intrinsic goods. However, the fact that religious belief is not a universal phenomenon undermines this strategy, particularly when the pervasive influence of aesthetic considerations, narrowly defined, is recalled.

The third reaction seeks to chart a middle course between the equally implausible extremes of discarding the religious form altogether or relinquishing another form to make room for it. The argument would be that the account of the rational form of sensibility put forward in the previous section is incomplete: a sixth postulate of acting for a reason was overlooked and it is in this sixth principle that the religious form can be grounded. It might accordingly be suggested that a rational being

necessarily seeks an ultimate reason for the existence of the universe, some purpose beyond merely human plans. In other words, the rational form of sensibility includes the principle of sufficient reason. A plausible case could perhaps then be made for seeing the religious form as the concrete counterpart of that principle. Some such argument seems to be the most reasonable course for philosophers who are not prepared to accept the first reaction. It might appear to be a somewhat desperate *ad hoc* manoeuvre, 'reading into' the idea of acting for a reason more than an impartial investigation was able to discern. But Taylor has argued that the principle of sufficient reason is 'a presupposition of reason itself.'[37] And so there is at least the prospect of augmenting the rational form of sensibility in such a way that a transcendental deduction of the religious form of knowledge could be attempted.

It can only be concluded that further philosophical investigation will be required to clarify the position of the religious form of knowledge. Some philosophers would be happy to discard it, while those wishing to retain it have the inkling of a line of thought which promises to repay further development.

11.5.7 The philosophical form of knowledge. It would be paradoxical for a philosophical thesis to be unable to establish the need for the philosophical form of knowledge. Yet there is no constituent of the rational form of sensibility with which it can be conceptually connected. And so it might be thought that the philosophical form is not a genuine form of knowledge at all. But this would not be a valid inference to draw. For the fact that the philosophical form of knowledge cannot be regarded as the concretization of a presupposition of the bare notion of acting for a reason is entirely in accordance with the standard contemporary conception of philosophy.[38] According to that view, philosophy is a second-order discipline which seeks to analyse the concepts and criteria used in trying to understand the world through the other forms of knowledge. Clearly, there can be no material for philosophical analysis until the other forms or disciplines of knowledge have developed. Only when the concepts and principles of the rational form of sensibility have been fully articulated in the forms of knowledge, as presuppositions of acting for a reason in the world as we know it, can they become subjects for philosophical reflection. Thus, the basis of a possible transcendental deduction of the philosophical form is not a constituent of the rational form of sensibility but their collective manifestation in the world as we know it as forms of knowledge.

A transcendental deduction of the philosophical form of knowledge would seek to establish that there is an indispensable area or aspect of rational thought or action which would be impossible without it. The special feature of the deduction of the philosophical form is that the form is not seen as the concretization of a constituent of the rational form of sensibility. Instead it would be grounded in the first-order forms of knowledge. What, then, would a rational being be unable to do if there were no such thing as the philosophical form of knowledge ? The answer is that he would be unable to see himself as a rational being; he would be unable to reflect upon the forms of knowledge, the concepts and criteria he used in accumulating a body of objective knowledge. It is an important part of the concept of a rational being that he should be able to understand the ways of thinking and acting in which his rationality consists. Certainly, if we identify the idea of a human being with that of a rational being existing in the world as we know it, the resulting claim that it is part of the concept of a human being that he should be able to understand his own nature and his place in the world would command wide assent among philosophers.[39]

It has been suggested that a transcendental deduction of something resembling forms of knowledge is a feasible enterprise. The formal question 'What is presupposed by the idea of acting for a reason ?' gives way to the concrete question 'What is presupposed by the idea of acting for a reason in the world as we know it ?'.

A considerable degree of correspondence has been found between the constituents of the rational form of sensibility and a widely recognised set of forms of knowledge. It seems not unreasonable to conclude that the correspondence is sufficiently close to justify the claim that forms of knowledge are the manifestation in the world as we know it of the rational form of sensibility.[40]

## 11.6 Summary.

In this chapter a transcendental deduction of a widely recognised set of forms of knowledge has been attempted. It was first established that such a deduction could not be based upon the reactions of primitive consciousness, for they are either socially conditioned or subjective. It was then argued that an objective foundation for a deduction of the forms could be provided by analysing the idea of acting for a reason. This abstract notion was found to presuppose five concepts or principles, which constitute the rational form of sensibility. A transcendental deduction of a set of forms of knowledge was then attempted: it was contended that a concrete version of the concept of rational action, namely that of acting for a reason in the world as we know it, presupposes a set of forms of knowledge.

## SUMMARY OF PART THREE

The argument of Part Three was a response to the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge. The curriculum, and the educational assessments based upon it, are instruments of indoctrination, according to the subjectivist, because they lack objective foundations.

In chapter nine educational judgements were examined in the light of the subjectivist claim that the standards on which they are based are arbitrary, reflecting the interests of powerful social groups rather than expressing objective facts about pupils. The performativist and relativist versions of this claim were repudiated, but the moderate institutionalist position was accepted. If facts about pupils are institutional, the question is whether they can somehow be traced back to the human form of sensibility. For in that case they would have an objective foundation in the presuppositions of rational intercourse with reality.

If the standards used in making educational judgements arise out of the curriculum, then they cannot have been imposed on the education system by outside agencies. But this assumes that the curriculum can be shown to have an objective basis. This is however just what the subjectivist denies and in chapter ten his claim that the curriculum is no more than an ideology was examined. It was found that the objectivity of the curriculum can be guaranteed by

deriving it from the forms of knowledge and then showing that they are objective. An attempt to do this by transcendentally deducing the forms from the reactions of primitive consciousness was found to fail.

This failure was diagnosed in chapter eleven and an alternative argument for the objectivity of the forms was propounded. The first transcendental deduction failed because it tried to ground the forms in merely subjective elements of the human form of sensibility. They must instead be based upon objective characteristics of the human condition; the term 'the rational form of sensibility' was introduced to signify this strategy. The rational form of sensibility consists of the presupposition of acting for a reason. It was argued that the forms of knowledge consist of the presuppositions of acting for a reason in a world such as our own. Without the forms of knowledge, rational action in a world such as our own would be impossible. An attempt has therefore been made to show how the forms of knowledge might be transcendentally deduced from the concept of rational action and its presuppositions.

## CONCLUSION

The principal conclusion of the thesis is that there are no grounds for accepting the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge. This conclusion has been arrived at after an examination of issues in epistemology, the methodology of the social sciences and the philosophy of education.

The subjectivist epistemological claim that there can be no objective knowledge was discussed and eventually rejected in Part One. The subjectivist claim involved attacks on several traditional philosophical positions, such as the view that knowledge is justified true belief, the correspondence theory of truth and metaphysical realism. A salient feature of the argument advanced in Part One is that its repudiation of the subjectivist claim does not entail an unqualified acceptance of these traditional theories. Thus, it was agreed in chapter one that reliable, as well as justified, true belief amounts to knowledge. But it was insisted that only justified true belief can constitute objective knowledge, by which was meant a body of propositions which have survived the most stringent critical tests available. An equally eclectic course was followed during the subsequent analysis of each of the elements of the familiar thesis that knowledge consists in a belief that is justified and true. After establishing that belief is not necessarily ideological, it was maintained, in reply to the subjectivist claim that beliefs

cannot be justified because the criteria used in trying to do so are no more than social conventions, that some criteria of rationality can themselves be rationally justified and are universally applicable. The subjectivist was therefore found to be right in thinking that some criteria of rationality are, as it is frequently put, context-dependent, but wrong in thinking that they all are. The subjectivist rejection of the idea of truth as correspondence to reality was similarly shown to be unacceptable only in being complete. For it was found that the only way to do justice to the variety of truth-criteria used in different forms of knowledge was to propound a syncretistic theory which accommodates both correspondence and coherence. Finally, it was contended that the subjectivist attempt to preclude any role for correspondence at all, by advocating a version of metaphysical idealism, fails because it misinterprets the nature of philosophical questions. The idealist claim that the world is mind-dependent is indeed true, but at the philosophical rather than the empirical level. Since the idea of truth as correspondence presupposes that the world is mind-independent only at the empirical level, metaphysical idealism, properly understood, can be incorporated into an objectivist theory of knowledge. And so the conclusion was reached that there can be objective knowledge.

In Part Two the subjectivist claim that objectivism threatens the existence of the sociology of knowledge was critically examined and ultimately rejected. Three

particular worries were discussed and, as in Part One, specific subjectivist arguments were not so much rejected out of hand but rather shown not to have the damaging implications they were thought to have. Thus, the claim that objectivism is incompatible with the sociology of knowledge because knowledge is socially constructed rather than objective was found to be based on the important insight that knowledge has social antecedents and effects. But the claim is untenable as it stands, for knowledge is both socially constructed and objective, so that the objectivism of Part One and the sociology of knowledge are perfectly compatible. The methodological implications of the rejection, in Part One, of the subjectivist view that all beliefs are necessarily ideological, were next considered. It was maintained that the objectivist position does not entail that some beliefs are beyond the scope of sociological investigation. Rather is it the case that three classes of beliefs must be distinguished and each one investigated in the particular manner appropriate to it. Finally, in reply to the subjectivist claim that agents' explanations of their own actions and beliefs must be uncritically accepted by sociologists, it was argued that objectivism, far from entailing the equally unjustified view that sociologists must impose their concepts and criteria on the agents whose actions they seek to understand, suggests a middle course, according to which sociologists are able to question, and on occasion to over-

rule, agents' explanations. And so it can be concluded that there is no reason for believing that objectivism undermines the sociology of knowledge.

It was therefore reasonable to claim that Parts One and Two had set out a version of objectivism which is epistemologically and methodologically sound. On that basis, an examination of the subjectivist critique of specifically educational knowledge was undertaken in Part Three.

According to the subjectivist, the school curriculum, and the educational judgements based upon it, cannot help but be instruments of indoctrination. The foundation of this claim is the view that teachers' and examiners' knowledge about pupils is socially constructed. Once again the subjectivist position was found to be based on a valuable insight whose significance had been misinterpreted. And so it was agreed that claims to educational knowledge of this kind express institutional, rather than brute, facts. However, it was contended that the institutional nature of educational judgements need not be indoctrinatory, as long as such judgements are based on a curriculum which has objective foundations. One way of securing the objectivity of the curriculum is to ground it in something resembling a set of forms of knowledge. But the problem then arose of ensuring the objectivity of the forms. An attempt to solve

this problem by means of a transcendental deduction of the forms from the reactions of primitive consciousness was therefore examined, only to be found wanting. For such reactions are either socially constructed or subjective. It was suggested that an objective basis for a set of forms could be found by analysing the notion of acting for a reason, which resulted in the specification of the rational form of sensibility. It was then argued that, just as the rational form of sensibility comprises the presuppositions of acting for a reason, so a widely recognised set of forms of knowledge constitute the presuppositions of acting for a reason in the world as we know it. Such an argument is, of course, a highly speculative one; all that is claimed is that enough has been done to demonstrate the feasibility of a transcendental deduction of something resembling the forms of knowledge.

A critical examination of the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge has therefore failed to find any reasons for accepting it. That critique claimed that there can be no objective educational knowledge: the school curriculum and the educational judgements derived from it are inescapably indoctrinatory. But it has been found that there are good epistemological reasons for believing that there can be objective knowledge; that there are no methodological reasons for revising that conclusion; and that an objective curriculum based on the rational form of sensibility is feasible. Consequently, it can be concluded

that, although subjectivism has contributed some valuable insights, they are misinterpreted if they are taken to undermine the possibility of objective knowledge in education.

The threefold examination of the subjectivist critique of educational knowledge proposed in the Introduction has therefore been completed.[1] Now that the objectivist position developed during the course of that examination can be seen in its entirety, it is possible to justify the claim made in the Introduction that objectivism must be distinguished from absolutism.[2] It can now be seen that subjectivists who argue that those who defend the objectivity of knowledge 'treat Western academic standards as absolutes' are guilty of a double misinterpretation of objectivism. Firstly, it has been made clear that objectivists are not typically dogmatic in their attitude to knowledge. Indeed, the truth is precisely the opposite, for, as was argued in Part One, objectivism involves a critical approach to propositions: to be justified in believing a proposition is to have found that it survives the best available critical tests.[3] Secondly, while it is true that objectivism, as advocated in this thesis, entails that something resembling forms of knowledge are 'absolute', in that they are presupposed by rational intercourse with the world as we know it, this endorsement does not extend to any particular set of forms. A fortiori it does not extend to the school curriculum as we now have it nor to all Western academic standards.

This defence of objectivism can be turned into an attack on subjectivism; it is arguable that it is the latter doctrine which leads to absolutism. For, if 'man is the measure of all things' is taken to mean that each individual is the guarantor of his own rationality, then every claim to know will be an absolute, forever beyond the reach of criticism. What subjectivism lacks is a means of imposing a separation of epistemological powers: the claimant to knowledge is also the sole adjudicator of his own claim. By contrast, it has been a recurring theme of this thesis that claims to know must be judged against criteria, all of which apply to others than the claimant and some of which apply to rational beings as such. Without this independent check, those beliefs would be likely to prevail which were held by the powerful; beliefs would be chosen according to their utility in serving the interests of the dominant social group rather than their ability to withstand critical tests. And so subjectivism would bring about what it professes to deplore: a society in which the strong control the beliefs of the weak.

# FOOTNOTES

## Introduction

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3. Ibid., p 75.

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10. See, for example, A.G.N.Flew, Sociology, Equality and Education, London 1976.

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10. K.R.Popper, Conjectures and Refutations, London 1965, pp 24-25.

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27. K.R.Popper, *The Open Society and its Enemies, Volume 2: Hegel & Marx*, London 1966, p 219.

28. See D.W.Hamlyn, *The Theory of Knowledge*, London 1970, p 81ff.

29. See p 16.

30. W.H.Walsh, 'Knowledge in its social setting', *Mind* LXXX, 1971, p 324.

31. See pages 22-3.

32. Op. cit. note 11, p 221.

CHAPTER TWO

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17. L.Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Oxford 1974, Part I ss 19 & 23 and Part II p 226.

18. Ibid. Part I s 241.

19. 'Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing admiration and awe, the oftener and more steadily they are reflected on: the starry heavens above me and the moral law within me.' I.Kant, Critique of Practical Reason and Other Writings on Moral Philosophy trans. L.W.Beck, Chicago 1949, p 258.

20. P.H.Hirst, 'Liberal education and the nature of knowledge' in Knowledge and the curriculum, London 1974, p 45.

21. Ibid. p 44.

22. See pp 87-91, 106-12 and 322-34.

23. See pp 217-30.

24. B.A.O. Williams, 'Deciding to Believe' in Problems of the Self, Cambridge 1973, pp 137-140.

25. A.Hartnett, M.Naish and D.Finlayson, 'Ideological documents in education: some suggestions toward a definition' in Theory and the Practice of Education Volume 2 A.Hartnett and M.Naish (eds.), 1976.

26. Ibid.,p.95

27. Ibid.

28. J.R.Searle, Speech Acts, Cambridge 1966, p 66.

29. Ibid.

30. This objection was made by Professor R.F.Dearden at the Annual Conference of the Philosophy of Education Society of Great Britain.

31. See pp 37-44.

CHAPTER THREE

1. D.Bloor, 'Popper's Mystification of Objective Knowledge', Science Studies January 1974, p 75.

2. M.F.D.Young, 'Introduction', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.) London 1971, p 5.

3. G.M.Esland, 'Teaching and Learning as the Organization of Knowledge', op.cit. note 2, p 77.

4. P.Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, London 1958, p 100.

5. Sextus Empiricus, Outlines of Pyrrhonism, quoted by R.Popkin, The History of Scepticism from Erasmus to Descartes, New York 1968, p 3.

6. R.Trigg, Reason and Commitment, Cambridge 1973, p 2.

7. J.A.Passmore, Philosophical Reasoning, London 1965, quoted in S.Wilson, Truth, Milton Keynes 1973, p 34.

8. A.G.N.Flew, Sociology, Equality and Education, London 1976, p 30.

9. See, for example, P.Winch op.cit. note 4.

10. Op. cit. note 6, p 4.

11. Ibid.,p.5

12. Ibid.

13. J.L.Mackie, Ethics, Harmondsworth 1977, p 35.

14. 'The Pyrrhonist, then, lives undogmatically, following ...... the laws and customs of his society, without ever committing himself to any judgement about them.' R.Popkin, op.cit. note 5, p XI.

15. S.Lukes, 'The Social Determination of Truth', Modes of Thought R.Horton and R.Finnegan (eds.) London 1973, p 238.

16. T.S.Kuhn, The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, Chicago 1970, p 198.

17. P.Winch, quoted by A.G.N.Flew, op.cit. note 8, pp 41-2.

18. J.Kekes, A Justification of Rationality, 1976, p 103.

19. Ibid., p 102.

20. Ibid., p 105.

21. P.Winch, op.cit. note 4, p 108.

22. J.R.Searle, _Speech Acts_, Cambridge 1969, p 51 : '..... _institutional facts_ ..... are indeed facts; but their existence, unlike the existence of brute facts, presupposes the existence of human institutions ..... it is only given the institution of money that I now have a five dollar bill in my hand. Take away the institution and all I have is a piece of paper with various gray and green markings.'

23. It may be worth pointing out that different forms of life do not have to be parts of radically different societies; contemporary Europeans and the Azande belong to different forms of life; but so too do the monk and soldier. See P.Winch, op.cit. note 4, p 52.

24. Perhaps this is what Esland has in mind in saying that objectivism 'disguises as given a world that has to be continually interpreted' and overlooks 'the entire complex process of intersubjective negotiation of meanings.' G.M.Esland, op.cit. note 3, p 75.

25. Wittgenstein seems to be making a similar point in the following remarks: 'Suppose somebody made this guidance for his life: believing in the Last Judgement. Whenever he does anything, this is before his mind ... an unshakeable belief. It will show, not by reasoning or by appeal to ordinary grounds for belief, but rather by regulating for all in his life.' _Lectures and Conversations on Aesthetics, Psychology and Religious Belief_, C.Barrett (ed.) Oxford 1966, p 53-4.

26. R.M.Chisholm, _The Problem of the Criterion_, Milwaukee 1973.

27. Ibid., p 22.

28. Ibid.

29. The paradigm cases could then be accepted as subjective knowledge in the sense of reliable true belief but not in the sense of justified true belief and so not as objective knowledge. See chapter one, especially pp 33-6.

30. Op.cit.note 26, p 17.

31. H.Feigl, 'De principiis non est disputandum', _Readings in Introductory Philosophical Analysis_ J.A.Hospers (ed.), London 1969.

32. Ibid., p 131.

33. Ibid.

34. W.W.Bartley, 'Rationality versus the theory of rationality', _The Critical Approach to Science and Philosophy_ M.Bunge (ed.) London and Glencoe, Ill., 1964.

35. See J.W.N.Watkins, CCR: A Refutation', *Philosophy* 44 1969 pp 57-62; T.Settle, I.C.Jarvie and J.Agassi, 'Towards a Theory of Openness to Criticism', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 4 1974 pp 83-90; N.Koertge, 'Bartley's Theory of Rationality', *Philosophy of the Social Sciences* 4 1974, pp 75-81; and J.Agassi, 'Rationality and the Tu Quoque Argument', *Inquiry* 16 1973, pp 395-406.

36. See pp 37-44.

37. Op.cit. note 34, p 64.

38. K.R.Popper, *The Listener*, 7 January 1974.

39. J.R.Bambrough, *Conflict and the Scope of Reason* (The St. John's College Cambridge Lecture 1973-4) Hull 1974, p 5.

40. Ibid. , p 16.

41. Ibid., p 17.

42. M.Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past*, trans. C.K.S. Moncrieff, London 1924, vol. III p 226.

43. (a) P.F.Strawson, *Individuals*, London 1964; (b) P.F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense*, London 1975.

44. Op. cit. note 42 (a), p 9.

45. Op. cit. note 42 (a), and (b) *passim.*

46. See, for example, op.cit., notes 2 and 3.

47. P.F.Strawson, *Introduction to Logical Theory*, London 1963, p 262.

48. L.Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Oxford 1974, p 88 (para. 242).

CHAPTER FOUR

1. G.M.Esland, 'Teaching and Learning as the Organization of Knowledge', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.), London 1971, p 75.

2. Ibid.

3. Ibid., p 77.

4. D.Bloor, 'Popper's Mystification of Objective Knowledge', Science Studies January 1974, p 76.

5. On Cartesian dualism, see G.Ryle, The Concept of Mind, Harmondsworth 1963, chapter 1 especially p 16; also J. Teichman, The Mind and the Soul, London 1974, pp 27-8. On the Causal or Representative Theory of Perception, see G.M. Wyburn, R.W.Pickford and R.J.Hirst, Human Senses and Perception, London 1964, p 253; also G.Vesey, Perception, London 1972, chapter 4.

6. N.Rescher, The Coherence Theory of Truth, Oxford 1973, chapters 1 and 2.

7. S.Haack, Philosophy of Logics, Cambridge 1978, p 90.

8. A.Tarski, 'The semantic conception of truth', Readings in Philosophical Analysis H.Feigl and W.Sellars (eds.), New York 1949: 'we may accept the semantic conception of truth without giving up any epistemological attitude we may have had (p 71).'

9. Popper certainly regards it in this way. See K.R.Popper, 'On the sources of knowledge and ignorance', Conjectures and Refutations, London Paul 1965, p 27.

10. B.Russell, An Inquiry into Meaning and Truth, Harmondsworth 1962.

11. Ibid., p 130

12. Ibid., p 303

13. This argument will be expounded more fully in chapter six, pp 202-3 of this thesis.

14. See pp 93-4.

15. D.F.Pears, Bertrand Russell and the British Tradition in Philosophy, 1967. Pears argues that, while 'atomic propositions are not logically independent of one another', Russell 'never says they are (p 141).' This may be true of atomic propositions, the term preferred by Russell in 'The Philosophy of Logical Atomism', Monist 1918 (reprinted in Logic and Knowledge R.C.Marsh (ed.), London 1956), but it is evidently not true of basic propositions, the term used in the later Inquiry, op.cit. note 10 (first published in 1940).

16. Dr.C.A.Wringe in a private communication.

17. This is presumably why Wittgenstein gave no examples of atomic propositions in the Tractatus.

18. Op. cit., note 15, p 159.

19. Ibid., p 175.

20. F.H.Bradley, Appearance and Reality, Oxford 1969, p 321.

21. Op. cit., note 7, p 96.

22. J.Dewey, 'Propositions, Warranted Assertibility and Truth' in Problems of Men, New York 1946, pp 343-44.

23. Op. cit., note 10, p 308.

24. Ibid., p 307.

25. See pages 81-91.

26. Oscar Wilde, The Importance of Being Earnest, Act I.

27. As Jenny Teichman says in another context: 'For we perhaps ought not to rashly assume that every mystery, every puzzling question, can be solved by the construction of a systematization of thought of the kind that deserves the label of "theory" (op. cit., note 5, p 105).'

28. P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters, The Logic of Education, London 1970, p 63.

29. Ibid., pp 64-5.

30. This would be contested by Causal theorists, who would say that the objects of perception are mental representations of external things, not those things themselves. Nevertheless, the idea of correspondence is preserved, in the relation between mental representation and what it represents. Only Berkeleian idealists would disagree with that.

31. See L.Wittgenstein, The Blue and Brown Books, Oxford 1975, pp 120ff., and Philosophical Investigations, Oxford 1974, Part I, ss 66-7.

32. The social or human sciences, while they contain many empirical propositions, are by no means entirely empirical and their classification as a distinct form of knowledge is controversial.

33. See Investigations, op. cit., note 34, Part I ss 66-7.

34. See A.Brent, Philosophical Foundations of the Curriculum, London 1978, pp 106-8; P.H.Hirst, 'Literature and the fine arts as a unique form of knowledge', Cambridge Journal of Education, vol 3 no 3 1973, reprinted in P.H. Hirst, Knowledge and the curriculum, London and Boston 1974; and P.Scrimshaw, 'Statements, language, and art', Cambridge Journal of Education, vol 5 no 3 1975.

35. See p 119.

36. See p 125.

37. L.Wittgenstein, Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus, London 1974, 4.5.

38. A has asserted nothing at all from the point of view of rational discourse. Asserting inconsistent propositions may be effective as emotional therapy or self-expression.

39. Hirst, as the progenitor of the forms of knowledge doctrine, would disclaim such support. See P.H.Hirst, Knowledge and the curriculum, London 1974: 'That there exist any elements in thought that can be known to be immune to change, making transcendental demands on us, I do not accept (p 92).'

CHAPTER FIVE

1. P.L.Berger and T.Luckman, The Social Construction of Reality, Harmondsworth 1966, pp 210-11.

2. P.Hamilton, Knowledge and Social Structure, London 1974, p 138.

3. See pp 84-5.

4. A.Blum, 'The Corpus of Knowledge as a Normative Order', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.), London 1971, p 131.

5. A.G.N.Flew, 'Metaphysical Idealism and the Sociology of Knowledge', Sociology, Equality and Education, London 1976, p 12 ff.

6. Op. cit., note 3 p 131.

7. G.M.Esland, 'Teaching and Learning as the Organization of Knowledge', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.), London 1971, p 75.

8. P.Helm, The Varieties of Belief, London & New York 1973, p 150.

9. See (i) K.R.Popper, Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Oxford 1972, pp 38-44; (ii) A.G.N.Flew, 'Sociologists as Surrogates for Berkeley's God', Open Mind, July 1977, pp 11-5; and also op. cit., note 5.

10. Op.cit., note 9 (i), p 38.

11. Sir Winston Churchill, quoted by K.R.Popper op.cit., note 9 (i) p 43. It is worth noticing the remarkable extent of the claim made by Popper on Sir Winston's behalf: his argument is 'a valid criticism of idealist and subjectivist arguments' and even 'the philosophically soundest and most ingenious argument against subjectivist epistemology (ibid.).'

12. Ibid., pp 40-1.

13. Op. cit., note 5, p 29.

14. Op. cit., note 9 (i), p 41.

15. N.Rescher, Conceptual Idealism, Oxford 1973, p 5.

16. Ibid., pp 152-3.

17. Realists who take idealism to be a straightforwardly empirical or causal thesis overlook the typical idealist claim that philosophical reflection is a quite different form of thought from non- or pre-philosophical thinking. Hegel, for instance, wrote as follows: 'The neglect of this distinction between thought in general and the reflective thought of philosophy has led to another and more frequent misunderstanding ... The ... metaphysical proofs of God's existence, for example, have been treated as if a knowledge of them and a conviction of their truth were the only and essential means of producing a belief and conviction that there is a God. Such a doctrine would find its parallel, if we said that eating was impossible before we had acquired a knowledge of the chemical, botanical, and zoological characters of our food .... Were it so, these sciences in their field, like philosophy in its, would gain greatly in point of utility; in fact, their utility would rise to the height of absolute and universal indispensableness. Or rather, instead of being indispensable, they would not exist at all (Hegel's Logic trans. W.Wallace, Oxford 1975, p 5).' And the idea of Philosophy as conceptual or metalinguistic analysis is also implicit in Bradley's work: 'The fact of illusion and error is in various ways forced early upon the mind; and the ideas by which we try to understand the universe, may be considered as attempts to set right our failure. In this division of my work I shall criticize some of these .... (F.H.Bradley, Appearance and Reality, Oxford 1969, p 9).' Elsewhere he implies recognition of a distinction between facts and ways of taking facts: 'In our First Book we examined various ways of taking facts ... (ibid., p 218).'

18. H.Putnam, Meaning and the Moral Sciences, London 1978, p 123.

19. Op. cit., note 15, p 167.

20. Op. cit., note 18, p 4.

21. Ibid., p 125.

22. Ibid.

23. I.Kant, Critique of Pure Reason, trans. N.Kemp Smith, London 1978, p 72.

24. R.Carnap, 'Empiricism, Semantics and Ontology', L.Linsky (ed.) Semantics and the Philosophy of Language, Urbana, Ill., 1952.

25. Op. cit., note 8, p 29.

26. D.W.Hamlyn, The Theory of Knowledge, London 1970, p 139.

27. Ibid.

28. Ibid., p 140.

29. Ibid.

30. D.W.Hamlyn, 'Objectivity', Reason: Part 2 of Education and the Development of Reason R.F.Dearden, P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters (eds.), London and Boston 1975, p 105.

31. For Wittgenstein's own use of the term, see L.Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Oxford 1974, I 19, 23, 241; II pp 174, 226.

32. See chapter three, pages 87-8 and note 23.

33. Op. cit., note 30, p 106.

34. Op. cit., note 26, p 73.

35. That there is some truth in relativism and that forms of life have a part to play in explaining communication breakdown has already been agreed (see chapter three pages 81-91). What is being argued here is that room must also be found for the human form of sensibility; this, too, was maintained in chapter three (see pages 106-112).

36. P.F.Strawson, Individuals, London 1964, p 9.

37. Strawson's comment on Kant is interesting in this context: 'Kant ... knew very well that such an empirical inquiry was of a quite different kind from the investigation he proposed into the fundamental structure of ideas in terms of which alone we can make intelligible to ourselves the idea of experience of the world. Yet, in spite of this awareness, he conceived the latter investigation on a kind of strained analogy with the former (P.F.Strawson, The Bounds of Sense, London 1975, p 15).'

## CHAPTER SIX

1. B.Hindess, Philosophy and Methodology in the Social Sciences, Hassocks 1977, p 3.
2. Ibid., p 6.
3. Ibid., p 197.
4. See pp 37-44.
5. See pp 92-4.
6. See pp 87-91, 106-12 and 322-34.
7. See pp 57-8.
8. P.Hamilton, Knowledge and Social Structure, London 1974, p viii.
9. G.M.Esland, 'Teaching and Learning as the Organization of Knowledge', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.), London 1971, p 77.
10. K.R.Popper, 'On the Sources of Knowledge and Ignorance', 'Conjectures and Refutations, London 1965, p 16 and p 21.
11. The distinction between propositions and speech acts was introduced in chapter one, when its epistemological significance was explained. See above, pages 12-45, especially 12-16.
12. J.R.Searle, 'Assertions and Aberrations', British Analytical Philosophy B.A.O. Williams and A.C.Montefiore (eds.), London 1966, p 53.
13. See (a) G.Frege, 'The Thought: A Logical Inquiry', Philosophical Logic P.F.Strawson (ed.), Oxford 1967; and (b) K.R.Popper, Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach, Oxford 1972.
14. D.M.Armstrong, Belief, Truth and Knowledge, Cambridge 1973, p 38.
15. See pp 12-6.
16. Op. cit., note 10, p 16 and p 21.
17. Ibid., p 27.
18. Ibid.
19. Op. cit., note 9, p 75.
20. Op. cit., note 13 (a), p 17.

21. Op. cit., note 9.

22. Ibid., pp 85-86.

23. A perlocutionary effect is one that happens as a causal consequence of a speech act but is not a necessary condition of a particular kind of speech act's having occurred. For instance, someone might commit suicide out of despair brought on by hearing a newscaster announce the death of John Lennon. The suicide is a perlocutionary effect of the newscaster's speech act. The newscaster would still have performed the speech act of reporting Lennon's death even if no suicide had resulted. For the difference between perlocutionary effect and illocutionary force, see J.L.Austin, How To Do Things With Words, Oxford 1962.

24. See chapter three, pages 69-113, especially pages 83-7, and footnote 22.

25. Op. cit., note 9, pp 85-86.

26. G.Dawson, 'Keeping Knowledge under Control', Journal of Further and Higher Education, Vol. 1 No.3 (Winter 1977), p 90.

27. See pp 46-68, especially 60-7.

CHAPTER SEVEN

1. See chapter two, page 47 for a defence of the distinction between rational and ideological beliefs.

2. A.C.MacIntyre, 'Rationality and the explanation of action', Against the Self-Images of the Age, London 1971, p 246.

3. Op. cit., note 2.

4. Ibid., p 245.

5. Ibid., p 247.

6. Ibid.

7. P.Bourdieu, 'Intellectual Field and Creative Project', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.), London 1971.

8. Ibid., p 163.

9. Ibid., p 185.

10. Ibid.

11. Ibid.

12. Ibid., p 166.

13. Op. cit., note 2, p 250.

14. See pp 87-91 and 106-12.

15. See pp 87-91 and 106-12.

16. See pp 106-12 and 322-34.

17. See pp 141-2.

18. See pp 89-91.

19. Op. cit., note 2, p 248.

20. G.Reddiford, 'Rationality and Understanding', Philosophy, vol 50 no 191 (January 1975), p 23.

21. See chapter one, pages 14-5 and chapter six pp 202-5.

22. In saying that there are no intrinsically rational beliefs all that is meant is that any proposition can be irrationally believed. This is consistent with the fact that there are beliefs which ought to be believed by anyone, on pain of not leading a fully human life. The belief

- contd -

that there are other minds, for example, could be described as intrinsically rational in this sense. But it is possible to imagine a Romulus-like figure (Remus having died at birth) with no memory of people, or even vixens, believing that there are other people somewhere simply out of loneliness. So even belief in other minds could be groundless.

23. Op. cit., note 2, p 246.

24. See chapter two pages 66-7 for the complete account of ideological belief.

25. G.Smith and N.Stockman, 'Some suggestions for a sociological approach to the study of government documents', A.Hartnett and M.Naish (eds.) Theory and the Practice of Education Volume Two, London 1976, p 40.

26. P.Berger and T.Luckmann, The Social Construction of Reality, Harmondsworth 1967, p 14.

27. Ibid., p 15.

28. Op. cit., note 25, p 40.

29. See pp 14-5 and 202-5.

30. Op. cit., note 26, p 14.

31. See pp 207-8.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

1. P.Winch, The Idea of a Social Science, London 1958, p 108.

2. A.C.MacIntyre, 'The Idea of a Social Science', The Philosophy of Social Explanation A Ryan (ed.), Oxford 1973.

3. Malinowski, quoted by MacIntyre, op cit., note 2, p 16.

4. S.Lukes, 'The Social Determination of Truth', Modes of Thought R.Horton and R.Finnegan (eds.), London 1973.

5. Ibid., p 243.

6. The concept of universalizability, which was used to rescue conceptual relativism from the internal disagreement argument, is analysed above, p 80.

7. Acting in accordance with p in C is of course the same as performing an action of a certain kind in C; for example, acting in accordance with the principle that one ought to help those in distress is simply an alternative description of helping someone in distress.

8. For example, Tristram refrains from seducing Jennifer because she is another man's wife (in fact, Arthur's), but he seduces Isolde, who is married to Mark. So he first of all acts on the general principle 'Never seduce another man's wife', only to act in accordance with a conflicting principle 'Seduce any woman to whom one is attracted' on a later occasion. If he professes to be guided by the first principle he is guilty of deception.

9. See pp 60-7 and 235-8.

10. See pp 81-91 and 106-12.

11. See pp 87-9.

12. Q.Skinner, '"Social Meaning" and the Explanation of Social Action', The Philosophy of History P.Gardiner (ed.), Oxford 1974, p 107.

CHAPTER NINE

1. M.F.D.Young, 'Introduction', Knowledge and Control M.F.D.Young (ed.), London 1971, p 2.

2. N.Keddie, 'Classroom Knowledge', op. cit., note 1, p 139.

3. R.Edgley, 'Education for Industry', Radical Philosophy No 19 Spring 1978, p 23.

4. L.Althusser, 'Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses', Education: Structure and Society B.R.Cosin (ed.), Harmondsworth 1972, p 261.

5. This interpretation is derived from a line of argument pursued in J.A. Clark and H.Freeman, 'Michael Young's Sociology of Knowledge: Criticisms of Philosophers of Education Reconsidered', Journal of Further and Higher Education, Vol. 3 No. 2 Summer 1979. See also G.Dawson, 'Keeping Knowledge under Control', JFHE, Vol. 1 No. 3 Winter 1977; and G.Dawson, 'Reply to John Clark and Helen Freeman', JFHE, Vol.3 No. 3 Autumn 1979.

6. J.A.Clark and H. Freeman, op. cit., note 5.

7. J.L.Austin, How To Do Things With Words', Oxford 1962, pp 1-11, 91, 99-131, 138 and 144-50.

8. See pp 91 and 106-12.

9. G.M.Esland, 'Teaching and Learning as the Organization of Knowledge', op. cit., note 1, 75.

10. For more on subjectivism and truth see chapter four, pages 114-6 and 131-3.

11. Op. cit., note 9, p 75.

12. See pp 81-91 and 106-12.

13. A.G.N.Flew, 'Metaphysical Idealism and the Sociology of Knowledge', Sociology, Equality and Education, London 1976, p 17.

14. R.Pring, 'Knowledge out of Control', Education for Teaching, Autumn 1975.

15. See p 85.

16. J.R.Searle, Speech Acts: An Essay in the Philosophy of Language, Cambridge 1969, p 51.

17. J.L.Mackie, Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong, Harmondsworth 1977, p 26.

18. K.R.Popper, <u>The Open Society and its Enemies: Volume 2 Hegel and Marx</u>, London 1966, p 384.

19. Op. cit., note 17, p 26.

CHAPTER TEN

1. M.F.D.Young, 'Curriculum change: limits and possibilities' in Schooling and Capitalism R.Dale, G.M.Esland and M. MacDonald (eds.), London and Henley 1976, p 185.

2. P.Friere, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Harmondsworth 1972, p 47.

3. I.Illich, Deschooling Society, London 1971, p 74.

4. For a recent statement of this view, see G.C.Allen, The British Disease, London 1976. For a discussion of this and related issues, see M.J.Weiner, English Culture and the Decline of the Industrial Spirit 1850-1980, Cambridge 1981.

5. J.Evetts, The Sociology of Educational Ideas, London and Boston 1973.

6. Ibid., p 11.

7. Ibid., p 44.

8. R.Williams, The Long Revolution, Harmondsworth 1965, pp 145-176.

9. Ibid., p 162.

10. The main contributions can be found in I.Snook (ed.). Concepts of Indoctrination, London 1972.

11. See chapters two and seven, especially pp 47-9.

12. R.Helm, 'Values in Economics', Economics Vol XV Part 1 Spring 1979, p 12.

13. Ibid., p 13.

14. Ibid.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., p 14.

17. See pp 215-40, especially 238-40.

18. J.P.White, 'Indoctrination without doctrines ?' in op.cit., note 10, p 198.

19. M.A.B . Degenhardt, 'Indoctrination' in Philosophy and the Teacher D.I. Lloyd (ed.), London, Henley and Boston 1976, pp 24-25.

20. Ibid., p 24.

21. For an account of locutionary meaning, illocutionary force and perlocutionary effects, see J.L.Austin, How To Do Things With Words, Oxford 1962.

22. Op.cit. note 18.

23. See pp 106-12.

24. P.H. Hirst, 'Liberal education and the nature of knowledge', in Knowledge and the curriculum, London and Boston 1974.

25. Young, for example, argues that the forms of knowledge doctrine 'appears to be based on an absolutist conception of a set of distinct forms of knowledge which correspond closely to the traditional areas of the academic curriculum and thus justify, rather than examine, what are no more than the socio-historic constructs of a particular time.' M.F.D.Young, 'Curricula as Socially Organized Knowledge' in M.F.D. Young (ed.) Knowledge and Control, London 1971, p 23.

26. It is also worth noting that, as Wringe points out, Hirst himself while not amending the number of forms, has altered the labels by which he identifies them. D.S.Wringe, 'Forms of knowledge', op. cit., note 19, p 73.

27. Curriculum 11-16 - Working Papers by H.M.Inspectorate: a contribution to the current debate, Department of Education and Science, December 1977.

28. The areas of experience listed on p 6 of Curriculum 11-16 are as follows: aesthetic and creative, ethical, linguistic, mathematical, physical, scientific, social and political and spiritual. The forms of knowledge are listed in P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters, The Logic of Education, London and Henley 1970, pp 63-64, as follows: logic and mathematics, the physical sciences, knowledge of our own and other minds (including history and the social sciences), moral knowledge, aesthetic knowledge, religious knowledge and philosophical knowledge.

29. P.H.Hirst, 'The forms of knowledge re-visited', op. cit., note 24, p 92.

30. Ibid., p 93.

31. See pp 87-91.

32. See P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters, op.cit.,note 28, p.65.

33. 'Introduction', op.cit., note 25, p 3.

34. A.Brent, Philosophical Foundations for the Curriculum, London 1978.

35. Ibid., p 159.

36. Ibid., p 196.

37. See pp 114-51, especially 140-51.

38. See pp 141-2.

39. See pp 106-12.

40. Op. cit., note 34, p 200.

41. Ibid., pp 200-201.

42. J.D.Marshall, M.Peters and M.Shepheard, 'Brent's Transcendental Arguments for the Forms of Knowledge' in Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol 15 No 2 1981, pp 267-277.

43. Ibid., p 276.

44. Extracted from op. cit., note 34, p 200.

45. Op. cit., note 42, p 276.

46. Ibid.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

1. J.D.Marshall, M. Peters and M. Shepheard, 'Brent's Transcendental Arguments for the Forms of Knowledge' in Journal of Philosophy of Education, Vol 15 No 2 1981, p 274.

2. A.Brent, Philosophical Foundations for the Curriculum, London 1978, p 159.

3. This would make him a coherentist.

4. Op. cit., note 2, p 12.

5. Ibid., p 136.

6. Ibid., p 109.

7. Ibid., p 222.

8. Ibid.

9. R.S.Peters, The Concept of Motivation, London and New York 1958, p 4.

10. Ibid., p 5.

11. D.Davidson, 'Actions, Reasons and Causes' in The Philosophy of Action A.R.White (ed.), Oxford 1968, p 79.

12. Op. cit., note 2, p 200.

13. Ibid.

14. See above p 314.

15. Op.cit. note 2, p 159.

16. In a well-known passage Wittgenstein asks how we learn the meaning of the names of sensations and suggests a possible answer: '... words are connected with the primitive, the natural, expressions of the sensation and used in their place. A child has hurt himself and he cries; and then adults talk to him and teach him exclamations and, later, sentences.' L.Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations, Oxford 1974, para. 244.

17. P.F.Strawson, The Bounds of Sense, London 1975, p 15. The passage from which the quotation is taken is worth citing in full, because in it Strawson accuses Kant of a confusion similar to that imputed to Brent: 'The workings of the human perceptual mechanism, the ways in which our experience is causally dependent on those workings, are matters for empirical, or scientific, not philosophical, investigation. Kant was well aware of this; he knew very

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well that such an empirical inquiry was of a quite different kind from the investigation he proposed into the fundamental structure of ideas in terms of which alone we can make intelligible to ourselves the idea of experience of the world. Yet, in spite of this awareness, he conceived the latter investigation on a kind of strained analogy with the former.'

18. This raises a problem for the objectivity of knowledge, if it is thought to involve the idea that knowledge is objective only if it is an end in itself, for that idea is apparently inconsistent with this definition of rationality. Of course knowledge can be sought as an intrinsic good. But its objectivity is in any case not dependent on this, for knowledge, it was argued in chapter one is both subjective and objective. And questions about the reasons for seeking knowledge apply directly only to knowledge in its subjective sense.

19. See R.Aron, *Main Currents in Sociological Thought 2*, Harmondsworth 1967, pp 186-187.

20. N.Rescher, *The Primacy of Practice*, Oxford 1973, p 136.

21. Ibid., p 137.

22. See pages 108-10.

23. Op. cit., note 16, para. 202.

24. See chapter ten op. cit., notes 24 and 27.

25. See pages 106-12.

26. See pages 147-50.

27. See pages 134-5.

28. P.H.Hirst and R.S.Peters, *The Logic of Education*, London and Henley 1970, p 63.

29. The significance of universalizability has of course been a major issue in recent ethical controversy. See, for example, R.M.Hare, *The Language of Morals*, Oxford 1952 and *Freedom and Reason*, Oxford 1963.

30. See K.Baier, *The Moral Point of View*, New York 1966, pp 93-100.

31. G.E.Moore, *Principia Ethica*, Cambridge 1903, p 188.

32. R.K.Elliott, 'Aestheticism, Imagination and Schooling: a reply to Ruby Meager', *Journal of Philosophy of Education*, Volume 15 Number 1 1981, p 33.

33. See pp 325-7.

34. See pp 324-7.

35. See, for example, M.Haralambos, Sociology: Themes and Perspectives, London 1980, p 487.

36. See op. cit., note 2 pp 104-106; also op cit., note 28, pp 63-4.

37. R.Taylor, Metaphysics, Englewood Cliffs 1963, p 87.

38. And with the account of the philosophical form of knowledge advanced in sections 5.5 and 5.6 of this thesis. See chapter five, especially pp 170-5.

39. And not only among linguistic philosophers. Phenomenologists such as Scheler and Husserl held that man is able to rise above his own "productive activity" and look at what he is doing, as it were, from a distance. He is someone who tries to understand the world and himself.' E.Pivcevic, Husserl and Phenomenology, London 1970, p 102.

40. The claim that objective knowledge organised in accordance with the forms is presupposed by the possibility of rational action receives support from Rawls' influential 'veil of ignorance' argument (J. Rawls, A Theory of Justice, Oxford 1973.) The purpose of that argument is to deduce the principles of justice from a consideration of what rational agents contracting to establish an ideal society would choose as the criteria for evaluating alternative social arrangements. Accordingly, they are placed behind a veil of ignorance: 'They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations (pp 136-7).' Thus, they do not know what their class or social status will be; they do not know how intelligent, strong or otherwise talented they will be; nor do they know what values they will hold and what temperament they will have; finally, they are kept in ignorance as to the level of culture and civilization of their future society and the generation to which they will belong. On the other hand, they do know 'general facts about human nature (p 137).' Economic theory, political affairs, social arrangements and psychological laws are all known to them, for without background knowledge of that kind the selection of the principles of justice will not be fully rational. For instance, it is a 'consideration against a conception of justice that in

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view of the laws of moral psychology, men would not acquire a desire to act upon it even when the institutions of their society satisfied it (p 138).' Now this is an important point, because Rawls is, by implication, claiming that it is necessary for rational beings to have access to objective knowledge, if they are to construct a just society, which is surely a paradigm of rational action in the world as we know it.

CONCLUSION

1. See pages 5-8.

2. See page 5.

3. See sections 1.4 and 1.5, pp 37-44.

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