

# **Truth and Objectivity:A Study with Reference to Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty**

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By  
Ajay Mohan M  
11HPPH01



Department of Philosophy  
School of Humanities  
University of Hyderabad  
Hyderabad- 500046  
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## CERTIFICATE

This is to certify that Mr. Ajay Mohan M has carried out the research work embodied in this dissertation titled 'Truth and Objectivity: A Study with Reference to Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty' for the partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophy from the University of Hyderabad my supervision.

I declare to the best of my knowledge that no part of this dissertation has been submitted either in part or in full for the award of any degree to any other university or institute of learning.

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Place: Hyderabad  
Supervisor)

Prof. R. C Pradhan  
(Research

Head  
Department of Philosophy

Dean  
School of Humanities

## DECLARATION

I, Ajay Mohan M hereby declare that this thesis entitled ‘Truth and Objectivity: A Study with Reference to Donald Davidson and Richard Rorty’ submitted by me under the guidance of Prof. R. C Pradhan is a bonafide research work which is also free from plagiarism. I also declare that it has not been submitted previously in part or in full to this University or any other University or Institution for the award of any degree or diploma. I hereby agree that my thesis can be deposited in Shodganga/INFLIBNET.

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*To my sister,*

*Sreedevi Mohan*

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## **Introduction**

The title of my thesis is 'Truth and Objectivity: A Study with Reference to Davidson and Rorty'. As the title indicates my thesis is about the two fundamental notions in philosophy of language, such as Truth and Objectivity. Though my primary field of enquiry is philosophy of language other areas of philosophy are also dealt with during the study.

This work focuses on the question about truth and objectivity: How are truth and objectivity possible? This is one of the age old questions in philosophy. I am narrowing it down to two of the most influential thinkers of the post-Quineian analytic philosophy- Richard Rorty and Donald Davidson. These two thinkers were constantly engaging with each other regarding the problems of truth as well as of objectivity. They were holding diametrically opposite views.

After Quine and Later Wittgenstein, the techniques of doing philosophy of language started to deviate drastically. The structural and ontological understanding of language itself is being revised during this time. The ontological status of meaning is discarded the arrival of naturalism. As a part of this whole revision in philosophy of language, the notions of truth and objectivity were also being challenged. Richard Rorty was one among those who challenged objectivity and tried to replace it with something else. Rorty's challenge was so intense since he questioned the very idea of language-world relationship by rejecting the idea of representation. Donald Davidson was also

against the atomistic representational picture of language. However, he brings back the language-world relation and thus objectivity.

Truth and objectivity are two fundamental issues in philosophy in general and in philosophy of language in particular. What is the relation between these two notions? The word 'objectivity' has been differently explained by different philosophers. The 'objectivity' I am dealing with in my thesis is the product of language-world relationship. Since truth has the fundamental occupation as the monitor of the language-world relationship, objectivity and truth go together in the same logical space.

There are five chapters in my thesis. The first chapter focuses on the background of the questions related to truth and objectivity. The second chapter deals with the philosophical reflections of Donald Davidson with regard to truth and objectivity. The third deals with Richard Rorty's views on them. In the fourth chapter I look through some of the prominent responses to these thinkers by their contemporaries. The fifth is the final chapter and in it I give my defence of the notions of truth and objectivity.

The first chapter engages with the historical and theoretical treatments of two issues: the relationship between language and world and our accessibility to it. This chapter has two parts. The first part deals with the relation between language and world and the second part deals with the relation between truth and language.

Philosophers have always tried to establish a theory that explains the relation between language and world. Plato did it by the theory of predication. For him a sentence is



true if the predicate is present in the subject. Rene Descartes differentiated the mental and physical as mutually exclusive categories. This dualistic theory made the language-world relationship notoriously difficult to theorize.

In the beginning of twentieth century, Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell tried to resolve the problem of language and world by studying the structure of language. Ludwig Wittgenstein followed this pattern of analysing language and provided a detailed metaphysics in his book *Tractatus LogicoPhilosophicus*. In that book he shows how language and world are connected by sharing the same logical structure. For him, sentences in a language correspond to facts and words are related to 'objects'.

In *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein mentions the importance of self in the language-world relationship. When it comes to *Philosophical Investigations* the self becomes the most important aspect of the language-world relation. He also focuses on the social situatedness of the language. But this social situated character of language makes it difficult to theorize and summarize.

In *Philosophical Investigations*, the content of language is shown as social in character. Wittgenstein replaces the atomistic picture of language with a holistic one. Though we theorized the structure as holistic and content as social, connecting language with world was remained a core issue.

Meanwhile, the other part of the story, the issue of truth was theorized and rejected by different philosophers. Notably, Friedrich Nietzsche presented a perspectival view of truth. He historicized the notion of truth. Within the three categories of world,

language and self, truth can be understood either as a concept related to language and world or as a concept related to language and self or as a concept connected to the relation among sentences.

The second chapter focuses on Davidson's views on truth and objectivity. This chapter has four parts. Davidson was influenced by Tarski and Quine. First part deals with these influences. In the second part, I focus on his metaphysical theories. In the third part, I focus on some of his epistemological ideas. In the last part, I explain his major contributions to philosophy of language.

Davidson rejects the theory of complete indeterminacy by two arguments. First argument is that in order to make sense of the indeterminacy of translation, we need a Meta concept, namely truth-condition. The second is that if we relativize reference, ontology is no longer in trouble.

Rejection of the theory of scheme-content distinction is central to Davidson's philosophy. This theory says that scheme and content are distinct from each other. This is entrenched in the very notion of language-world relationship. Davidson attacks this distinction between the conceptual scheme and its contents. His rejection of the scheme-content distinction is based on the idea that we cannot satisfactorily explain how a scheme is connected with content or vice versa without invoking one another.

Davidson holds the view that the belief goes always along with language. He rejects anything like a 'language of thought', but accepts that the language and thought go together. According to Davidson, in order to have a belief one must be a rational

animal. In order to say someone is a rational animal she must be working with a holistic framework of belief. For him, beliefs always constitute a system. He rejects the correspondence theory of truth and knowledge. Instead of that he introduces a form of coherence theory. Another important theory in Davidson's epistemology is his rejection of massive error. The coherent system he suggests is of such a form that as a whole it is correct. That is, there may be false sentences in the system; most of the sentences in the system are true.

There are three major concepts he uses to explain the nature of language. One is that it is learnable. Any human beings, with their limited capabilities, are able to learn and use language. The structure of a language is holistic, i.e., it exists as an interconnected web. The third idea is that the language is indefinable. Since it is difficult to demarcate scheme and content, it is difficult to figure out the nature of language.

Davidson gives a meaning theory using Tarski's truth theory. For him, we could figure out the meaning of a sentence using truth conditions. A relativized version of T-schema could work as a meaning theory for natural languages.

The third chapter is an overview of Rorty's philosophical concerns regarding truth and objectivity. This chapter has four sections. The first section deals with his idea of philosophy. The second deals with his position called anti-essential nominalism. The third section deals with his version of pragmatism and the last section deals with his ideas about truth and objectivity.

Nominalism is a metaphysical view that there are no universal and abstract entities.

What exist are particulars or concrete objects. Rorty subscribes to one kind of nominalism. For him it is the non-essential linguistic entities that exist. This position is based on his two philosophical theories. One is his rejection of epistemology and the other is his theory of contingency.

Rorty believes that epistemic gap between mind and world is the result of the epistemology we were undertaking. The best solution for epistemic gap is the dismissal of epistemology. He argues for this by rejecting the representationalism. On the basis of Quine's rejection of analyticity, Sellars's rejection of 'the Given' and Davidson's rejection of scheme-content distinction, Rorty arrives at the position that the language cannot be seen as a representation of the world.

The other part of Rorty's nominalism is his theory of contingency. For him, language, world and self are contingent. For him, language develops through history. On the process of history some vocabularies are used more than the other. Such vocabularies become the central concepts in language.

Pragmatism for Rorty is an anti-essentialist position. His pragmatism does not entertain ahistoricessentialistic truth. Pragmatists would not believe that objects behave as constraints on understanding of truth and that truth reveals itself only to the scientists. For Rorty, his pragmatism is not a form of relativism but of ethnocentrism.

The ethnocentrism is the view that truth is decided by ethnic justificatory mechanisms. According to Rorty, we knowingly or unknowingly think in terms of our

ethnic community. Even the scientific explanations are influenced by it. Justification happens as a collective acceptability of the concept concerned. Our feeling of being connected to a community is the basis of this form of justification. This feeling is the feeling of solidarity.

Truth, for Rorty, is a norm like good which could be explained using culture and history. Truth is a creation of human beings because language is a creation of human beings and truth is a part of language. Justification is the criterion of something being true. Objectivity, on the other hand, can be replaced by solidarity.

Chapter Four is an explication of the philosophical underpinnings of the Rorty-Davidson debate. In this chapter I focus on three philosophers who are included in this debate: Hilary Putnam, John McDowell and Robert Brandom.

Hilary Putnam connects truth with rationality. Truth, according to Putnam is what is rationally acceptable. Truth should be based on an ideal condition of rational acceptability. For him, language and world are constitutive of each other.

John McDowell brings back the Kantian project in epistemology. He inquires about the possibility of the tribunal of experience. His concept of objectivity is based on how our thoughts are answerable to the world. He agrees to many of Rorty's basic ideas but disagrees to his ideas of truth and objectivity.

Robert Brandom tried to rework pragmatism using normativity. He connects his pragmatism with semantic practices. Semantics, for him, comes under pragmatism

because pragmatism is the study of human acts and semantics is the study of the act of asserting sentences. Pragmatism, for him, is limited by rationality and rationality has to be explained in terms of normativity. Normativity has to be explained within a social system.

In the final chapter, I present my analysis and defence of truth and objectivity. Rorty's project fails because it is impossible to theorize language and social practices without presupposing truth and objectivity. Davidson's project will work given its commitment to truth and objectivity. I argue for truth and objectivity as indispensable normative conditions of the function of language.

## **Chapter 1**

### **Background of the problem of Objectivity and Truth**

2.0211 If the world had no substance, then whether a proposition had sense would depend on whether another proposition was true.

2.0212 In that case we could not sketch any picture of the world (true or false)

-L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus LogicoPhilosophicus*

#### **Introduction**

Throughout the history of philosophy, people tried to fix or loosen the notion of truth in both ethics and in epistemology. Till twentieth century metaphysics and logic were the major methodological tools for doing this. In the twentieth century philosophy of language began to play the leading role, keeping metaphysics aside.

Language will not provide its all easiness when we make historical studies. We, then, look into a society's cultural, political and epistemic presuppositions in order to figure out the meaning of a word. The words 'truth' and 'objectivity' were also conglomerated with many conceptual alternatives because these were understood from different standpoints by the realists and the anti-relists.

#### **I. The Question of Objectivity**

Objectivity is the notion that the thought and language of a subject does not alter the nature of the world. In terms of the objectivity, truth should be understood as the relation between the language and the world outside. There are two major questions involved in the Objectivity issue. First one is regarding the relation between language and the world. Whether there is a relation at all between them? If yes, what could be its nature and if not, why not?

The second question concerns the accessibility of objectivity. My study presupposes the idea that language is the major medium to access the reality and the truth is the operational concept to demarcate real from what is not real. Now the question is what is truth? How a sentence gets a truth value?

These two questions are apparently connected to each other. There is a set of concepts that are logically associated with these two questions.

## **II. The Language and the World**

It is after Gottlob Frege that the philosophical world turned the nature and scope of language analysis. This idea itself is suggested as a technique to overcome the apparent epistemological and metaphysical issues. The central concern behind this is that language is the one and only medium through which we can access the world.

The medium in the middle, the receiver and the object that is received constitute the picture that is supposed as the preliminary step to understand this project.



Interestingly, language appeared to be a clearer notion than the other two. Language seems to dominate all our thinking about the world and even our self. That is why analytic philosophy took language as its subject-matter for analysis.

There are two definite contents of our notion of language. They are the sentences and their constituent parts, i.e., words. Philosophy of language discusses the relation between these two components.

## **II. 1. The Dichotomy**

Every sentence logically presupposes some metaphysics or other. At least almost all of them presuppose an object-property relation. The changes in the metaphysical outlooks possibly affect our language use. Sometimes our language adapts the new theme and sometimes it shows it as an anomaly or contradiction.

Early Greek thinker Parmenides believed in ontological continuity. He found that although the opposite forces moving away from each other, the unity continues to sustain in the world. This deep ontological principle is the absolute reality for him. It is complete and changeless. He says: “It has a farthest limit, it is complete on every side, like the mass of a round sphere, equally poised from the centre in every direction; for it cannot be greater or smaller in one place than in another”<sup>1</sup>

The existence is to be understood in his system as a part of reality. The non-existence, on the other hand, is another part of reality. In the dualist opposition in the world non-

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1 Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, (Adam&Charles Black, London, 1930), p. 176

existence serves as the opposite counter part of existence. That means non-existence is not unreal for him. The unreal is something that cannot be understood. For him, “What is not cannot be named.”<sup>2</sup> That which cannot be named is unreal. If something is conceivable, it is real and nameable. There cannot be a name that which does not denote anything. He uses “being”, “not-being”, “becoming” and “perishing” as naming expressions.<sup>3</sup>

This theory might not be compatible with our current understanding of language. The modern notions of truth and falsity of a sentence are very much related to the notions of the ‘real’ and ‘unreal’. All of this could be explained as the after effect of considering a logical relation between name and real. When we come to Plato this is more systematically presented. He was concerned about the object-property relation.

Plato was of the view that only by establishing a correct explanation of the relation between property and the object; we can be justified in using our sentences of subject-predicate form. For him, a true sentence is true because the predicate is present in the subject. So predicate and object must be ontologically available in order to make a sentence true. There is no option to discard the truth in a true proposition. So apparently it follows that the denotation of predicate really exists. This theory presupposes what we call 'ontological predication', i.e., the predicated subject is one of the participants of the provided predicated form or set.

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2 Greaser, “On Language, Thought and Reality in Ancient Greek Philosophy”, *Dialectica*, Vol. 31, No 3-4 (1977)

3 Vlastos, *Platonic studies* (princeton U P, 1973), p. 238

The topic of subject and object had a different schematic structure in the Greek age from that of the Cartesian or modern structure. Greek philosophical tradition has its roots in what is known as materialistic monism. Their search was after the key element of the world. The search then extended to the non-material objects also. The entire world is considered as alive in some sense. Everything including human beings is understood as a part of it. This picture is at the background of the Greek way of philosophising.

The concept of a 'mysterious Nature' of the Greek age was replaced by the concept of a 'material World' in the modern age. Rene Descartes differentiated subject and object as mutually exclusive categories. The mind is non-material, non-extending and thinking category and matter as non-mental, non-thinking and extending category. This assumption was followed by the question regarding their connection. If they cannot be connected, knowledge is impossible. If any of them is explained to have the upper hand in the process, the other can be tragically explained away.

In the beginning of the twentieth century, when Language became the primary philosophical concern to some philosophers, both of these problems (that of the predication and of the mind-matter dualism) were presumed to be answered. Frege's problem was to see how the same referent can have different meanings in different contexts. Names and descriptions are for him referring expressions. Any name is understood based on its mode of presentation, which is in other words, its sense. Bertrand Russell agreed with Frege that the names and descriptions have the status, without being referring expressions. For him, the only proper referential tools are those of the ostensive expressions like, 'this' and 'that'. Wittgenstein of the

*Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* has advanced this theory with a detailed metaphysics including a fact-ontology. He imagined language as a picture of reality in which the words corresponds to the objects and the sentences corresponds to facts.

## **II. 1. A. Words and Objects**

The primary mechanism, the early philosophers of language founded to solve the problem of language-world dualism is to provide a theory of reference. A theory of reference is a justification enough to imagine that the language has a grip on the world. In the entry on 'Reference' in *Encyclopaedia of Philosophy*, Timothy Williamson defines reference as "Reference is usually conceived as the central relation between language or thought and the world. To talk or think about something is to refer to it."<sup>4</sup> These referential theories proceeded with the assumption that two main categories of language such as words and sentence refer to object and fact respectively. John Stuart Mill had a direct reference theory. A direct reference theory is a theory that a word would refer to the concerned object directly, without mediation. Frege introduced a different theory of reference which is known as the descriptive theory, which says that in order to pin point the reference the word should be associated with a proper description of the object.

Frege's famous paper, 'On Sense and Reference' starts with a question regarding the identity statements. With an intense analysis he concludes that some identity relations

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4 Williamson, 'Entry: Reference', *Encyclopedia of Philosophy, Second Edition, Volume 8* (Ed.

Chief. Donald M. Borchert, Macmillan Reference USA, An imprint of Thomas Gale, a part of thomas Corporation, Detroit, New York, 2006), p.288

(such as  $a=b$ ) are synthetic statements which has informative content and their difference is due to the difference in their way of presentation that is sense.<sup>5</sup>

For Frege both name and sentence have reference and sense. “A proper name (word, sign, sign combination, expression) expresses its sense, stands for or designates its reference. By means of a sign we express its sense and designate its reference.”<sup>6</sup>

Further, he writes:

The regular connexion between a sign, its sense, and its reference is of such a kind that to the sign there corresponds a definite sense and to that in turn a definite reference, while to a given reference (an object) there may have more than one sign. The same sense has different expressions in different languages or even in the same language. To be sure, exceptions to this regular behaviour occur.<sup>7</sup>

According to Russell, there are two ways we can know about something. Things that are available to someone directly are knowable through her acquaintance with that. Those things that are not directly available to her are known through the descriptions associated with it.<sup>8</sup>

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5 Frege, “On Sense and Reference”, in *Meaning*, Ed. Mark Richard, (Blackwell Publishers Inc, Malden, Massachusetts, 2003), p. 36

6 Ibid, p. 40

7 Ibid, p.38

8 Russell, “Knowledge by Acquaintance & Knowledge by Description”, in *The Problems of Philosophy* (Henry Holt and Company, New York, Williams and Norgate, London, 1912)

The knowledge by acquaintance is immediate knowledge which is available to us through sense-data. Sense-data, for Russell, are the entities we receive from an object. We can have different kind of acquaintance to know different kind of things. We can have an acquaintance of a thing based on our memory. We introspectively acquire the knowledge about our own mental things. We can have acquaintance of universals such as Indians, philosophers etc.

The knowledge by description is the knowledge we get through a detailed description of something. There are two varieties of description, one is definite description which is of the form 'the so and so' and the other is indefinite description which is of the form 'a so and so'.

Proper names, for Russell, are encapsulated descriptions. But he holds the view that there are logical proper names which are not encapsulated descriptions. Logical proper names are the ostensive expressions like 'this' and 'that'. As per Russell's analysis, it is through these logical proper names that we referentially connect to the world.

In *TractatusLogico-Philosophicus*,<sup>9</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein gives a detailed metaphysical theory in which language and world share same logical form. For him, a sentence can be decomposed into its constituents, the words or names. These names refer to 'objects'. These Tractarian objects are simples, which cannot be further divided. Similarly the names are also simple symbols. Objects are the building blocks

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9 Wittgenstein, *TractatusLogicoPhilosophicus*, Tr. D. F Pears & B. F McGuinness, (Routledge, Routledge Classics, London, New York, 2001)

of the world. These objects are necessary conditions of this world but their combination is contingent. Wittgenstein says in the Tractatus:

2.02 Objects are simple.

2.021 Objects make up the substance of the world. That is why  
they cannot be composite.

2.014 Objects contain the possibility of all situations.

2.0141 The possibility of its occurring in states of affairs is the form of an object.

For Wittgenstein we do not give same name to two objects or one name to two objects. These names have reference but no sense.

Imagine a possible format of language where words are syntactic signs which are in themselves devoid of any semantical properties. In order to make these signs capable of referring to an object outside the domain of language, it is needed to provide a set of directions so that it could be able to differentiate the object from its neighbourhood. Wittgenstein's names are not equivalent with the common usage of 'words'. These are signs which are connected to the objects based on the idea that they share same logical scheme.

## **II. 1. B. Sentences and Facts**

Sentence is commonly understood as a connected set of words which has a complete meaning. Though it has two neighbouring concepts such as propositions and utterances my primary focus is on the concept of sentence as such. Some philosophers make a distinction between propositions and sentences. Since my primary worry here

is the structure of language and the relation between its two elements (words and sentences), I prefer to use sentence to propositions.

In his criticisms of Russell, P. F Strawson gives an explanation that the truth value of a sentence is required only if the presuppositions of that sentence is suggestive of a positive reference. We can see this idea in Frege's 'On Sense and Reference' when he says, "... the reference of a sentence may always be sought, whenever the reference of its components involved; and that this is the case when and only when we are inquiring after the truth value."<sup>10</sup> Frege says that we do not want to be concerned about the truth value of a sentence which is primarily a work of art.

With regard to the declarative sentences Frege says that their reference is a matter of concern for the truth value of a sentence. He says, "We are therefore driven into accepting the *truth value* of a sentence as constituting its reference. By truth value of a sentence I understand the circumstance that it is true or false. .... Every declarative sentence concerned with the reference of its words is therefore to be regarded as a proper name, and its reference, if it has one, is either the True or False."<sup>11</sup> So for Frege a sentence has reference just like names has reference. The reference of a sentence is its truth value.

Russell held the view that if the statement has a definite description, that implies that it has a reference and thus it has a truth value. The Wittgenstein of *TractatusLogico-*

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10 Frege, "On Sense and Reference", in *Meaning*, Ed. Mark Richard, (Blackwell Publishers Inc, Malden, Massachusetts, 2003), p. 42

11 Ibid.



*Philosophicus* follows Russell in the idea that a sentence must have a truth value. For Wittgenstein a sentence refers to fact. A fact is a possible connection of Tractarian objects. (“Logic deals with every possibility and all possibilities are its facts.”) These facts are independent of each other.

- 2                   What is the case—a fact—is the existence of states of affairs.
- 2.01             A state of affairs (a state of things) is a combination of objects (things).
- 2.061           States of affairs are independent of one another.
- 2.062           From the existence or non-existence of one state of affairs it is impossible to infer the existence or non- existence of another.

Just like the names stands for the Tractarian objects sentences stands for facts. These sentences work like a picture of the fact. For Wittgenstein, this picturing is the fundamental nature of language. The pictorial form, i.e., the structure of the picture shows the possible arrangement of the objects through the elements of the picture. That is how language gets connected to the world.

- 2.1               We picture facts to ourselves.
- 2.151           Pictorial form is the possibility that things are related to one another in the same way as the elements of the picture.
- 2.1511          That is how a picture is attached to reality; it reaches right out to it.
- 2.1512          It is laid against reality like a measure.

In a nutshell, there are two main conceptions of Language available in the early

analytical tradition. One is a tool conception in which language is a tool to refer to the world. Frege and Russell are holding this position. The other view is that the language is a mirror of the world.

## II. 2. The Self

The *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* could have a Kantian reading in which Tractarian 'I' is comparable with the transcendental unity of apperception. The Tractarian 'I' can be understood as an uniting factor of language in which the form of world is represented. But in a formal sense, the relation between language and world happens because of the very nature of these two categories. They are interested in the logical connections possible between language and world without the aid of any kind of psychologic enterprise. The Tractarian 'I' has little role to play in the logical relation between language and the world.

Plato had a concept of soul and rebirth. In his theory of recollection soul is the agency possessing true knowledge. But the concept of soul in Greek period is not identical with the modern understanding of that concept. In Aristotle's 'De Anima', he explains soul as the principle of animal life. Aristotle's theory of soul could be understood better through his theory of substance. Aristotle says, "Of natural bodies some have life in them, others not; by life we mean self-nutrition and growth. It follows that every natural body which has life in it is a substance in the sense of composite."<sup>12</sup> With Rene Descartes the self becomes an epistemic agent. David Hume

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12 Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book II, 15, Tr. McKeon, Richard, *The Basic Works of Aristotle* (Random House, New York, 1941), p. 555

was sceptical about an empirically unavailable self, whereas Immanuel Kant considered it as a principle of unifying experiences.

In contrast with Kant's subject, G.W.F Hegel construed the self as a historical element. There were two kinds of understandings of self after Kant. One is self in itself which has an essential structure and the other is a construction of social and historical circumstances.

Edmund Husserl, in his phenomenological method, reinstates an essentialistic concept of self. The phenomenology is a method to establish proper scientific mechanism by taking recourse to the pre-reflective awareness of the given world. For Husserl this experience of the given is possible because of the self.

## **II. 2. A. Aboutness: Reference as a human activity**

Wittgenstein of the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* held a view that the limits of language are the limits of the world and the language is limited by the self. What if this self has a social dimension? Then language becomes a social enterprise. Wittgenstein of the *Philosophical Investigations* reflects upon the social dimension of language and self.

While explaining language use as a social enterprise, Wittgenstein introduces the idea of 'form of life'. The idea of 'form of life' has to be understood in contrast with the social agreement notion of truth. There is a theory that truth is nothing but social agreement. That is the society will come to an agreement that some concepts and

norms are valid. A sentence gets its truth value based on how the society decided about its validity. Social agreement theorists oppose the idea that truth lies in the correspondence between language and world. The idea of 'form of life' is also an idea which does not accept the correspondence theory of truth. But it is not satisfied with the idea that social agreement is the foundation of truth. 'Form of life' is a concept that the use of language is a part of our very life itself. The concept of life is associated only with the concept of language use. Using language is an act of living itself. As Wittgenstein says:

241. "So you are saying that human agreement decides what is true and what is false?"—It is what human beings say that is true and false; and they agree in the language they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life.<sup>13</sup>

### **II. 3. Nature of Language**

One worry which could persist in the social situatedness of language is regarding the exact ontological status of language. Language is ontologically allied with subject and the world. If language is taken as a separate ontological category, then only there could be a relation between self and the world through language.

As a part of accepting the dynamism of language, there are two major ideas developed. One is that of accepting the social nature of language. Instead of translating the form of language to formal systems, it can be seen as a social enterprise. The contingencies involved in a socially situated language cannot be

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13 Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, Tr. G. E. M Anscombe, (Basil Blackwell Ltd, Oxford, 1958), p. 88

ruled out.

The other idea is that of the relations among the sentences in a language. A sentence is said to be connected to other sentences. Such a theory is popularly called as 'Holism'.

### **II. 3. A. Language as a Social Enterprise**

When human beings are taken to be understood as social creatures, the language they use may also be social. In fact, its reverse, just because the language they use is social, humans are social, also may be correct. If that is the case, being social and being linguistic go together.

There is a theoretical formulation by Wittgenstein of the idea that language cannot be non-social. He explains that a person cannot have a language of his own, which cannot be understood by others.

262. It might be said: if you have given yourself a private definition of a word, then you must inwardly undertake to use the word in such- and-such a way. And how do you undertake that? Is it to be assumed that you invent the technique of using the word; or that you found it ready-made?<sup>14</sup>

A private language is of the form that the words in that language must be private. Only a single person can be able to use it. It is a situation in which a collection of letters is taken to be a word by a person and that word has a meaning which he only knows. For Wittgenstein, that explanation is counter-intuitive to our concept of

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14 Ibid, p. 93

language.

The private language argument has two dimensions. One is the referential dimension, which is concerned with the public availability of objects. If language is not private, then the objects it refers also cannot be private. When a sentence is used it tells something about some state of affairs. Understanding that sentence means being aware of the state of affair it concerns.

275. Look at the blue of the sky and say to yourself "How blue the sky is!"—When you do it spontaneously—without philosophical intentions—the idea never crosses your mind that this impression of colour belongs only to you. And you have no hesitation in exclaiming that to someone else. And if you point at anything as you say the words you point at the sky. I am saying: you have not the feeling of pointing-into-yourself, which often accompanies 'naming the sensation' when one is thinking about 'private language'. Nor do you think that really you ought not to point to the colour with your hand, but with your attention. (Consider what it means "to point to something with the attention".)<sup>15</sup>

276. But don't we at least mean something quite definite when we look at a colour and name our colour-impression? It is as if we detached the colour-impression from the object, like a membrane. (This ought to arouse our suspicions.)<sup>16</sup>

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15 Ibid. p. 96

16 Ibid.

The other dimension of the theory is that the language is social. The meaning of a word lies in its use. All human beings are potentially capable of using every word. All human beings are potentially capable of understanding the meaning of every word. The structure of language lies in the expression of it.

### **II. 3. B. Language as an Interconnected Network**

Holism is a theory about how language is connected within itself. Language is a system in which syntactic and semantic entities are available. Holism explains how the sentences are systematically and semantically part of a network.

The holistic theory proposed by W.V.O Quine is that if the meaning of a sentence is to be understood then the other related sentences should be checked. In that sense the entire language is an interconnected network. For Quine sentences constitute a corporate body which semantically face the tribunal of sense-experience.<sup>17</sup> The corporate body of experience is something logically attained. The mathematical and logical propositions occupy in the central place in the system. The contingent sentences stay in the periphery.

In a nutshell, what could be understood regarding language as a system is that language is a dynamic system. It is constantly in interaction with the society and the

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17 See Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism", *The Philosophical Review* 60 (1951): 20-43.

Reprinted in W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Harvard University Press, 1953; second, revised, edition 1961)

human knowledge. It is not only a medium or a tool or a mirror which connects to 'outside world'. It is something more as components the totality of human behaviour vis-a-vis the world.

### **III. Truth and Language**

Protagoras had a theory which is seemingly similar to the modern subjective relativist theories. One of the major doctrines which is in the form of a dictum by him is, "man is the measure of all things." Plato interprets this as an individual belief, whatever it may be, can be explained to have a truth value. Protagoras is a sophist who teaches rhetoric and oratory to students. Protagoras was very much influenced by Heraclitus. If everything is in the state of flux, the truth value of a statement also changes. So truth is not a permanent concept. Thus we could explain any statement as true or false.

Plato tries to demolish this theory by a peritrope argument (reverse argument). Plato says that man is the measure doctrine implies that everyone can have their own truth claims. It is possible that same claim can be true for one person and false for another one. Since 'man is the measure', you cannot deny the truth value of another person's claim. So the dictum itself spoils the theory of Protagoras, since it allows itself being false.

But Plato's peritrope is valid only on the basis of the dictum being a declarative sentence with a truth value. If the theory denies the assertion of truth value then there is no point in saying that the dictum has the truth value.



Aristotle criticises Protagoras differently. His line of argument is based on the assumption that Protagoras believes that something can be thought differently by different people. Like the same wind can be felt by someone as hot and someone else as cool, or something can be beautiful to someone and ugly to someone else. Aristotle's way out to this problem is consulting an expert. The many views about the same thing, for him, are deviations due to the subjective limitations. A mature healthy person's opinion should be taken as correct about the nature of weather as against the opinion of a person of ill-health or immature. Similarly in the case of knowledge we should follow a rational man's opinion.

In the post-Kantian German philosophical scenario Friedrich Nietzsche presented a view of nihilism. Nihilism is the view that there is no foundation to knowledge and ethics. The only foundation world has is by given by us. There is no essential structure or objectivity in the world. All the moral and epistemological concepts are a product of the defective Western culture.

Human beings respond in two different ways to the nihilistic reality he is encircled with. Nietzsche calls those who respond in two ways as intuitive man and rational man. Intuitive man engages in artistic pursuits and the rational man in scientific endeavours. For Nietzsche both forms of engagements are a cover over the bitter reality of world. Both are a result of man's desire to overcome the foundationless world. "There are ages in which the rational man and intuitive man stand side by side, on one in fear of intuition, the other with scorn for abstraction. The latter is just as irrational as the former is inartistic. They both desire to rule over the life: the former,

by knowing how to meet his principal needs by means of foresight, prudence and regularity; the latter, by disregarding these needs and, as an “overjoyed hero,” counting as real only that life which has been disguised as illusion and beauty.”<sup>18</sup>

Both of these men are interested in portraying human intellect. Whenever humans try to find out the foundations he fails. He understands the floating foundationless concepts. For Nietzsche human intellect can only do this and not beyond this. So in his terms, human intellect is “shadowy,” “transient,” “aimless,” and “arbitrary”<sup>19</sup>

In order to revive itself from this nihilistic existence, the intellect dissimulates itself. The intellect stick on to its pride that it can know things. For this, pride leads to deception. This “art of dissimulation” becomes the convention and society blindly follows it. Though it is difficult from the “continuous fluttering around the *solitary* flame of vanity” to an urge to know the truth, humans has a desire to go beyond this illusions. In Nietzsche's terms, it is the “war of each against all” (*bellum omni contra omnes*)<sup>20</sup> that necessitates us to desire for truth. As a peace treaty with the society man starts to provide meaning to the enterprises he is engaging in as a part of it he creates a concept of reality. The tool he uses for that is language.

Nietzsche uses the concept of truth mainly in two senses. One is the truth that the world is nihilistic. As per the philosophical system Nietzsche created, it is through the

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18 Nietzsche, *Philosophy and Truth: Selections from Nietzsche's Notebooks of the early 1870's* (Ed. & Tr.: Daniel Breazeale, Humanities Press, New Jersey, 1993), p. 90

19 Ibid, p. 79

20 Ibid, p. 81

dissolution of pride of knowledge that we can accept the nihilistic world. Another sense of truth is the concept we created as a part of engaging with the illusory world and as a part of giving meanings and foundations to the knowledge we collected because of the pride of intellect.

It is with the urge for truth that humans try to construct a theory of meaning. The sentences are true because the meanings are real. A word in Nietzsche's terms, "is the copy in sound of a nerve stimulus."<sup>21</sup> Because of the urge for truth, meaning of each word becomes objective or real. Humans formulate concepts from words through their place in the constructed fabric of illusion. By doing so the experience which is the cause of that word is denied. "Every word instantly becomes a concept precisely insofar as it is not supposed to serve as a reminder of the unique and entirely individual original experience to which it owes its origin; but rather a word becomes a concept insofar as it simultaneously has to fit countless more or less similar cases- which means, purely and simply, cases which are never equal and thus altogether unequal."<sup>22</sup> A concept is formed by discarding the differences between the occurrences of similar things. So it is through a two sided process a concept is formed. One is discarding the small differences and the other is accepting the big differences between that and other things. Humans make these concepts as some kind of objective things, as 'occult qualities'.

Nietzsche does not think that in itself words are not intimately connected to objects. Reference, for him, is a much diluted concept because there is no necessity involved

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21 Ibid, p.81

22 Ibid, p.83

in the word-object relation. Apart from the fact that our urge for truth tries to provide necessity regarding this relation, word in itself is free from object. Words in that sense are not literal but metaphorical. Truth itself is a part of a system of metaphors. He says:

What then is truth? A movable host of metaphors, metonymies and anthropomorphisms: in short a sum of human relations which have been poetically and rhetorically intensified, transferred, and embellished, and which after long usage seem to a people to be fixed, canonical, and binding. Truths are illusions which we have forgotten are illusions; they are metaphors that have become worn out and have been drained of sensuous force, coins which have lost their embossing and are now considered as metals and no longer as coins.<sup>23</sup>

There are two different ways human beings construct the language-world relation. One is with a scientific temperament seeking objective reality. The other is with an artistic bend of mind seeking happiness and concept of beauty. All his constructions are the product of boredom he faces in the society and the necessity he wanted to achieve in his relations with world.

From the Greek philosopher who considered a necessary word-object relation to the post-Kantian historicist tradition and its culmination in Nietzsche's thoughts, the concept of truth gets different modes and functions. The concept of truth is encircled by the concepts of subject, language, world society. Truth could be understood in terms of the relations among these categories.

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23 Ibid.

1. Truth can be seen as a concept that is connected to the relation between language and world. If language is able to present the world as it is then sentences in the language can be said to be true. If the world is understood solely in terms of language, then also we can say that sentences are true to world.
2. Truth can be understood as a concept connected to the relation between subject and language. If the subject possesses a set of pre-linguistic or non-linguistic thoughts and it is depicted perfectly in language, this language could said to be truthful to the thoughts.
3. Truth can be seen as an acceptable relation between sentences. Among the possible relations of the sentences the logically coherent set or sets can provide a justification to a sentence. This justification can be further understood as a concept of truth.

#### **IV. The question of Objectivity Revisited**

As an attempt to understand the possibility of objectivity in terms of truth and its relation with the concept of language, many possible suggestions are proposed by philosophers. These suggestions have their drawbacks. These drawbacks collectively merge into a paradox which these theories failed to explain. If a dualistic metaphysics is maintained, it is difficult to connect the two concepts and if we try for a monistic metaphysics it is epistemologically difficult to differentiate the concepts. The paradox

is that we intuitively believe that there is language but we are not able to provide an adequate theory to explain the nature of it. If so, what is our justification to use the concept of language? And what could be the status of truth in the light of this dilemma. And also what could be the notion of objectivity?

## **Conclusion**

The concept of truth is intimately connected to the concepts of language and world. Both Davidson and Rorty maintain many positions that are anticipated by other philosophers. Both of them improves upon these ideas and provide interesting new ideas. Even they share many positions. But they stay in two different corners of this discussion. That, I think, makes a study upon these two philosophers interesting.

## Chapter 2

### Davidson on Truth and Objectivity

#### Introduction

Truth isn't an object, and so it can't be true; truth is a concept, and is intelligibly attributed to things like sentences, utterances, beliefs and propositions, entities which have propositional content. It is an error to think that if someone seeks to understand the *concept of truth*, that person is necessarily trying to discover important general truths about justice or the foundations of physics. The mistake percolates down to the idea that a theory of truth must somehow tell us what, in general, is true, or at least how to discover truths.<sup>24</sup>

Davidson's notion of truth is often regarded as a primitive theory of truth. Though I agree to this point, my major contention here is not exactly the primitivity. It is evident that the primitive theory of truth will play the background score for this chapter; I preferably see truth as situated in the whole theoretical framework of Davidson.

Davidson directly disagrees with two schools in terms of truth. One is the realists school and the

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24 Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated", in *Truth, Language and History*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005), p. 4

other is the group of theories called epistemological theories. He disagrees with realism for two reasons. One is because of the ontological indeterminacy of the notion of facts. Secondly, he disagrees with the idea that the real and true are independent of our beliefs. For him, there must be some connection between truth and belief if we are to relate the truth of utterances to their use. But this does not mean that the truth is determined by beliefs. That is his major disagreement with the epistemic theories. It is not the case that our belief is the reason for something to be true. Truth, in fact, lies as a part of our language use. And our language use is functioning with respect to our rationality. So belief, language, rationality and truth, all go together, hand in hand with each other and that is the focus of this chapter.

## **I. Influences**

Davidson's philosophical reflections were influenced by many prominent philosophers such as Frege, Ramsey, Tarski etc. Their influences are explicitly and implicitly present in his works. But here I am dealing with his theoretical influences which are explicitly present in his philosophy and are irreducible to one another or any other influences.

### **I.1. Tarski's truth theory**

Alfred Tarski is a Polish philosopher and mathematician. He tried to give a definition of truth within the framework of logical semantics. His theory, therefore, is known as a semantic theory of truth.

Let us see Tarski's theory of truth. Tarski defines truth in terms of semantic concepts. What he



antstoconstructisatheorywhichstatesourintuitivenotionoftruthwhichisasimplesemantictheoryforhim. What hewants is “toconstruct-withreferencetoagivenlanguage-*a materiallyadequateandformallycorrectdefinitionoftheterm'tru sentence'.*”<sup>25</sup> What he meansbythissentenceisthatweneedtoconstructatheorywhichwilldefinetheconceptofa'tru sentence'andthelanguageofdefinitionmustfulfilltwoconditions-  
thematerialadequacyconditionandformalcorrectness condition.

The two conditions of Tarski's truth definition are precisely pointing at the inadequacy of colloquial language to be the language of truth theory. The main problem of a colloquial language is its universality. The universality here is to be understood with juxtaposing the law-abiding nature of formal languages. Unlike the formal languages, the colloquial language is not restricted, people can use it differently. The universal character of a colloquial language makes it too wide to be theorized and the universal character is the root cause of semantic antinomies. These conditions are given to solve the problem of universality.

### **Formal correctness condition**

The definition of truth must not be in a natural language. It must be stated in a formal language. A semantic theory stated in a formal language has the form of

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<sup>25</sup> Tarski,

“The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages”, in *Logic, Semantics, Mathematics* by J. H. Woodger (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1956), p. 152

'p'istrueifandonlyifp

(Where 'p' refers to the sentence and 'p' refers to the corresponding fact.

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The definition must be in formal language because it does not have the problem of universality. About Formal language Tarski says, “most of these languages possess no terms belonging to the theory of language, i.e, no expression which denote signs and expression of the same or another language or which describe the structural connexions between them” [p. 167, logic, semantics, mathematics] So the expressions of one language has to be explained in a second language. Tarski calls this second language the metalanguage. Tarski says, “The first of these languages is the language which is "talked about" and which is the subject-matter of the whole discussion; the definition of truth which we are seeking applies to the sentences of this language. The second is the language in which we “talk about” the first language, and in terms of which we wish, in particular, to construct the definition of truth for the first language. We shall refer to the first language as “the object-language,” and to the second as “the meta-language.””<sup>26</sup>

### **Material adequacy condition**

Material adequacy condition works on the basis of our intuitive idea of truth. Take any arbitrary sentence and check its truth value. Consider the sentence “snow is white.”

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<sup>26</sup> Tarski, “The Semantic Conception of Truth: and the Foundations of Semantics”, *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, Vol. 4, No. 3 (Mar., 1944), pp. 349, 350

This sentence is true if snow is white and false if snow is not white. In other words:

“Snow is white” is true if, and only if, snow is white

The snow is white on the right side is the sentence itself and “snow is white” on the left side is the name of the sentence. Based on the fundamental conventions of the language subject must be a noun or an expression functioning as noun. The “snow is white” is the name of the sentence snow is white. The right side can be expressed in the form 'X is true' where X is the name of the sentence snow is white. Let us replace the sentence snow is white with the letter 'p'. Now see the logical relation between the metalanguage sentence 'X is true' and the object language sentence 'p'. It will be:

X is true if, and only if, p

This equivalence formula is called as the Convention T. Since the object language is contained in the meta language, we can make any sentence in the object language to be of the form 'p', and thus we could make Convention T for all the sentences in object language. The definition of truth is possible by the collection of the all Convention T formulations. In Tarski's words, “...we will consider the usage and the definition of the term "true" as adequate from the material point of view: we wish to use the term "true" in such a way that all equivalences of the form (T) can be asserted, and we shall call a definition of truth "adequate" if all these equivalences follow from it.”<sup>27</sup>

## **I.2.Quine's Theory of the inscrutability of reference**

W.V.O. Quine is one of the most influential analytical philosophers of the twentieth century. He contributed many new ideas to different fields of philosophy and the

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid. p. 344

most notable among them are his attack on the two dogmas of empiricism, ontological relativity and naturalized epistemology. Davidson shares many theories with him such as holism and inscrutability of reference.

Holism is the theory that language is to be understood as a whole and not as parts. That means to understand the meaning of a sentence we have to rely on the entire language. Even though they share this idea there are slight deviations in their formulations. The Holistic method of understanding the meaning of a sentence entered into the philosophical scenario as juxtaposed with the atomistic view of meaning. In meaning atomism, the meaning of a sentence is understood precisely based on that sentence itself. Holism, on the other hand, takes into account the allied sentences. Quine's holism is a version of meaning holism. Quine explains holism as a part of verifying the meaning of a sentence based on a theory. For Quine a sentence in a theory does not face the observation sentences alone but as together. This is called as the confirmation holism. Davidson approaches meaning holism from the point of view of interpretation. For him, a theory of meaning constitutes the methodologically correct interpretations of the sentences of a given language. In that set, the meaning of a single sentence has to be understood based on the entire sentences of the language.

Quine's inscrutability of reference is an attack on the 'museum' view of meaning. The 'museum myth', according to Quine, is a misconception regarding the nature of language. The myth is that two words work like labels for the entities called meanings. Even if we change the label the entity is supposed to exist. In Quine's words,

“Uncritical semantics is the myth of a museum in which the exhibits are meanings and the word

sarelabels.”<sup>28</sup>

His attack on this myth is based on his behaviorist view of language. The behaviorist theory of meaning considers meaning as a form of behavior. The only evidence available in order to understand the meaning of a sentence is the behavior of the speaker. In the complex and obscure process of language learning our only data is the behavior but we commonly think that there is an mental entity. Quine says, “Language is a social art which we all acquire on the evidence solely on other people's overt behaviour under publicly recognizable circumstances”.<sup>29</sup>

The complexity and obscurity of language acquisition is the reason for considering even the commonly held behavioral patterns as indeterminate. The indeterminacy is that a stimulus can have equally competing different interpretations as part of different linguistic responses. He explains this with the scenario of radical translation.

A field linguist visits a remote place where the language of that place is unknown to him. He and a native speaker are confronted with a rabbit when it scurries by. The native speaker suddenly says, pointing to it:

“gavagai”. The linguist notes down 'gavagai' as a tentative translation of rabbit. The linguist was unclear whether

'gavagai' means rabbit or rabbit parts or rabbit hood or the currying of rabbit. All these are equally competent meanings for that stimulus.

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28 Quine, “The Ontological Relativity”, in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 65, No. 7 (Apr. 4, 1968), p. 186

29 Ibid. pp. 186-187

The theory of inscrutability of reference and meaning is based on the conceptual relativism or ontological relativism. Each of the meaning we ascribe to the objects simply shows the idea that our concept of the object is controlled by the theory we use. In other words the ontology we ascribe to the object is relative to the language we use. In his book 'Ontological Relativity' Quine states, "For naturalism the question whether two expressions are alike or unlike in meaning has no determinate answer, known or unknown, except insofar as the answer is settled in principle by people's speech dispositions, known or unknown."<sup>30</sup> Semantic indeterminism is the background of his theory of ontological relativity. Since there are no determinate meanings to expressions our possible mechanism to understand that expression is by relativizing it to a theory. Similarly if we relativize it to another theory, we will get a different meaning to that expression. Since our ontology is based on the references of expressions, change in reference will result in change in ontology. So ontology becomes relative.

Both of these theories influenced Davidson. But his formulations of these theories differ in a significant way. He disagrees with Quine about the consequence of his inscrutability thesis such that the ontological relativity.

## **II. Reality, Scheme and Representation**

Davidson differentiates two major views of understanding truth, one is predominantly epistemic

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<sup>30</sup> Quine, *Ontological Relativity and other essays*, (Columbia University Press, New York, London, 1968), p.27

ic which would keep the reality to be something unknown and the other view unconditionally connecting reality to our beliefs.<sup>31</sup> In this chapter I try to show his systematic disagreement with the metaphysical, epistemological and semantic views of both of these schools. Apart from the set of views, there is a third position of considering truth to be an insignificant notion which is held by Richard Rorty.

## II. 1. Inscrutability of Reference

We have seen Quine's inscrutability thesis and his conclusion of the idea of ontological relativity. Davidson disagrees with the conclusion while retaining the premise to be correct.

For Davidson the idea of a complete indeterminacy of reference does not make sense. He shows it in two steps. The first is that in order to make sense of the indeterminacy of translation, we need a meta-concept, namely truth-conditions. The second is that if we relativize the reference, the ontology is no longer in trouble.

The theory of the indeterminacy of translation is the theory that there are equally competing alternative interpretation schemes for a word and this will result in our inability to figure out the reference. Imagine that there are different permutations of the universe. In one scheme of universe one particular word refers to *x*, but in another scheme it refers to *y*. Whenever that word refers to *x* in the first scheme, it refers to *y* in the second scheme. If we assume reference is based on the sa-

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31 Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005), p. 34

tisfaction relation, we can see that the truth conditions for the two schemes are equal.<sup>32</sup> What Davidson says is that in order to use the predicate 'refers', we need to follow a definite truth condition. The example he gives is this:

...suppose every object has one and only one shadow. Then we may take  $\phi$  to be expressed by the words 'the shadow of'. On a first theory, we take the name 'Wilt' to refer to Wilt and the predicate 'is tall' to refer to tall things; on the second theory, we take 'Wilt' to refer to the shadow of Wilt and 'is tall' to refer to the shadows of tall things. The first theory tells us that the sentence 'Wilt is tall' is true if and only if Wilt is tall; the second theory tells that 'Wilt is tall' is true if and only if the shadow of Wilt is the shadow of a tall thing. The truth conditions are clearly equivalent. If one does not mind speaking of facts, one might say that the same fact makes the sentence true in both cases.<sup>33</sup>

Keeping this model in mind how can we relativize the reference. This model allows us to look from above, allows us to see from the point of view of a meta language which will enable us to differentiate different interpretative schemes. By taking recourse to the principle of reverse charity we can relativize reference from this point of view. The principle of charity is the empathic relation an interpreter or translator makes in order to arrive at the best possible reference by considering the speaker as a rational agent. We suppose rational principles residing in the speaker. The principle of reverse charity is the speaker's assumption of the interpreter being rational. Applying this principle we will be able to see that the speaker would try to minimize the indeterminacy. One possible way for this is relativizing the

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32 Davidson, "The Inscrutability of Reference", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 229

33 Ibid. p. 230



reference or making it more specific. For example-

It never makes sense simply to ask where an object is, but it does make sense to ask where an object is relative to other objects—a coordinate system (of course the relativity may go unmentioned because some frame of reference is assumed). The relativized question ('Where is Bronk's house in the address system of the Bronx?') is clear and answerable, and the answer is complete. It has no further hidden parameter. We can, of course, go on to ask another, similar question: 'Where is the Bronx?' And this question in turn makes no sense until relativized. But once relativized, it is clear and answerable. No predicate with an extra place is hidden behind the relativized location predicate.<sup>34</sup>

Specifying the parameters of the sentence will reduce the possibility of indeterminacy. This in turn reduces the possibility of relativity. Once the parameters are specified, the hearer will not find it confusing or search for possible references of a sentence. The principles of charity and reverse charity together will create a suitable condition of communication in which the speaker and hearer would consider the other as rational.

## **II. 2. The Third Dogma of Empiricism**

### **II. 2. A. On Conceptual Schemes**

The conceptual scheme is a structure through which we organize experience. Our knowledge is said to be dependent on our conceptual scheme. One of the most popular characterizations of

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34 Ibid. p. 232

conceptual scheme is seen in Immanuel Kant's categorical structure. He supported the view that there is only one conceptual scheme and everyone shares it. Some other philosophers hold the view that there are many conceptual schemes and they are dependent on different conventions or languages. Kuhn's idea of paradigm shift, also incorporates the notion of multiple conceptual schemes. Apparently, these conceptual changes are explained as the change of the meaning of a sentence.

In his book, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, Thomas Kuhn discusses the idea of paradigm shift. The basic idea of this is that a complete revision of the system of scientific enterprises happens in each and every scientific revolution. The history of science, according to Kuhn, undergoes changes in time to time. At a particular point in that history, there is a matrix of theories and they are inter-related. All scientific theories of that particular time are in harmony with this matrix. But when an anomalous discovery or experience is occurred, a new theory will be required. With that theory the entire matrix changes into a new one. This is the paradigm shift in science. A theory in the new paradigm cannot be evaluated by the old one.

There is another kind of relativism and that is the cultural relativism. According to a cultural relativist, meaning of a sentence in one culture cannot be explained in another culture. For them each culture is a closed system in which the meaning of a sentence is a product of that culture alone.

Davidson attacks both of these views. First view is that the truth is relative to a conceptual scheme. That means truth in one scheme may not be truth in another scheme. Second view is that meaning is relative to a scheme. That means a sentence in one scheme cannot be translated into another

her scheme. Davidson attacks these second doctrine and rejects the first on the basis of his notion on truth-meaning relation.

Apparently, his strategy is that if we show the possibility of translatability, it will show the cultural opacity of truth. He considers two kinds of failure of translatability - complete and partial. Complete failure of translatability is that we cannot translate as significant set of sentences of one language into another whereas in partial failure of translatability we can successfully translate some part of the significant set.

He criticizes mainly the idea of complete non-translatability. The idea of complete non-translatability targets the view that anything and everything can be expressed in language. If we are not able to do that it is not under the purview of language. In his words “nothing, it may be said, could count as evidence that some form of activity could not be interpreted in our language that was not at the same time evidence that that form of activity is not a speech behaviour. If this were right we probably ought to hold that a form of activity that cannot be interpreted as language in our language is not a speech behavior.”<sup>35</sup> But this view for him lacks the appeal of self-evidence. So he takes a different step.

What he does is that he places language in the web of beliefs. According to him in order to state about a person's speech behaviour, we need to investigate into his detailed beliefs system and attitude. He says that speech requires a set of beliefs and intentions. In short, “there can be no doubt that the relation between being able to translate someone's language and b

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35 Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 186

being able to describe his attitudes is very close”<sup>36</sup>. This strategy is incomplete until we make sense of the relation between language and belief.

What Davidson did was to engage meaning at the level of the allied beliefs of the language user and not with the referential connection a sentence has with a fact. This does not mean that he does not take into account the world-language relation. He describes it in a different way altogether.

On the basis of translatability he engages with two metaphysical positions about the world-language relation:

- a. one language or conceptual scheme and many worlds.
- b. one world and many conceptual schemes or languages.

The possibility of many language and many worlds would never make much sense, according to Davidson, primarily because we will not be able to engage with it at all. We will have no foothold in these worlds which are logically closed to us. Davidson rejects this view.

The first position is based on the notion of contingency of empirical states. This will allow us to speak about different possible worlds. The second position is based on the contingency of language or conceptual scheme. While the first allows us to describe different worlds within the same language, the second allows the same world to be differently presented in different languages. The latter view states that the change in the major scientific theory will lead to a massive change in the way we understand sentences and truth-value of one paradigm cannot be applicable in another paradigm. The Kuhnian type of

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36 Ibid.

paradigm shift is possible within the one-world-and-many-languages situation.

In both senses the change in scheme will be explained as change in meaning and truth. Like Davidson says:

We may now seem to have a formula for generating distinct conceptual schemes. We get a new one out of an old scheme when the speakers of the language come to accept a true and important range of sentences they previously took to be false (and, of course, vice versa). We must not describe this change simply as a matter of their coming to view old falsehoods as truths, for a truth is a proposition, and what they come to accept, in accepting a sentence as true, is not the same thing that they rejected when formerly they held the sentence to be false. A change has come over the meaning of the sentence because it now belongs to a new language<sup>37</sup>

But the view has an evidentially problematic possibility of a complete change of language structure which means each and every item in a language undergone drastic change. But it is evident that a new paradigm cannot be completely indifferent to the old one. The best way, according to Davidson,

is to see paradigm shift as a new way of looking at the things in the domain of science. This will not affect the complete linguistic structure, for after all science is only one form of language we use. He gives an example,

“suppose that in my office of minister of Scientific Language I want the new man to stop using the words that refer, say, to emotions, feelings, thoughts, and intentions, and to talk instead of the psychological states and happenings that are assumed to be more or less identical with the mental stuff and ruff. How do I tell whether my advice has been heeded if the new man speaks a new language? For all I know, the shiny new phrases though stolen from the old language in which they ref

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37 Ibid. p. 188

ertopsychologicalstirrings,mayinhismouthplaytheroleofamessyoldmentalconcepts.”<sup>38</sup>Thathatmeansnotusingsomeoftheoldvocabularycannotbeconsideredasthebasisforprovingaschemetobeneworeventhesame.

Both these positions, as we have seen, are built up on a special kind of dualism-a dualism of scheme and content. The analytic- synthetic distinction also presupposes this dualism. The analytic- synthetic distinction is based on the idea that some sentences are true by the virtue of its meaning and some are true by the virtue of the empirical content. Quine's rejection of analytic-synthetic distinction has allowed us to abandon meaning, but it allowed keeping the empirical content. This is precisely because of retaining the scheme-content distinction. Let us see what are the difficulties in making sense of scheme-content distinction.

## **II. 2. B. On Facts**

Our major difficulty with the scheme-content relation is that of their connection. It is unclear how they are related. There are two possible ways they get connected:

- a. conceptual scheme organizes something
- b. content fit into the scheme.

Conceptual scheme organizing something means it systematizes the content. The problem with this view is that we cannot organize something without understanding its meaning. If we know

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38 Ibid.

with the meaning we no more need to organize it. To understand the meaning of a sentence is to place it with a set of concepts. Only through the allied concepts we get to know the meaning of a sentence. This itself is a form of organizing. But here we are not dealing with the bare empirical content. Here we are not dealing with an atomistic fact which needs to achieve meaning by our intervention. What we are organizing is something that is already available to us in our language. We cannot organize it again. Davidson says:

We cannot attach a clear meaning to the notion of organizing a single object (the world, nature etc.) unless that object is understood to contain or consist in other objects. Someone who sets out to organize a closet arranges the things in it. If you are told not to organize the shoes and shirts, but the closet itself, you would be bewildered. How would you organize the Pacific Ocean? Straighten out its shores, perhaps, or relocate its islands, or destroy its fish.<sup>39</sup>

Empirical contents fit into the scheme means sentences as a whole face the tribunal of experience. This fitting results in saying the sentence is true. But the concept of fitting does not give any intelligibility to the concept of truth because the correspondence to fact itself is a wrong notion. Take the sentence, 'The statement that Thika is in Kenya corresponds to the fact', Davidson says,

“Whether or not we accept the view that correspondence to fact explains truth, ... and it is no more than 'The statement that Thika is in Kenya is true'...”<sup>40</sup>

Let us see it clearly, take the sentence, 'Cochin is in the north of Trivandrum' which corresponds

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39 Ibid. p. 192

40 Davidson, “True to the Facts”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 41

to the fact that Cochin is in the north of Trivandrum. It also corresponds to the fact that Trivandrum is in the south of Cochin. Interestingly it is also true that Cochin is in the north of the capital city of Kerala. Here we can see that we are in fact referring to a collection of facts. Take another example, that a spoon is on the table which corresponds to the fact that that spoon is on the table. It also corresponds to the fact that the object known as a spoon which is a member of the set of kitchen utensils lying on an object known as a table. Similarly we can extend it to many related facts. The form of the argument is as follows:

Let's abbreviate some true sentence. Then surely the statement that *s* corresponds to the fact that *s*. But we may substitute for these *s*'s the logically equivalent '(the *x* such that *x* is identical with Diogenes and *s*) is identical with (the *x* such that *x* is identical with Diogenes)'. Applying the principle that we may substitute coextensive singular terms, we can substitute '*t*' for '*s*' in the last quoted sentence, provided '*t*' is true. Finally, reversing the first step we conclude that the statement that *s* corresponds to the fact that *t*, where '*s*' and '*t*' are any true sentences.<sup>41</sup>

The bottom line of this argument is that true sentences correspond to the totality of facts. Davidson calls this totality of facts as 'The Great Fact'.<sup>42</sup>

We have seen two ideas regarding the sentence-

fact relation and they are interrelated. The first one is that the sentence through the language already contains the fact. The second one is that a sentence corresponds to a totality of facts. Later he makes a difference in his view about the applicability of the notion of 'correspondence'. Thereason he gives is the elusiveness of the notion of fact. His worry is that we cannot say what the ontological status of fact is.

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41 Ibid. p. 42

42 Ibid.



## II. 3. Anti-representationalism

We have seen in his rejection of scheme-content distinction his antipathy for considering an empirical content to be corresponding to a scheme. The thesis entails the notion that we cannot say scheme or language is a representation of reality. In fact, his rejection of scheme-content distinction which is based on the idea that scheme or content cannot be understood without the other and thus any explanations on their relations or non-relations simply does not make any sense.

One thing we should take into account there is that Davidson considers correspondence as the representational theory. The interesting part of his rejection of scheme-content is that we are unable to say whether scheme and content are connected or not. Apart from that he conclusively explains why he communicates correspondence theory because of its atomistic fact ontology. In his words:

The correct objection to correspondence theories is not, then, that they make truths something to which humans can never legitimately aspire; the real objection is rather that such theories fail to provide entities to which truth vehicles (whether we take these to be statements, sentences, or utterances) can be said to correspond. If this is right, and I am convinced it is, we ought also to question the popular assumption that sentences, or their spoken tokens, or sentence-like entities or configurations in our brains, can properly be called “representations,” since there is nothing for them to represent. If we give up facts as entities that make sense

nce true, we ought to give up representations at the same time, for the legitimacy of each depends on the legitimacy of the other.<sup>43</sup>

## II. 4. Davidson's Realism

Davidson, as I said before, rejects semantic realism. Although he rejects classical realism, including Putnam's metaphysical and internal realism, his view is a version of the realistic position. Davidson says

My form of realism seems to be neither Hilary Putnam's realism nor his metaphysical realism. It is not internal realism because internal realism makes truth relative to a scheme, and this is an idea I do not think is intelligible. A major reason, in fact, for accepting a coherence theory is the unintelligibility of the dualism of conceptual scheme and a 'world waiting to be coped with. But my realism is certainly not Putnam's metaphysical realism, for it is characterized by being 'radically non-epistemic' which implies that all our best researched and established thoughts and theories may be false.<sup>44</sup>

Unlike many realists Davidson accepts a holistic and coherentistic view of language and belief. But he accepts the view that beliefs are caused by the sensations. Since the

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43 Davidson, *Truth and Predication*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2005), p. 41

44 Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, New York, 2001), p. 140

sensations are the products of the world, our beliefs are caused by the world. So beliefs are veridical, that is, we have objective knowledge about the world. Thus Davidson accepts objectivity and so he is a realist.

### **III. Belief, Coherence and Rationality**

#### **III. 1. Belief and Knowledge**

There are different theories about the nature of belief. Davidson holds the view that the belief goes always along with a language. He rejects anything like a 'language of thought', but accepts that the language and thought go together. According to Davidson, in order to have a belief one must be a rational animal. In order to say someone is a rational animal she must be working with a holistic framework of belief. For him, beliefs always constitute a system.

Davidson clearly agrees to the view that we cannot go outside of our beliefs. Any kind of justification should be inside the set of beliefs. In fact, in such a position in which only intentional justification of beliefs is possible, it is likely that objectivity of beliefs and knowledge could be questioned. But Davidson holds on to the objectivity of knowledge.

Belief is to be understood in terms of an interpreter's point of view. It is causally connected with the evidences of the surroundings.

The adoption of the notion of satisfaction would give a very consistent scheme to understand this coherence theory. Since the belief is understood as an interpretative concept, I suppose the truth-value could be figured out from any of the interpretations of the belief. We just need one true interpretation to do this.

### **III. 2. Correspondence without confrontation**

Justification, according to him is a part of possessing the belief. In order to make this connection he enquires about the relation between sensation and belief. For him the relation is of a causal one. He says:

The relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes. What then is the relation? The answer is, I think, obvious: the relation is causal. Sensations cause some beliefs and in *this* sense are the basis or grounds of beliefs<sup>45</sup>

Davidson views the sensation as a transparent medium through which we receive the data from the world. So our beliefs caused by sensations cannot go wrong. He says, “A more plausible line is to claim that we cannot be wrong about how things appear to us to be. If we believe we have a sensation, we do; this is held to be an analytic truth or fact about how language is used”<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid, p. 143

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, p. 142

What Davidson does here is this. He accepts the idea of a holistic system of beliefs in which we understand the meaning of a belief through a coherent relationship with other beliefs. At the same time he believes that the beliefs we have are caused by sensations. Here we are not checking our beliefs with the sensation, but our beliefs itself are the product of sensation. So the question of objectivity and truth are taken for granted. This is how the slogan of 'correspondence without confrontation' fulfills its meaning.

In his paper, “A Coherence theory of Truth and Knowledge”, he defines belief as the mental state of a human being. He says, “Beliefs for me are states of people with intentions, desires, sense organs; they are states that are caused by, and cause, events inside and outside the bodies of their entertainers. But even given all these constraints, there are many things people does believe, and many more that they could.”<sup>47</sup> There is potentially infinite number of beliefs just like potentially infinite number of sentences. All of them should be the mental states of a rational agent. Precisely because of the infinitude of the number of beliefs, it is nearly impossible to imagine complete coherence of the complete set of beliefs. So truth of a belief cannot be solely dependent on the coherence.

Davidson says, “The concept of belief is the potential gap between what is held to be true and what is true.”<sup>48</sup> He means that belief is something that can be true but it not necessarily true. But in his 1987 ‘Afterthoughts’ of the same paper he reconsider this concept and arrives at a new understanding of the idea. There he considers belief as

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47 Ibid.

48 Ibid, p. 138

intrinsically veridical because of its ties with the meaning.<sup>49</sup>

### III. 3. Rejection of Massive Error

To reject the representationalism has its consequences. We need to figure out the nature of truth in the language itself. But we cannot completely step aside from any mode of connection with reality. That is what he did with the slogan of correspondence without confrontation. The worry is the possibility of error a human agent can commit. The first step to alleviate this problem is to remember the holistic nature of language and belief. That means it is not the case that a single person has an unique belief. It must be minimally within the range of community. The rejection of complete non-translatability of a language to another is rejected already. Davidson says,

Then I must say, what I must say in any case, the problem of error cannot be met sentence by sentence, even at the simplest level. The best we can do is cope with error holistically, that is, we interpret so as to make an agent as intelligible as possible, given his actions, his utterances, and his place in the world. About some things we will find him wrong, as the necessary cost of finding him elsewhere right. As a rough approximation, finding him right means identifying the causes with the objects of his beliefs, giving special weight to the simplest cases, and countenancing error where it can be best explained.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Davidson, "Afterthoughts", in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, New York, 2001), p. 156

<sup>50</sup> Davidson, "A Coherence theory of Truth and Knowledge", in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, New York, 2001), p. 152

He says that the rightness and wrongness of a belief could be traced simply because there is a level of belief in which belief is correct about the world. Here he talks about an omniscient interpreter. What an omniscient interpreter does is that “he attributes beliefs to others, and interprets their speech on the basis of his own beliefs, just as the rest of us do. Since he does this as the rest of us do, he perforce finds as much agreement as is needed to make sense of his attributions and interpretations; and in this case, of course, what is agreed is by hypothesis true”<sup>51</sup>

#### **IV. Language, Meaning and Truth-value**

Davidson in his celebrated paper 'Truth and Meaning' shows us how to give a theory of meaning using Tarski's convention T. This, I think, gives a good proof for the relation between language and truth.

##### **IV. 1. Language**

Davidson has a definite conception of language. One key feature he considers as the foundation of language is its learnability. A rational being is able to understand and develop language. With our finite set of abilities we are able to construct infinite sentences.

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51 Davidson, “The Method of Truth in Metaphysics”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 201

Another aspect of Davidson's theory of language is holism which says that sentences in a language constitute a whole. He says:

A speaker can't be conveying (in the ordinary sense knowing what his words mean) a particular proposition with his words if he has no idea what properties that proposition has. This does not need to put in explicit knowledge: a given sentence in someone's language can't express a certain proposition unless it occupies a place among other sentences that reflect the logical relations among those sentences.<sup>52</sup>

Holism raises the question as to whether sentences are independent of each other or interdependent. The motto of holism is: "Only in the context of language does a sentence (and therefore a word) have meaning"<sup>53</sup>. Davidson further says:

If sentences depend for their meaning on their structure, and we understand the meaning of each item in the structure only as abstraction from the totality of sentences in which it features, then we can give the meaning of any sentence (or word) only by giving the meaning of every sentence (and word) in the language.<sup>54</sup>

This is the central idea of Holism. He says, "Holism maintains that the contents of speech and thought depend on the relations among meanings and among thoughts".<sup>55</sup>

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52 Davidson, "Radical Interpretation Interpreted", in *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol.8, Logic and Language. 1994, p. 121-128

53 Davidson, "Truth and Meaning", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 22

54 Ibid. p. 22

55 Davidson, "What is Present to the Mind", 1989, Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective



From this we can figure out a structure, which is holistic, i.e., language exists as an interlocked web of sentences. That is, to understand the meaning of a sentence is to see it in the light of many other sentences.

One important aspect of Davidson's meaning theory is his commitment to formalism. He gives a formal theory of meaning. His theory is formal in the sense that his theory gives a condition for a sentence to be meaningful. The condition he gives is the convention-T. He modifies the convention-T to suit to the natural language. One most important concept in his system is the concept of satisfaction. This allows us to figure out the truth value of a sentence with a single instance of being true.

#### **IV. 2. Truth-theoretic Semantics**

Davidson gives an empirical theory of meaning. “A theory of meaning (in my mildly perverse sense) is an empirical theory and its ambition is to account for a natural language”<sup>56</sup> Such a theory must show the conditions of our natural ability to understand meaning. To attain that the best way to proceed is by figuring out the conditions for a theory of meaning and finding a theory which meets all those conditions. He specifies this point:

“for what is being recommended is not a particular theory, but a criterion of theories. The claim is that if this criterion is accepted, the empirical study of language will gain in clarity and significance”

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(Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001), p. 65

56 Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 24.

ance.”<sup>57</sup>

The method he adopts is a holistic method. By giving the condition for all the sentences in language to be meaningful we could give a theory of meaning for that language. For this we need a metalanguage. For Tarski this metalanguage is a formal language. For Davidson, a metalanguage could be a natural language with additional logical concepts.

#### **IV. 2. A. The Conditions of a Theory of Meaning**

Davidson considers three main conditions for a theory of meaning for a natural language. They are the followings.

##### **Condition 1**

I mentioned earlier that Frege put forward a condition that the sentence \_\_\_\_\_ is structurally composed out of the parts of sentence. Davidson accepts this criterion. He says,

A satisfactory theory of meaning must give an account of how the meanings of sentences depend upon the meanings of words. Unless such an account could be supplied for a particular language, there would be no explaining the fact that we can learn language: no explaining the fact that, on mastering a finite vocabulary and a finitely stated set of rules, we are prepared to produce and to understand any potential infinity of sentences. I do not dispute these vague claims, in

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<sup>57</sup> Davidson, “Semantics for Natural Languages”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 60

which is sense more than a kernel of truth.<sup>58</sup>

If a language is to be learned by a being with finite capacities then it should have a finite set of rules which could be handled by that finite individual. If we did not recognize this fact then we cannot consider a language as learnable. He says:

When we regard the meaning of each sentence as a function of a finite number of features of sentence, we have an insight not only into what there is to be learned; we also understand how an infinite aptitude can be encompassed by finite accomplishments. For suppose that a language lacks this feature; there is no matter how many sentences a would-be speaker learns to produce and understand, there will remain others whose meanings are not given by the rules already mastered. It is natural to say such a language is *unlearnable*.<sup>59</sup>

The compositionality condition explains how language is learnable and scrutable because it explains the following:

1. How humans with their finite capacities be able to make potentially infinity of sentences.
2. How humans understand previously unencountered sentences (In other words: “the theory provides a method for deciding, given an arbitrary sentence, what its meaning is”<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 17.

<sup>59</sup> Davidson, “Theories of Meaning and Learnable Languages”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 8

<sup>60</sup> Davidson, “Semantics for Natural Languages”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*,

## **Condition2**

We should not suppose meaning as an entity. An empirical theory must not consider meaning as anything that is supernatural. It must be within our minimum ontology.

## **Condition3**

The third condition is that the truth conditions of the sentences must be exactly the conditions under which these sentences are either true or false. He says:

The statements of truth conditions for individual sentences entailed by the theory should in some way yet to be made precise, draw upon the same concepts as the sentences whose truth condition they state.<sup>61</sup>

Altogether these two conditions explain how a meaning theory should be. Let us see how Davidson's theory meets these conditions.

### **IV. 2. B. How truth theory could work as a meaning theory?**

Davidson starts his paper ‘Truth and Meaning’  
with the issue of compositionality. Davidson rejects the way Frege's theory met this condition. To meet the principle of compositionality Frege assigned sense to the parts of a sentence which are supposedly platonic entities. By the principle of Occam's razor these entities will make our

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(Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 56

61      Ibid.

ontology inflated and so one undesirable. Davidson rejects Frege's proposal not simply with this issue. For him assignment of entities to words will not satisfactorily explain the concept of meaning. He says:

“Paradoxically, the one thing meanings do not seem to do is to oil the wheels of a theory of meaning—at least as long as we require of such a theory that it non-trivially give the meaning of every sentence in the language. My objection to meanings in the theory of meaning is not that their identity conditions are obscure, but that they have no demonstrative use.”<sup>62</sup> Meaning must not be explained in terms of meaning itself.<sup>63</sup> Davidson argues that if we assign meaning entities to the parts of one sentence, then we need to specify the relation between meaning and the part of the sentence. This will lead to an infinite regress. Frege tried to solve the problem of regress by considering these meanings of parts as incomplete or unsaturated. For Davidson “this doctrine seems to label a difficulty rather than solve it”.

The holistic theory states that the meaning of a word is to be understood in the context of the sentence and the meaning of a sentence is to be understood in the context of a language. Each and every sentence in a language has the same form for its meaning and that is: *s* means *p*. But the expression 'means' is intensional and has to be explained further. Davidson writes:

The theory will have done its work if it provides, for every sentence in the language under study, a matching sentence (to replace '*p*') that, in some way yet to be made clear, 'gives the meaning' of *s*. One obvious candidate for matching sentence is just *s* itself, if the object language is contained in the metalanguage; other

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62 Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 20, 21

63 Ibid, p. 18

wise at translation of *s* in the metalanguage.<sup>64</sup>

On this basis he tries the truth condition as a candidate and then the formulation will be:

*s* is T if and only if  $p$  (Where *s* is the structural description of a sentence *a* and *p* is that sentence itself)

This T sentence of Tarski could do the job of a competent meaning theory. It could state for each sentence *a* in a language *L*, what its meaning is. For the purpose of testing it, we can put the formula in an empirical formula:

“Snow is white” is true if and only if Snow is white.

For a natural language, to use this formula as a meaning theory we should meet the issues of indexicals and demonstratives. For that

“we could take truth to be a property, not of sentences, but of utterances, or speech acts, or ordered triples of sentences, times and persons; but it is simplest just to view truth as a relation between a sentence, a person, and a time”<sup>65</sup>. With a systematic change in the formula we can overcome this problem. For that we can relativize truth to a person and a time. Thus we get:

“The spoon is on the table”

is true as (potentially) spoken by *p* at *t* if and only if the spoon is on the table.  
“I am tired”

is true as (potentially) spoken by *p* at *t* if and only if *p* is tired at *t*. “The book was stolen”

is true as (potentially) spoken by *p* at *t* if and only if the book demonstrated by *p* is stolen prior to *t*. (Where *p* is a person and *t* is a particular time)

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64 Ibid, p.23

65 Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p.34.

Now we must see what exactly the theory is telling. What we are doing here is imagining ourselves as an outsider of a particular language and trying to theorize about the truth structure of the language in our own language. For that purpose we characterized the truth conditions for all the sentences in that language. And this set of T-sentences would work as a theory of truth for that language. Davidson says, “By a theory of truth I mean a set of axioms that entail, for every sentence in the language, a statement of the condition under which it is true.”<sup>66</sup> The T-formula will show the truth conditions of each sentence of a language. This could work as a competent meaning theory for natural languages because it satisfies the conditions mentioned above. Let us see how it satisfies those conditions.

#### IV. 2. C. How the Theory meets the Conditions?

Davidson's theory satisfies Frege's principle of compositionality on the ground that a T-sentence applies to sentences of natural language consisting of other sentence-parts. What we then need is a characterization of the formal structure of a sentence. On a holistic basis the formal structure must be a general structure of all sentences in a language. A T-sentence reveals that formal structure.

Davidson's theory does not suppose meaning as an entity. But by this he does not say that there is no meaning at all. Meaning, for him, is an empirical reality and it should be theorized on empirical grounds. It is to be found in the structure of sentences because then only we can show how finite

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<sup>66</sup> Davidson, “Semantics for Natural Languages”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 56

beings like humans understand the meaning of a sentence. This structure is best expressed in T

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sentences. Frege would say that the meaning is grasped by the human rationality. For him meaning is an entity. The human beings only need the ability to cognize it. In Frege's picture there are three components in linguistic understanding-

the speaker, the meaning and the hearer. But in Davidson's picture there are only two components-

the speaker and the interpreter. The interpreter interprets the utterances, by bringing out the truth conditions of the utterances made by the speakers.

About the third condition Davidson says

“a theory couched in the metalanguage that contains the object language, for in the required statement of the form ‘s is true if and only if p’ the truth conditions of s are given by the sentence that replaces ‘p’, namely s itself, and so make no use of any concepts not directly called upon understandings.”<sup>67</sup>

Thus the formulation meets the three conditions for a theory of meaning. What Davidson's theory does is that it gives a general formula for finding the meaning of every individual expression in a language on the basis of their structure. For that he shows that every meaningful sentence has the same structure. This structure gives us the meaning. The theory will accommodate only truth-

statements in a language excluding the sentences like the interrogative sentences, etc. F

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67 Davidson, “Semantics for Natural languages”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 57



orthose sentences different theories are needed.

Another issue is that the theory is based on the literal language. According to Davidson the literal language is the basis of communication. He says:

“Communication by language is communication by way of literal meaning.... The theory of truth deals with the literal sense.”<sup>68</sup> The metaphors do not possess any extrameaning than its literal meaning. What is distinctive of a metaphor from a sentence is not its meaning but its use.

Davidson's

theory gives a good explanation about how we can have determinate meaning for a sentence. The theory is based on our known truth conditions. From the known truth conditions we can easily move to the meaning of an unknown sentence provided the sentence is from a language which we know. The theory stated in his paper 'Truth and Meaning' assumes

“that the speakers of a language can effectively determine the meaning or meanings of an arbitrary expression (if it has meaning).”<sup>69</sup> The structure of sentences will show the way to determine meanings of unknown sentences from the known expressions.

#### **IV. 2. D. Meaning theory in a Natural language**

Tarski's T-

scheme was in a formal language. He thought natural language is too complicated to be theorized

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68 Davidson,

“True to the Facts”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p.45

69 Davidson, “Truth and Meaning”,

in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p.35

ed for his purpose. As an initial step Davidson accepts this formula to work as a meaning theory. But Davidson makes a departure from Tarski as evidenced in his paper 'In Defence of Convention T'. In that paper he propounds a "semantic theory of natural language couched in a natural language."<sup>70</sup> For Davidson what is necessarily kept unchanged, even if he is deviating from Tarski's method is the ontology. The ontology of metalanguage must be the same as that of object language.

Davidson did this by an interesting revision of Tarski's formula. We know that Tarski's formula is based on the idea that object language is contained in metalanguage or the object language could be translated in metalanguage. Tarski agrees that object languages are the formal languages. For Davidson, however, the object language is a natural language. If that is the case how do we understand the metalanguage? The metalanguage is rich enough to receive the translation of all the sentences in an object language. Davidson writes:

If we understand our metalanguage, we are using a system of concepts and a language which the one for which we *really* want a theory, for it is richer system than is our natural one. And fortunately the richer system does not raise any difficulties for a truth theory satisfying Convention T, for it is extensional.<sup>71</sup>

A formal language is not rich enough to receive all the translations of an object language. Not only that, Davidson clearly states that if we can speak about anything at all we can express it in a natural language and natural languages are intertranslatable. So it is always better to state truth formulae in a natural language.

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Davidson, "In Defence of Convention T", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 71

71 Ibid, p. 73

### **IV. 3. Radical Interpretation**

Radical interpretation is a special case. This is a situation when we try to understand an unknown language. How much indeterminacy is involved in it? This is what radical interpretation tries to solve.

Quine introduced the idea of radical interpretation because he believed that there is possibility of radical indeterminacy in understanding the meaning of utterances of the speakers who are alien to us. Davidson tries to eliminate radical indeterminacy by introducing the principles of charity and humanity. For him, language is shared by all human beings and so there is no threat of breakdown of communication, even among us and alien languages.

According to Quine, indeterminacy of translation is the proof for a behaviorist theory of meaning. In a radical situation, we find difficulties in translating the speaker's utterance. This is because we are not able to understand the speaker's linguistic behavior. From such a situation we can understand that we are not extracting meaning from reference.

Davidson agrees with Quine that there is an indeterminacy involved here. He agrees that reference is inscrutable to some extent. But, for him, we can correctly determine the meaning of a sentence of an alien language by learning the language.

Let us understand the concept of radical interpretation clearly. The theory of radical

interpretation is a theory of how we get along with other speakers in a communicative situation. Both the interpreter and the interpretee are speakers of language, though not of the same language. Davidson writes:

I have stressed that a radical interpreter already has language, and a set of concepts that more or less match those of the interpretee. My interpreter has the concept of truth, of intention, of belief, of desire, and of assertion (and many, many more). She knows a lot about the world and about how people behave in various circumstances.<sup>72</sup>

What he does not know, however, is the mind of the speaker, the details of speaker's intentions and beliefs. Therefore he applies the method of interpretation to get at these beliefs and intentions of the speaker.

#### **IV. 3. A. Indeterminacy of Interpretation**

Frege held the view that the meaning is determinate. There is a specificity of meaning. When someone utters a sentence he has a specific meaning to his utterance. This meaning exists as a thought. When someone understands that utterance, he understands it by receiving that thought. So the meaning the speaker meant and the hearer understood is the same.

Quine rejected the idea of a determinate sense. He rejected it on the basis of inscrutability of reference. The inscrutability of reference is the theory that in an ostensive definition you will get equally competing different theories of reference.

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72 Davidson, "Radical Interpretation Interpreted", *Philosophical Perspectives*, Vol.8, Logic and Language. 1994, pp.121-128

From this point he goes to the theory of ontological relativity. If reference cannot be fixed there can be many competing ontologies. Ontology is, then, relative to the language. An ontological category is understood within the language with the help of another item which is also relative.

If Quine's theory is right, then the hearer of an unknown language will face difficulties in pin pointing reference. The problem is really between the word and its reference. Imagine a jungle boy like Mougli has a language. (I think such an imagination will never question the private language argument, because the argument as I understood will not say that a public sphere is necessary for language, rather it says the features of language must be publicly available) You found the boy and he started to speak to you something. From his behavior you can understand some of his utterances. But what about those sentences which you cannot understand on the basis of behaviour? This is the problem of indeterminacy of translation. You can try the concept of empathy to an extent. The principle of empathy says that you project yourself in the boy's situation and imagine what you could have meant by that sentence. But this will not be of much help. The only option left for you is to study the language. That will give you the holistic understanding of sentences in that language and thus its meanings. The conclusion Quine derives from this is that meaning is indeterminate.

Davidson will agree with inscrutability of reference to an extent. But he does not accept Ontological relativity. Davidson points out three kinds of indeterminacies, such as indeterminacy of truth, indeterminacy of logical form and indeterminacy of

reference.<sup>73</sup> It is the latter that has been accepted by him.

Ontology is not fixed, according to Quine, because of the inscrutability of reference. Quine tried to settle the problem by relativizing ontology to a background language. He pointed out that ontologies are laid within languages to which they are relativized. Davidson rejects the ontological relativity which is based on the concept of a conceptual scheme. He accepts that languages do not create ontology. He says: “Suppose we could fix the ontology of 'refers' by relativizing it. Then we would have fixed the ontology of language or speaker we were using the word 'refers' to characterize. It may be said: but the fixing is only relative to an arbitrary choice. The choice is not dictated by any relevant evidence. Hence the inscrutability.”<sup>74</sup> Arbitrary choice is the keyword here.

Davidson says that in an arbitrary choice we cannot pin point the reference. He would reject ontological relativity and relativism of reference to a background theory of language by saying that in order to understand ontological relativism one has to rise above it and give it up.

Quine's theory of ontological relativity leads to many other semantic problems like indeterminacy of translation and meaning. Davidson rejects Quine's theory because it leads to semantic instability. For him if we take another language to relativize, that will simply lead to a regress. We must have a higher principle to understand the

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73      Davidson, “Inscrutability of Reference”, in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p. 228

74      Ibid. p. 232

relativity of reference. The regress must stop somewhere.

Davidson's solution to the problem is to use the principle of charity across-the-board. And gradually the person can figure out the exact meaning and reference of a sentence. As Davidson says, "On my approach, the degree of indeterminacy will, I think, be less than Quine contemplates: this is partly because I advocate adoption of the principle of charity across-the-board basis, and partly because the uniqueness of quantificational structure is apparently assured if Convention T is satisfied."<sup>75</sup> Meaning is indeterminate in a radical situation to some extent. We can learn the language to soften the indeterminacy. But then the situation is no longer radical. Thus Davidson solves the problem of indeterminacy of interpretation.

## Conclusion

What we can summarize is the following. There is a deep relation between language, rational being and the world. This relation is not representational. The relation is more of a causal kind. Our beliefs are true because of this causal connection with the world. Our sentences are meaningful because our beliefs are true. Our system of beliefs is true because of our rational capacity. We are rational because we have language. Davidson says,

If I am right, each of these concepts requires the others, but none is subordinate to, much less definable in terms of, the others. Truth emerges not as wholly detached from belief (as correspondence theory would make it) nor

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75 Davidson, "Belief and the Basis of Meaning", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984), p.153

as dependent on human methods and powers of discovery (as epistemic theories would make it)<sup>76</sup>

Truth has an important role to play in his philosophy. The two key components in his system are the causal relation from world to beliefs and the rational relation of language and world. This second relation is possible because of truth. Truth makes us rational beings. Davidson says, "Truth is important, then, not because it is especially valuable or useful, though it may be on occasion, but because without the idea of truth we would not be thinking creatures, nor would we understand what it is for someone else to be rational creature"<sup>77</sup>

## Chapter three

### Rorty on Truth and Objectivity

#### Introduction

To say that we should drop the idea of truth as out there waiting to be discovered is not to say that we have discovered that, out there, there is no truth. It is to say that our purposes would be served best by ceasing to see truth as a deep matter, as a topic of philosophical interest, or "true" as a term which

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76 Davidson, "Afterthoughts", in *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001), p. 156

77 Davidson, "Truth Rehabilitated", in *Truth, Language and History*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2005), p. 16



repays "analysis." "The nature of truth" is an unprofitable topic, resembling in this respect "the nature of man" and "the nature of God," and differing from "the nature of the positron," and "the nature of oedipal fixation."<sup>78</sup>

Richard Rorty is one among the leading philosophers who tried to step beyond the boundaries of analytic philosophy and amalgamate both analytical and continental models of philosophizing. In fact he would prefer to overcome the traditional ways of philosophizing. He also devoted himself to a political position and theorized regarding that. He considered democracy as having some priority over any other form of political life.

His antipathy towards traditional philosophy includes his antipathy towards truth. One of the main tendencies of modern philosophy is scienticism, which means philosophy follows science in building its own picture of the world Rorty questioned this form of philosophizing. According to him it should be literature and not science that philosophy should mainly take into account, for its non understanding of reality.

Truth is recognized as the central notion in modern philosophy. Rorty's main criticism against truth is regarding this centrality. Rorty is not completely rejecting the notion of truth, but doing something more damaging, that is, to disregard it. For Rorty truth is a concept among many other concepts and has no importance.

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<sup>78</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1989), p.8

He introduces some sociological notions into his philosophical view such as solidarity and ethnocentrism which help him in relegating truth to the background.

## **I. Background and Influences**

Rorty places himself in the American pragmatist tradition with some new formulations. Pragmatist tradition started with William James who defined truth in terms of workability<sup>79</sup>. James was interested in reconciling tough minded empiricists and tender minded idealists. His solution was to consider workability as the criterion to provide meaning for a claim. Apart from the American pragmatist tradition we can trace influences on him in the continental stream of philosophy especially to Nietzsche and Heidegger. Derrida's theory of Deconstruction also influenced him very much in developing his notion of recontextualization. The major analytic philosophers through whom he developed his epistemology and the doctrine of anti-representationalism are Quine, Sellars and Davidson.<sup>80</sup>

## **II. Rorty on Philosophy**

Rorty is one among the few American philosophers who took keen interest in the continental traditions of philosophy. Many of his philosophical theories are derived

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<sup>79</sup> James, *The Meaning of Truth: A Sequel to "Pragmatism"*, The Project Gutenberg Ebook of the Meaning of Truth, Release Date: February, 2004 [EBook #5117], Last Updated: July 4, 2013, link: <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/5117/5117-h/5117-h.htm>

<sup>80</sup> See Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey, 1979)

directly from the continental traditions. The amalgamation of two traditions is visible in his philosophical writings. He brings pragmatism close to post- modernism.

One of the key features of post- modernism is that of seeing different forms of knowledge as different forms of literature. Rorty endorses this position and considers both philosophy and science as forms of literature i.e., different forms of writing.

“Philosophy does not justify affiliations with a community in the light of something ahistorical called “reason” or “transcultural principles.” It simply expatiates on the special advantages of that community over the other communities.”<sup>81</sup>

Inspired by later Wittgenstein, Rorty also believes in quietism. Quietism is the view that the role of philosophy lies in dissolving problems rather than solving it.

### **III.Anti-essential Nominalism**

Nominalism is a metaphysical view that there are no universal and abstract entities .What exists is particulars or concrete objects. Rorty subscribes to one kind of nominalism. For him it is the non-essential linguistic entities that exist.

Rorty's nominalism has to be understood as the bottom line of two of his philosophical positions. One is his denial of any kind of epistemological relation

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<sup>81</sup> Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1991), p. 43

between world and the subject. The second is his characterization of language and self as contingent so that the essentialism can no longer enter into his scheme.

### **III. 1. Anti epistemological position**

Epistemology has been the cornerstone of modern philosophy. Epistemology had been used as the main tool to resolve the Cartesian dualism. With the arrival of Kant, epistemology had developed to face more difficult problems of philosophy such as asking the very possibility of experience itself. But the problem of the epistemic gap between subject and the world had remained unsolved. Rorty dismisses this gap as the result of a wrong epistemological practice which is the result of a wrong notion of subject-world relation. His primary weapon of anti-epistemological position is anti-representationalism.

#### **III. 1. A. Anti-representationalism**

As the project to settle the worries created by the Cartesian dualism regarding the possibility of knowledge remained to be solved, different theories have been formulated. The basic worry was to connect the two substances of completely different characteristics. The most appealing answer to this was that language or thought represents the world. If that is the case we are justified in believing in the propositions we made about world, where the only necessity was the correctness of representation. If the proposition correctly represents the world, then the proposition attains the label of 'true'. If not, it is false.

This project demands the ordering of world in the model of language. Then only we can satisfactorily say that language mirrors the world. So the world must possess atomic facts like its counterpart in language, the sentences. So at the end of the day, we have two structures in our hand which are almost similar and one is the representation of the other. This is precisely the representational picture of language.

According to Rorty, these philosophers had an idea that language/mind is a mirror of nature. This is, for him, a faulty idea. A cure for this is disregarding the supremacy of the notion of truth in philosophy.

In simple terms, representationalism is the view that there is a direct relation between 'us' and 'Reality'. Anti-representationalism is the rejection of this thesis. The representational model is based on one of the two views mentioned below.

1. Reality is there and we can understand it.
2. Reality is what we understand.

The view that Reality is there but we cannot understand it is not a problem for Rorty but the above views are problematic for him because there is an intervention of epistemology in the latter views. The epistemology builds up a representational picture in order to justify our beliefs about 'Reality'.

The representational model can be of two types. One is that language is a representation of reality. The other is that language must be a representation of reality. Russell maintained the latter whereas Kant and Wittgenstein would go for the former. Both of these models suffer a lot from their respective ontology. There can be three different ways the representational model can give the truth value of a sentence:

1. Truth value of a sentence is due to the structure of subjectivity.
2. Truth value of a sentence is due to the picturing relation a sentence has with reality.
3. Truth value of a sentence is due to the referential relation a sentence has with fact.

The anti-representationalism refutes all the three ways. These three models carry out three major postulates of representationalism such as the notion of 'a priori', 'correspondence' and 'strict reference' respectively. We can find the first view in Kant, second in Wittgenstein and the third in Russell.

Rorty was influenced by many philosophers in developing his view of anti-representationalism. Starting from Nietzsche, Heidegger, Wittgenstein, Dewey and his contemporaries like Putnam and Brandom, he systematically connects his views to the theories of many philosophers. Nietzsche's idea of truth influenced him to a large extent. Later Wittgenstein's use theory of meaning and notion of language as a tool also influenced him.

His theoretical demolition of representationalism is notably based on Wilfred Sellars's critique of 'the Given' and W.V.O Quine's critique on analytic synthetic distinction. The holism provided by Sellars and Quine taken together gives the theoretical insight for anti-representationalism.

Wilfred Sellars has given a critique of the logical independence of observational fact or 'the given'. He is attacking the foundationalistic picture of knowledge. The

foundationalists hold a view that certain beliefs are non-inferentially given to us such as observational statements and they are the foundations of our knowledge. Sellars denies this idea. To take a simple observational statement such as, “this is green”, to be a knowledge claim, the observer has to satisfy minimally two logical conditions: he must have an idea of the concept of ‘green’ and he must have the competence of expressing that statement. So any observational statements must have presupposed some other concept. Sellars says,

One of the forms taken by the Myth of the Given is the idea that there is, indeed *must be*, a structure of particular matter of fact such that (a) each fact can not only be noninferentially known to be the case, but presupposes no other knowledge either of particular matter of fact, or of general truths; and (b) such that the noninferential knowledge of facts belonging to this structure constitutes the ultimate court of appeals for all factual claims -- particular and general -- about the world. It is important to note that I characterized the knowledge of fact belonging to this stratum as not only noninferential, but as presupposing no knowledge of other matter of fact, whether particular or general. It might be thought that this is a redundancy, that knowledge (not belief or conviction, but knowledge) which logically presupposes knowledge of other facts *must be* inferential. This, however, as I hope to show, is itself an episode in the Myth<sup>82</sup>

For Rorty, although Sellars gets out of the foundationalistic framework, he continues to conceive truth as a central notion. This is because, for Rorty, Sellars did not give up the necessary-contingent distinction.

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<sup>82</sup> Sellars, ‘Does Empirical Knowledge Have a Foundation’, in *Epistemology An Anthology*, Ed.

Ernst Sosa and Jaegwon Kim, (Blackwell Publishing Ltd, Malden, 2000), p. 120

Quine in his “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”<sup>83</sup> gives a critique of the notion of ‘analyticity’. He is attacking the essentialist notion of meaning. The essentialistic notion of meaning is that meaning or intension of a word is different from the denotation/extension of that word. He says that essentialism leads to a position in which some statements are true by virtue of their meaning. Among these statements which are known as analytic statements one set of statements puts synonyms for synonyms. Quine rejects the necessary-contingent distinction by explaining the impossibility of providing a definition of analyticity because the analytic statements are the necessary statements. After his critique of the second dogma, the reductionism, he provides a holistic picture of sentences where all sentences co-exist. He calls it the ‘web of belief’.<sup>84</sup>

Rorty combines these two theories. One is the critique of ‘the given’ and the other is the critique of necessary contingent distinction. For him if these two perish our representational picture will also perish.

Donald Davidson gives a critique of the third dogma which is the scheme-content distinction; in his paper “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme”<sup>85</sup>. According to Davidson the third dogma of empiricism continues to uphold distinction between

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<sup>83</sup> Quine, “Two Dogmas of Empiricism”, in *The Philosophical Review* 60 (1951): 20-43.

Reprinted in W.V.O. Quine, *From a Logical Point of View* (Harvard University Press, 1953; second, revised, edition 1961)

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

<sup>85</sup> Davidson, “On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme” in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984)



scheme and content or the sentence and the fact as independent of each other. This view is faulty because we cannot explain scheme or content without relying on the other. That means if you take scheme, content is already present in it and if you take a content, scheme is already present in it. Though they are theoretically different, they are not distinct from each other. There is no ontological gap between them. This is an explicit anti representationalist position. Davidson and Rorty agree a large extent in terms of anti representationalism and the de-epistemologising of language. They differ in semantic notion of Truth. For Davidson it is a crucial notion for language use and for Rorty it is not.

### **III. 2. Rorty's notion of Contingency**

The notion of contingency is one of the main ideas in Rorty's philosophy. This is the other side of his rejection of necessary or essential truth. The notion of contingency is applied to language, self and community.

#### **III. 2. A. The Contingent Nature of Language.**

Language as the central concept lies between human reality and the world. This relation between the language bearer and the world is said to be based on the concept of truth. So the concept of truth is central to all our understanding of the world. If our notion of truth goes down, the objectivity of knowledge cannot survive. Rorty makes the following argument: Truth is a property of sentences. Sentences/ language is created by human beings and they cannot exist independently of human mind. So

truth cannot exist out there. If truth is not out there, then we cannot say there is necessity out there. If there is no necessity out there, then there is no objectivity in our sentences. By saying 'there is no truth out there', Rorty means that there is no definite structure of world out there as represented in language. That means world does not splits itself into facts. So, for Rorty, language is not a representation of reality.

Then, what is language? Rorty answers it by giving his own interpretation of Wittgenstein and Davidson. According to Rorty, Wittgenstein and Davidson follows a 'tool' conception of vocabulary. Here vocabularies are considered as tools to build meaning. There are different tools. None among them can be reduced to another and none among them is more important than the other. Language develops through history. On the process of history some vocabularies are used more than the other. The more-used-metaphors turn out to be recognized as nearer to reality. So the contingency of language and the 'centrality' of some concepts are explained on the basis of an evolusionary process. In Rorty's words, "Our language and our culture are as much a contingency, as much a result of thousands of small mutations finding niches (and millions of others finding no niches), as are the orchids and the anthropoids."<sup>86</sup>

### **III. 2. B. The Contingent Nature of Self**

We have seen that the language allows us to create new vocabularies. Rorty was heavily influenced by Nietzsche on the matter of truth. Nietzsche explained truth as "a

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<sup>86</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, irony and solidarity*, (Cambridge university press, Cambridge, 1989), p.16

mobile army of metaphors.” Though he rejected the idea of truth he did not give up the notion of self. But he was against accepting the old descriptions of self. Instead we should find our own knowledge of self. For him, self-knowledge is self-creation. It is a kind of redescription. Rorty says, “To fail as a poet -and thus, for Nietzsche, to fail as a human being- is to accept somebody else’s description of oneself, to execute a previously prepared program, to write, at most, elegant variations of previously written poems.”<sup>87</sup>

Keeping Nietzschean self as the backdrop, he further explains self on the basis of Freudian conception of self. Rorty sees Freud as a ‘moralist who de-divinize the self by tracking conscience home to its origin in the contingencies of our upbringing.’ Freud explains our behavior on the basis of our situations. So, for Rorty, self is a redescription based on our contingent situations.

### **III. 2.C. Ironism**

Ironism is the philosophical position of questioning the basic principles of human beliefs. More clearly, it questions our ‘final vocabulary.’ He says that all humans carry a set of words to justify their actions and beliefs. This vocabulary includes the words like, ‘good’, ‘true’, ‘right’ and ‘beautiful’. Rorty defines the final vocabulary in the following way:

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term

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<sup>87</sup> Ibid, p.28

projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary."<sup>88</sup>

According to Rorty an ironist is someone who continuously doubts the final vocabulary. She also thinks that no vocabulary is closer to reality than the other. She will be a liberalist if she believes 'cruelty is the worst thing they do'. Ironists are the intellectuals in a liberal society and the non-intellectuals are commonsensical nominalists and historicists. Ironists like Nietzsche and Proust argue for private perfection by self-redescription.

### **III. 3. Rorty's Nominalism**

Meaning of a sentence is not derived from a representational relation it has with the world. It is the representational theory that demanded truth value of sentences. So when we give up the notion of representation we are no longer in need of explaining the truth value of some sentences using representational. Meaning is no longer appeal to any abstract entities 'out there', like the truth-conditions.

Meaning is understood precisely in the realm of language itself. Unlike the language of representational paradigm, Rorty's notion of language is that of a non-representational and contingent phenomenon. There is no necessary relation between sentences and meaning. The relation between the sentences can be explained only

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid. p.73

within the system of language. That is, language as a whole gives rise to meaning of the sentence. This is Rorty's non-essentialist nominalism.

#### **IV. Rorty's Pragmatism**

Pragmatism is a philosophical view that the solution of any dispute in philosophy lies in the practicality of those positions. We should choose only those concepts and theories which have more practical applicability or which are more useful. The pragmatic theory of truth accordingly, demands the practical applicability of concepts and theories.

Pragmatism for Rorty is the philosophy which does not engage in any ahistorical essentialist enquiries for figuring out truth and it is rather interested in the working conditions of the ideas or concepts. For him pragmatism has to be devoid of the Kantian epistemological legacy. His pragmatism is more akin to that of James's and Dewey's than that of Peirce's. Rorty says that Peirce has remained a Kantian and what he did was only preparing the way for pragmatism. Rorty says that Pragmatism of James and Dewey was a reaction to this kantianism. "Peirce himself remained the most Kantian of thinkers -- the most convinced that philosophy gave us an all-embracing ahistorical context in which every other species of discourse could be assigned its proper place and rank. It was just this Kantian assumption that there was such a context, and that epistemology or semantics could discover it, against which James and Dewey reacted." <sup>89</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Rorty, "Pragmatism, Relativism and Irrationalism" , *Proceedings and Addresses of the*

Rorty gives three characteristics of pragmatism. They are the following:

1. Pragmatism is an anti-essentialism applied to the notions like truth, knowledge and morality. It is possible for someone to connect the bits and pieces of world with similar words and sentences of the language. This isomorphism has to be seen purely as accidental. But it would be wrong to assume that there is an underlying relation between the the world and language such that we are able to connect them. The question of truth in terms of this essentialism will not enlighten us regarding the value of truth of what we believe. That is, it will not say why it is good to believe in a set of truth we believe. Rorty says, “Those who want truth to have an essence want knowledge, or rationality, or inquiry, or the relation between thought and its object, to have an essence. Further, they want to be able to use their knowledge of such essences to criticize views they take to be false, and to point the direction of progress toward the discovery of more truths. James' thinks these hopes are vain. There are no essences anywhere in the area. There is no wholesale, epistemological, way to direct, or criticize, or underwrite, the course of inquiry.”<sup>90</sup>
2. Rorty's second characterization of pragmatism is this: “there is no epistemological difference between truth about what ought to be and truth about what is, nor any metaphysical difference between facts and values, nor any methodological difference between morality and science”<sup>91</sup> Scientists and the scientific minded philosophers think that a defined methodology could

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*American Philosophical Association*, Vol. 53, No. 6, Aug., 1980, pp. 717+719-738

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, p. 722

<sup>91</sup> Ibid, p. 723

lead them into truth. Rorty says that it is often a myth. It is also a myth that people resolves their moral problems using ethical theory. We do not arrive at conclusions through mechanical procedures. Epistemology-centered philosophy is a search for a methodology to figure out the mechanical procedure,for arriving at truth.

3. Rorty's third characterization of pragmatism: “ it is the doctrine that there are no constraints on inquiry save conversational ones -- no wholesale constraints derived from the nature of the objects, or of the mind, or of language, but only those retail constraints provided by the remarks of our fellow-inquirers”<sup>92</sup>

Pragmatists would not accept that the objects constrain us to believe the truth about them and only to be revealed to scientific minded people. This position is thematically the core to Rorty's philosophy.

#### **IV. 1. Pragmatism and Relativism**

The question about relativism is often raised about Rorty's relativism. The reason for that is its admission of ethnocentrism. Ethnocentrism is the doctrine that the truth is constituted by the communities or the ethnic groups. Rorty consider it as a misguided construal of realism.

Rorty says that the traditional notion of relativism can mean the following,

1. Every belief is as good as every other.

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<sup>92</sup> Ibid. p. 726

2. There are different meanings to a sentence based on different forms of justification.
3. Justification procedures of society are enough to settle down the problems regarding truth.

The third view is admitted by pragmatists while the other two are refuted. So for Rorty pragmatism cannot be treated as a form of relativism. The accusation of relativism on pragmatism is a construction of the realist mind. The realists apply their framework of representationalism to pragmatism. However, since pragmatism is more concerned with the practical affairs, they are not interested in the representational framework. “The realist is, once again, projecting his own habits of thought upon the pragmatist when he charges him with relativism. For the realist thinks that the whole point of philosophical thought is to detach oneself from any particular community and look down at it from a more universal standpoint. When he hears the pragmatist repudiating the desire for such a standpoint he cannot quite believe it. He thinks that everyone, deep down inside, must want such detachment. So he attributes to the pragmatist a perverse form of his own attempted detachment, and sees him as an ironic, sneering aesthete who refuses to take the choice between communities, a mere “relativist.””<sup>93</sup> According to Rorty, pragmatists take their community too seriously. A pragmatist is an ethnocentricist and not a relativist.

#### **IV. 2. Solidarity and ethnocentrism**

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<sup>93</sup> Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1991), p. 30



According to Rorty, meaning can be chosen from the web of beliefs since sentences can be recontextualized. We can choose the meaning out of its pragmatic value. But, how can we pinpoint the pragmatic value? Who decides what is pragmatically good? Rorty's answer is that we decide what is good according to the norms of the ethnic group which we belongs to.

The ethnocentrism is the view that truth is decided by the ethnic justificatory mechanisms. Rorty's pragmatism, as we saw, does not make a distinction between truth and our familiar notions of justification. As he says, "...there is nothing to be said about either truth or rationality apart from the descriptions of the familiar procedures of justification which a given society -ours- uses in one or other area of inquiry"<sup>94</sup> This is precisely his ethnocentric position.

The ethnic concepts are embedded in our thought process in such a way that our thinking is directed by it. Scienticism, propagates the idea that science is the ultimate justificatory mechanism through which we decide truth. Rorty would say that when scientists make their decisions they already presuppose the mode of justification of their concerned ethnic community. So nobody is out of this ethnic intuition. "To be ethnocentric is to divide the human race into the people to whom one must justify one's belief and the others. The first group -one's ethnos- comprises those who share enough of one's belief to make fruitful conversation possible. In this sense, everybody is ethnocentric when engaged in actual debate, no matter how much realist rhetoric about objectivity he produces in his study."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid, p. 23

<sup>95</sup> Ibid, p. 30

We have seen Rorty's notion of contingency of our existence. About this contingency of our self and language, the representationalist picture of world often fails to answer. He says, "...one consequence of anti-representationalism is the recognition that no description of how things are from a God's eye point of view, no skyhook provided by some contemporary or yet-to-be-developed science is going to free us from the contingency of having been acculturated as we are".<sup>96</sup> Our only hope in a non-essentialistic cultural system is the solidarity we can have about truth or other notions.

#### **IV. 2. A. Solidarity**

The mode of justification in an ethnocentric world view is solidarity. What solidarity does is to give the idea of being a part of a particular community. Among the different forms of solidarity Rorty takes into account the ethnic form of solidarity. He apparently rejects the concept of human solidarity. Human solidarity is the idea that there is a unity of attitude among human being as a form of species-behaviour. Rorty considers this as a form of essentialism. He sees it as a form of overcoming the tension between the private and the public by the traditional epistemologist. He says, "A universalistic ethics seems incompatible with ironism, simply because it is hard to

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<sup>96</sup> Ibid, p. 13

imagine stating such an ethic without some doctrine about the nature of man. Such an appeal to real essence is the antithesis of irony”<sup>97</sup>

The mechanism of having solidarity with the immediate cultural group is a social fact. We recognize ourselves primarily with the ethnic group in which we are situated. Then we may go on with the bigger groups we belong to. Human solidarity is the farthest and weakest among them. So the depth of human solidarity is very less. “Their point is that at the “deepest” level of the self there is no sense of human solidarity, that this sense is a “mere” artifact of human socialization. So such skeptics become antisocial. They turn their backs on the very idea of a community larger than a tiny circle of initiates.”<sup>98</sup>

Solidarity is empathy towards our surroundings. This empathy is not a pre-existing fact but we create in the process of socialization. We find ourselves with our immediate other. “Solidarity is not discovered by reflection but created. It is created by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people.”<sup>99</sup>

Metaphysics used to be a search for the essential human nature in order to give meaning to human solidarity. Metaphysicians want to go beyond the idea that human beings are centerless webs of beliefs and desires. But Rorty showed that such

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<sup>97</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1989), p. 88

<sup>98</sup> Ibid, p. xiii

<sup>99</sup> Ibid, p. xvi

essentialistic picture of human nature is a lie. So to achieve human solidarity we voluntarily wish for that.

Solidarity is a selfish hope to retain our final vocabulary. But such a selfish hope does not do any harm if some form of human solidarity we can arrive at. We generally empathize with the pain of someone of a different ethnic group. “On her conception, human solidarity is not a matter of sharing a common truth or a common goal but of sharing a common selfish hope, the hope that one's world - the little things around which one has woven into one's final vocabulary - will not be destroyed. For public purposes, it does not matter if everybody's final vocabulary is different, as long as there is enough overlap so that everybody has some words with which to express the desirability of entering into other people's fantasies as well as into one's own...Her hope is that she will not be limited by her own final vocabulary when faced with humiliating someone with a quite different final vocabulary.”<sup>100</sup>

#### **IV. 3. Recontextualization**

“Think of human minds as web of beliefs and desires, of sentential attitudes- webs which continually reweave themselves so as to accommodate new sentential attitudes”.<sup>101</sup>This is how Rorty draws the picture of the belief-system of the human beings and also of their language system.

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<sup>100</sup> Ibid. p. 93

<sup>101</sup> Rorty, “Inquiry as Recontextualization: An anti-dualist account of interpretation”, in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*(Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1991), p. 93

Language does not have a necessary structure. It is contingent. Sentences in it are interlinked in such a way that meaning has to be selected out of its relations. The contingent nature allows sentences to connect with new groups of sentences or new contexts. Maybe the new context puts strains on the old ones or maybe we find the new ones are more enriching than the old. This self-reweaving web of beliefs is the foundation of Rorty's theory of recontextualization.

What happens when we land on a new context is that our age old belief will begin to undergo some changes. This is a move from a habit to an inquiry. This movement happens as a part of the process of addition or subtraction of beliefs. At certain point of this process we realize that our sentence is in a new context which has a new meaning. This is recontextualization. The recontextualization is a process of revising our beliefs.

## **V. On Truth and Objectivity**

### **V. 1. Two kinds of Truth.**

Rorty explains two different senses of truth. One is in the absolutistic sense and the other is the ordinary linguistic notion of truth. The notion of absolute truth is the product of epistemic-centred imagination. An absolute truth is ahistorical and unchangeable. Rorty completely dismiss this notion of truth. The second is that of the ordinary, day-to-day life usage of truth. This, for him, has some pragmatic utility.

The second sense of the term truth is the notion of truth which Davidson uses to explain meaning. He agrees with Davidson in saying that the meaning can be explained using the truth-value of a sentence. Though Davidson's theory focuses on the cultural opacity of the languages, Rorty focuses on the cultural diversity of it. He even allows a family resemblance in the usage of 'true' by different societies.

## **V. 2. The Pragmatic notion of Truth**

We have seen Rorty's version of pragmatism. Truth, for him, is a norm just like good. Philosophy, for Rorty, is nearer to literature than to science. Its aim is not to figure out the truth but to explicate the possibilities of describing different viewpoints. Following James, Rorty equates truth with good. "On James view, "true" resembles "good" or "rational" in being a normative notion, a compliment paid to sentences that seem to be paying their way and that fit in with other sentences that seem to be paying their way and that fit in with other sentences which are doing so. To think that truth is "out there"<sup>102</sup>

Truth for him, as we have seen, is a value like good. The definitions of truth available in philosophy of language may pragmatically allow us to deal with different issues such as Davidson's, truth-theoretic use of it in understanding the learnability of language. But these construals of truth can never prove the objective notion of truth.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>102</sup> Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism*, (Harvester Press, Brighton, Sussex, 1982) , p. xxv

<sup>103</sup> Ibid. p. xxvi

### V. 3. Truth as a creation of Language

Language is not subservient to the world. It works on its own. The world out there is impossible to be captured. What we have is the possibilities of theorizing about the world using the tools provided by language. Words are created by the language and so is truth. Rorty says:

To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human Languages are human creations.<sup>104</sup>

Realists would say that the truth is the notion that connects language and world. So it has to be outside the language and existing on its own. It exists as the intrinsic nature of the world. For Rorty it is pragmatically unnecessary to imagine such an intrinsic nature of world. He says, "To say that there is no such thing as intrinsic nature is not to say that the intrinsic nature of reality has turned out, surprisingly enough, to be extrinsic. It is to say that the term "intrinsic nature" is one which it would pay us not to use, an expression which has caused more trouble than it has been worth."<sup>105</sup> What is in our possession is not the world, but the language. What we can imagine about

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<sup>104</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1989), p. 5

<sup>105</sup> Ibid, p. 8

truth, without supposing extra entities in our ontology is that the truth is a word in our language. “Truth cannot be out there - cannot exist independently of the human mind - because sentences cannot exist so , or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false.”<sup>106</sup>

Since the truth is a product of our language use, it changes according to the way we use language. This does not mean that truth will attain a new meaning which is altogether different from its earlier use. But it means that the components of a sentence such as the reference and meaning might change according to the new way of using a sentence. Truth-value would change in terms of this new use. For Rorty, this truth-value would direct us to create a theory of meaning. Apart from this use truth does not have any higher purposes.

#### **V. 4. Truth as Justification**

In his later book, *Truth and Progress*, Rorty slightly deviates from the ordinary notion of truth. He began to criticise the notion of truth as absolutistic by viewing that the notion of justification is enough to do its job. Truth in terms of justification also has a pragmatic origin since justification is a human process. He says:

Truth is, to be sure, an absolute notion in the following sense: “true for me but not for you” and “true in my culture and not in yours” are weird pointless locutions. So is “true then, but not now.” Whereas we often say “good for this purpose, but not for that” and “right in this situation but not in that,” it seems

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid, p. 5



pointlessly paradoxical to relativize truth to purposes or situations. On the other hand, “justified for me but not for you” (or justified in my culture and not in yours”) makes perfect sense. So when James said that “the true is the good in the way of belief” he was accused of confusing justification with truth, the relative with the absolute.<sup>107</sup>

He considers justification as the only criterion of truth. Every application of the word truth is relative to the situation since the justification is based on the community. It is not for once and for all. Justification changes according as the language game changes. Our final vocabulary as well as many sentences based on that, what appears to be indubitable in certain point of view. But Rorty says all sentences in a vocabulary can be doubted. “.. there are no beliefs that can be known to be immune to all possible doubt.”<sup>108</sup>

But the justificatory notion does not completely wipe out the absolutistic conception of truth. Although the criterion of truth is said to be justification, the nature of truth may not be the same. It is precisely because justification does not fulfill our intuition about truth. For, Rorty, our pragmatic recourse is to follow Davidson in saying truth is indefinable.

## **V. 5. Truth and Objectivity**

According to Rorty, the Realists holds the following thesis,

1. World is independent of our beliefs.

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<sup>107</sup> Rorty, *Truth and Progress*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, UK, USA, 1998), p. 2

<sup>108</sup> Ibid.

2. World has an essential structure.

3. Truth is the correspondence between world and sentence.

Objective notion of truth, for Rorty, is a confusion between the first and the second ideas. Rorty would accept the first one with some relaxation. It is not a metaphysical fact for him, rather, simply as a belief which has no reason to be doubted. According to Rorty, a desire for objectivity is the product of our fear of the end of the community. For Rorty, Davidson's attack on scheme-content distinction would no longer let us use the concept of objectivity, because if the representational picture goes, the scientific objectivity which is based on the premise that the world is structurally available to us will also go. Rorty finds his solution to this in Nietzsche's notion of solidarity. Rorty invokes Nietzsche's notion of truth as the mobile army of metaphors which eventually becomes obligatory to people. Rorty explains his suggestion in the following way: "The pragmatic suggestion that we substitute a "merely" ethical foundation for our sense of community – or, better, that we think of our sense of community as having no foundation except the shared hope and the trust created by such sharing – is put forward on practical grounds.... It is a suggestion about how we might think of ourselves in order to avoid the kind of resentful belatedness – characteristic of the bad side of Nietzsche – which now characterises much of the high culture."<sup>109</sup>

## Conclusion

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<sup>109</sup> Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity" in *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1991), p. 33

Rorty's philosophy can be called as a pragmatic nominalism. He is a nominalist in the sense that he does not accept the existence of abstract objects or relations. What he is accepting is the language and human beliefs. Even language and beliefs are not related within themselves with anything essential. The relations among the sentences are that of pragmatic. So he is a pragmatic nominalist.

His philosophical position allows him to swing around the analytical and continental modes of thought since he accepts new methods of interpretation. Truth for him is one among the many concepts which has some pragmatic utility and nothing more than that. Truth for him is a tool for showing the contextuality of meaning.

He does not go for an essentialistic explanation of human nature. He would never be interested in the rationalistic picture of human beings. He would rather go with a picture of a never ending inquirer. He would consider go with the picture of an imaginative man than a rational man.

## **Chapter Four**

### **Responses to Davidson and Rorty:**

### **Putnam, McDowell and Brandom**

#### **Introduction**

In the Analytic tradition, the philosophical discourse regarding the nature of truth and objectivity has got a new shape in the second half of twentieth century. As against the first half which was passionately striving to back up science by atomism and representational theories, the second half was for new methods in philosophising and even for some radical views like anti-representationalism and epistemological anarchism. This new tendencies in philosophy of language were mostly an effect of Quine, Sellars and Davidson. Quine's rejection of analyticity, Sellars doubts regarding the given and Davidson's diapproval of scheme-content distinction are the key elements that shaped the new outlook on truth and objectivity.

The philosophers in the post Quinean age who were dealing with the philosophical issues of language, epistemology and metaphysics have responded in some or other way to this new outlook. It was Richard Rorty who moulded his philosophy in this tradition but interpreted this tradition a completely new way. The challenge he posed to the new outlook is pretty intreuiging, that is, he is accepting the key tenets of the new outlook but interpreting it in a different manner altogether. There were many other philosophers who were very much influenced by the new outlook and had a philosophical theory of their own. Most notable among them are Hilary Putnam, John McDowell and Robert Brandom.

Analysing the arguments of these will provide us with systematic suggestions to evaluate the problem of truth in general and helps us to capture the exact outlines of the debate in particular. All the more the philosophies of these thinkers are connected to each other and it will be difficult to ignore one for the other.

## **I. Hilary Putnam**

Hilary Putnam is an analytic philosopher known for his works in the fields of philosophy of language and science. He is recognized to be changing his philosophical position time to time. I am focusing on his philosophy which he developed in the period between 1975 to 1990, mostly. In this period he was presenting a philosophy called Internal Realism.

### **I. 1. Internal Realism**

Internal Realism is to be understood in contrast with Metaphysical Realism. Putnam considers Metaphysical realism as an externalist position while Internal Realism is an internalist position primarily based on the ontological status of meaning. A metaphysical Realism consists of following doctrines<sup>110</sup>:

1. The world consists of the fixed totality of mind-independent objects.
2. There is a true and complete description of the nature of world.
3. Truth lies in the correspondence between words and objects.

Putnam's Internal Realism does not dispute the idea that there are objects in the world. But for him it is not epistemically independent. Putnam also denies that the truth lies in word-object correspondence.

### **I. 2. Reference of Natural kind terms**

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<sup>110</sup> Putnam, *Realism with a Human Face*. Ed. James Conant.(Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Mass.,1990)

A natural kind term is a term that refers to any natural object such as orange, gold and cats. Referring to a natural kind is traditionally (Frege and Russell) understood as based on the meaning which is based on description. The major worries of this view is that there may be deviant cases in a class which would not agree to the description of all properties and the description changes if the scientists discover new fact about the object. It is not the competent speaker of a language but the scientist who figures out the nature of an object.

In his 1973 paper “Explanation and Reference”<sup>111</sup>, Putnam gives a causal explanation of natural kind reference. In that paper he says that the reference of a natural kind term is fixed by causal connection between the term and the event it refers to. An event that is referred by the term is introduced to the speaker through an appropriate definite description. The causal connection between the word and its reference is not directly linked to the object but to the event in which the object is introduced to a speaker. This is precisely because it is through the context that the speaker is able to figure out the application or use of the term. So the definite description is based on that particular context of introduction of the object.

In his 1975 paper “Meaning of 'Meaning'”<sup>112</sup>, he elaborates this externalist position of meaning. Externalism is a philosophical position of arguing that the meaning of a

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<sup>111</sup> Putnam, “Explanation and Reference”, in *Conceptual Change*, Ed. G. Pearce & P. Maynard (Dordrecht-Reidel 1973), p. 199-221

<sup>112</sup> Putnam, “Meaning of ‘Meaning’”, in *Mind, Language and Reality*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1979)

word lies outside of our head. The contrasting position to this is that of arguing that the meaning is inside our head (as brain wave, sense, etc.,) and this position is known as internalism.

He criticises the traditional theories of reference. The traditional theories rest upon two major assumptions.

1. Meaning is a state of mind. The traditional view suggests that the knowing the meaning of a term means being in a particular psychological state. Thus meaning is to be understood as sense or as proposition.
2. Sense of a term determines its extension. It is through the description that we are able to pin point the object of reference. Different senses can have the same extension, but different extensions cannot have the same sense.

Putnam argues that though these are individually appealing, jointly they make a mistake. The first one states that the sense is a psychological state. The second states that same sense does not refer to two objects. That means two persons who have the same psychological state about a term must be referring to the same object. Putnam says this may not be true. For that he gives a thought experiment.

Putnam imagines a twin earth<sup>113</sup>. This twin earth is almost the same as the earth we live. Twin earth also has human beings as similar to us in every detail. They think and behave just like humans of earth. The only difference the twin earth has with the earth

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<sup>113</sup> Putnam, "Meaning and Reference", in *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 70, No. 19, Seventieth Annual Meeting of the American Philosophical Association Eastern Division (Nov. 8, 1973), pp. 699-711

is in the chemical combination of water. Their water has the chemical combination of XYZ and not H<sub>2</sub>O. Apart from this there is no difference between the water in the two earths. They have the same uses. Before the development of chemistry in both earths, the earthlings as well as the twinearthlings used the term water to refer to water in the two earths. We cannot differentiate their psychological states in using the term, but the objects they are referring to are fundamentally two substances.

The suggestion Putnam gives here is that the fixing of a reference has some ostensive component. That means the meaning of a natural kind term is fixed with an act of introducing it in a certain context with some ostensive factors. The meaning of the term water is fixed by pointing at the water. So when the earthlings point at the water their meaning is fixed by the water on the earth and when twinearthlings do that their meaning gets fixed by the water there.

Putnam concludes that the first assumption of the traditional theory is wrong. The first assumption was that the meaning is a psychological state. But we have seen that the same psychological state can refer to different things. But the second assumption of traditional theories can be taken into account because it is precisely through the sense that we fix the reference.

So the meaning of a natural kind term is not inside our head but it lies with our interaction with the natural kind itself. That means meaning is not internal but external.

### **I. 3. Representation.**



In his thought experiment of 'Brains in a vat'<sup>114</sup>, Putnam provides an imagery of an ant which accidentally makes a shape which looks like Winston Churchill. Can we consider such a shape as a representation of Churchill? According to him, we cannot count it as a representation, based on our commonsense. If so, what is the criterion of representation?

Imagine a cartoonist drawing a caricature of Churchill. For Putnam, it could be counted as a representation because the cartoonist wilfully drew that. An accidental shape cannot be treated as a form of representation of something. But a human being can be counted as making a representation because he is performing the activity of presenting something intentionally. This intentionality is the key to the concept of representation.

An accidental ant's path does not have any intentionality because it is nothing but a physical object. No physical object is a representation of something else. Physical objects will not refer to something else. Without the referring no representation is possible. On the contrary, mental images, thoughts have the function of referring. So a drawing made by a human being with the intention of referring will represent the object it refers to.

Similarly, imagine a case in which a picture of a tree dropped from a spacecraft to a planet which has no trees. What could be the suppositions of the intelligent beings on

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<sup>114</sup> Putnam, "Brains in a Vat", in *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York 1981)

that planet about this picture? For them it will not be a representation of a tree. Similar is the case with the words. No random association of letters will refer to something. Imagine some monkeys randomly hitting keys on a type writer and the copy turn out to be an excellent literary work!

### **I. 3. A. The Brain in a Vat Argument.**

The brain in a vat is a sceptical imagery<sup>115</sup>. It goes like the following. An evil genius placed a human brain in a vat full of liquid. This brain is connected to a super computer. The computer sends signal to this brain and the brain feels different sensations. Everything the brain thinks and does is the signals supplied by the super computer. The computer generates a virtual condition of reality in which the brain counts itself as a person. The brain feels like seeing an object when the computer says so. Suppose we are all brains in a vat. How do we make sense of our mental representation and truth?

Putnam would say that such a condition is impossible because it is self-refuting. A self-refuting statement is that which is falsified by its own truth. Such as 'everyone in my group are liars'.

In a brain in a vat scenario, the computer sends a signal to the brain and says “this is a tree”. There are no external objects in the brain in a vat condition. The statement is bound to be false because there are no trees in the scenario of brain in a vat. The “tree” in this virtual world does not refer to an actual tree. Thus the semantics of the

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<sup>115</sup> Ibid.

statement becomes unclear. Similarly, in the virtual condition, the computer sends the statement “I am a brain in a vat”. Clearly, the “brain” in this situation does not refer to the actual brain because it is a signal provided by the computer. Putnam says, “There is some causal connection between the machine and the real world apples, etc., via the perceptual experience and knowledge of the creator-designers. But such a weak connection can hardly suffice for reference. Not only is it logically possible, though fantastically improbable, that the same machine *could* have existed even apples, fields and steeples had not existed; more important, the machine is utterly insensitive to the *continued* existence of apples, fields, steeples, etc. Even if all these things *ceased* to exist, the machine would still discourse just as happily in the same way. That is why the machine cannot be regarded as referring at all.”<sup>116</sup>

The argument is as follows: In a brain in a vat condition,

1. The statement “brain in a vat” does not refer to brain in a vat
2. If the statement “brain in a vat” does not refer to brain in a vat, then the statement is false.
3. Thus “I am brain in a vat” is self-refuting.

#### **I. 4. Rejection of God’s eye view**

God's eye view, for Putnam is a part of metaphysical realism. The God's eye view is that there is a complete and true description of the world from a perspective out of human context.

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116 Ibid, pp.11,12

In whose perspective is the brain in a vat scenario described? This is not told from the human's perspective as the humans are inside the vat. It is not even told from an alien's perspective who is engaging with our world because the world consists of actual objects. The brain in a vat situation is actually described out of the human context. The brain in a vat arguments collapses because it detaches the human beings from the actual world.

Because of this problem, the metaphysical realists cannot solve the problem of Brain in a vat. Metaphysical realists hold the correspondence theory of truth. The problem is that the principle by which the language corresponds to the world cannot possibly be available to the person if he is really a brain in a vat. That means if he is a brain in a vat and his language consists in the correspondence relation with world then it cannot establish any correspondence with the world. If the person cannot understand the situation, then it means, the language is not actually working on a correspondence theory of truth and this goes against the metaphysical realists. So for them the problem of brain in a vat is cannot be solved.

On the other hand, internal realists describe the language-world relationship as a sort of fitting in. They could explain the problem by pointing out the incoherence of the sentence "I am a brain in a vat" with its reference.

## **I. 5. Rationality**

Putnam's conception of truth is primarily based on his idea of rationality. For him truth and rationality have a close connection. Truth for him is what is rationally

acceptable.<sup>117</sup> Rationality, for him, should not be based on any particular principle or methodology. That means there are no fixed systems of rational explanation. But, at the same time, he is denying that the rationality is a relative concept.

In short, he denies both of the prevalent views on truth that of the copy theory which says the language is a copy of world and the other theory which says truth is relative to subject or culture. His suggestion about the subject-object relation would be that of a correlation. That means language and world are constitutive of each other. As he presents it: “the mind and the world jointly make up the mind and the world”<sup>118</sup>

For him, rationality is a form of value. Fact- value dichotomy, according to him is a product of the dichotomy of copy theories and subjective theories of truth. Only through a meticulous study of truth can we be able to decipher the problem of the fact-value dichotomy.

## **I. 6. Putnam's Internal Realist view of Truth**

Putnam's internal realist holds a middle position between realism and anti realism. He rejects the correspondence theory of truth which is central to metaphysical realism. However, he accepts that there is an objective truth but unlike realists he goes for an epistemological view of truth. For the realists truth is real and accessible without any epistemic mediation. Putnam holds the former and rejects the latter. He says:

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<sup>117</sup> Putnam, “Two Philosophical Perspectives”, in *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981)

<sup>118</sup> Putnam, *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981), p. xi

'Truth' in an internalist view, is some sort of (idealized) rational acceptability - some sort of ideal coherence of our beliefs with each other and with our experiences *as those experiences are themselves represented in our belief system* – and not correspondence with mind-independent or discourse-independent 'states of affairs'<sup>119</sup>

According to Putnam, the realist view of truth is indefensible on many skeptical issues. Also, for a realist, truth is verification-transcendent. The anti-realist account, on the other hand, does not do justice to our intuitive notion of truth. An anti-realist theory of truth, which propounds the notion of communal consensus, is bound to end up in cultural relativism.

In between the two views of truth, Putnam introduce his version of truth theory based on the notion of ideal conditions. For him, truth should be understood in terms of idealized justification. By idealized justification Putnam means justification under epistemically idealized conditions. Since it is based on justification it is verification-immanent and since it is done in idealized situation not everything can be justified.

### **I. 7. Putnam's critical responses to Rorty**

Though there are many similarities in their philosophy, Putnam and Rorty criticise each other as relativists. Putnam offers two major criticisms against Rorty. In Putnam's words the disagreement between him and Rorty are based on two things: "I hope that

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119 Putnam, "Two Philosophical Perspectives", in *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981), p. 50

philosophical reflection may be of some cultural value; but I do not think it has been the pedestal on which the culture rested, and I do not think our reactions to the failure of a philosophical project- even a project as central as “metaphysics”- should be to abandon ways of talking and thinking which have practical and spiritual weight. ...And I think that what is important in philosophy is not just to say, “I reject the realist/antirealist controversy,” but to show that (and how) both sides *misrepresent* the lives we live with our concepts. That a controversy is “futile” does not mean that the rival pictures are unimportant”<sup>120</sup> In short he says that the mere consideration of something as unimportant will not help us to explain away that concept. Considering something as pseudo-problem will not work as therapeutic.

1. Putnam says that Rorty's position faces the same challenges which are faced by the logical positivists and Quine.

Some logical positivists were committed to phenomenalism. For them language is a description of our sense-data. In order to remove the solipsism involved in such descriptions they argue:

1. The sense-data are independent of the subject. They have only contingent relation with the subject.
2. Every sentence has truth preserving translation in the phenomenalist language.

The worry with these phenomenologists is that there are many ordinary statements about objects that we cannot deny. We cannot deny the human subjectivity involved in our

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120 Putnam, “Realism with a human face “, *Realism with a human face* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 20

phenomenal description of the world.

On the other hand, Quine gives strict materialist account of facts. When he refers to his cat tabitha, he refers to tabitha or the whole world minus tabitha. But for him his use of words will help him derive observation conditionals. Putnam says “Moreover, *a speaker's understanding of those observation conditionals consists simply in the ability to use them as a part of a huge linguistic machine which enables the speaker in question to anticipate stimulations of his or her nerve endings...*”<sup>121</sup>

Similar is the situation when Rorty says his account gives an explanation about the relation between vocables and reality. Putnam's objection is regarding this relation.

Rorty often describe different forms of interpretation as different language games. For him these interpretations are explicated in contexts. These interpretations depend on their contexts. He also suggests that no word or sentence has a correspondence relation with the world. If that is the case, how can he talk anything about 'reality'? Putnam says, “But, then, how does saying “There is a reality (outside ourselves) which we act on” help Rorty himself to cope? Either this particular “vocalbe” is merely a trivial consequence of Rorty's currently accepted world picture or else it is merely a futile gesture in the direction of realism which Rorty has repudiated? If it is the first, then it is too vague; wh Rorty should have written is “there are animals, vegetables, minerals, elementary particles, nineteenth-century painting, etc., that we act on”; and the passage I have quoted twice should have read “the mistake lies in

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121 Putnam, “Richard Rorty on Reality and Justification”, *Rorty and his Critics* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Malden, Massachusetts, 2000), p. 83



thinking that the relation between vocables and animals, vegetables, minerals, elementary particles, nineteenth-century paintings, etc. [and whatever else his current story posits] has to be piecemeal, etc.”<sup>122</sup>

2. Rorty's view of justification also has some drawbacks.

Putnam criticises Rorty's idea that justification is a sociological matter. Putnam criticises Rorty that he considers majority is right. But majority can be wrong. In his book, *Realism with a Human Face*, Putnam gives five principles of justification.

1. “In ordinary circumstances, there is usually a fact of the matter as to whether the statements people make are warranted or not”<sup>123</sup>

2. The justification is independent of the opinion of the cultural peers.

3. The norms of justification are the products of history and they evolve in time.

4. “Our norms and standards always reflect our interests and values. Our picture of intellectual flourishing is part of, and only makes sense as a part of, our picture of human flourishing in general”<sup>124</sup>

5. “Our norms and standards of *anything*- including warranted assertibility- are capable of reform. There are better and worse norms and standards”<sup>125</sup>

Putnam says that according to Rorty's position warrant is seen as a sociological matter. It should be understood in terms of the reception of someone's statement by

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122 Ibid.

123 Putnam, “Realism with a human face”, *Realism with a human face*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 1990), p. 21

124 Ibid

125 Ibid

her peers. If Rorty agrees to the idea that majority can be wrong he cannot continue to consider solidarity as the condition for justification.

## **II. John McDowell**

John McDowell is an analytic philosopher known for his original contribution in Philosophy of language and mind. He was influenced very much by Sellars, Rorty, Davidson and Strawson. A Kantian influence is very much present in his writings.

### **II. 1. McDowell on the Mind and the World**

McDowell's concern in philosophy of language and mind is the answerability of a subject to the world. He is bringing back the Kantian project in epistemology. His basic issue is how is the tribunal of experience possible? The concept of the tribunal of experience can be loosely understood as a judgemental faculty of experience, which brings into the centre-stage the important role the 'space of reason'<sup>126</sup> plays in experience.

#### **II. 1. A. Minimal Empiricism**

According to McDowell, in order to understand the mind's directedness towards the world we need to consider the state of mind normatively. That means our beliefs and judgements about the world will either correctly or incorrectly refer to what it is

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<sup>126</sup> McDowell, *Mind and World*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, first published 1996)

supposed to refer. Thus, we can consider the mental states in a normative context which could be shown to be correct or incorrect. He says:

This relation between mind and world is normative, then, in this sense: thinking that aims at judgement or at the fixation of belief, is answerable to the world - to how things are – for whether or not it is correctly executed.<sup>127</sup>

This answerability of our thought to the world being in a normative context is indeed restricted to the domain of empirical thinking. McDowell considers a Kantian strategy here. He says that this answerability to the world could be possible only within our answerability to our experiences. He calls this a minimal empiricism. A minimal empiricism is, as he says, “...the idea that experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are, as it must be if we are to make sense of it as thinking at all.”<sup>128</sup>

## **II. 1. B. Possibility of experience**

In a situation where we reflect upon the possibilities of knowledge or lack of it we need to reflect on the relation between mind and the world. This leads us to raise the question: How is it possible to have a tribunal of experience?

While attacking the “Myth of the Given”, Wilfred Sellars writes, “In characterizing an episode or a state as that of knowing, we are not giving an empirical description of

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127     Ibid, p. xii

128     Ibid

that episode or state; we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says.”<sup>129</sup> In other words, knowledge is a product of the thought's engagement with the world. McDowell says that placing thought in the logical space of reasons is a process of normative contextualization.

From the quotation given above, we could figure out two ways thought can be processed. One is that of a normative functioning, that is, putting the thought in the logical space of reason and the other is that of giving an empirical description of that thought. McDowell calls this empirical description as the logical space of nature.<sup>130</sup>

As regards the logical space of nature McDowell says, “I think we capture the essentials of Sellars's thinking if we take that the logical space of nature is the logical space in which the natural sciences function, as we have been enabled to conceive them by a well charted, and in itself admirable, development of modern thought.”<sup>131</sup> Sellars is not giving a positive interpretation of this in a way that placing thought in nature means placing it in the realm of law; rather he gives a negative characterization such that the logical space of nature cannot provide validation of thought. That means we cannot say one thought is correct or incorrect in the space of nature.

If that is the case, where does the realm of experience belong? Does it belong to the

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<sup>129</sup> Sellars, “Empiricism and Philosophy of Mind”, in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol.1, Eds. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven, (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, 1956), pp. 298-299

<sup>130</sup> McDowell, *Mind and World*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, first published 1996)

<sup>131</sup> Ibid, p. xiv, xv

logical space of reason or the logical space of nature? McDowell says that the experiences in the form of impressions will be placed in the logical space of nature. So in Sellar's position the impressions do not belong to the space in which we can make judgements about the correctness and incorrectness of the impressions. Thus McDowell accepts the Sellarsian distinction between the space of reasons and the space of nature without satisfying his minimal empiricism.

McDowell traces two major anxieties of modern philosophy. Both of these views are about empirical thinking and in that way about the mind world relation. One is the minimal empiricism and the other is the view that considers the tribunal of experience as impossible or illogical.

One of the ways to overcome this anxiety is to renounce empiricism. Davidson's rejection of the third dogma is in under this project. By rejecting the scheme-content dualism Davidson successfully demolished empiricism. Sellar's attack on the Myth of the Given was a similar project.

McDowell says, "Davidson's ground for giving up empiricism is in its essentials, the claim that we cannot take experience to be epistemologically significant except by falling into the Myth of the Given, in which experience, conceived in such a way that it could not be a tribunal, is nevertheless supposed to stand in judgement over our empirical thinking."<sup>132</sup> Although Davidson effectively imposes on us the need to renounce empiricism, he does not show us how to do it. According to McDowell, the

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132 McDowell, *Mind and World*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000, first published 1996) , p. xvii

empiricist picture is the best available picture we have to make sense of the mind-world relation. This can show us our answerability to the world by being answerable to the tribunal of experience.

One of the reasons why Davidson and Sellars want us to renounce empiricism is that they think the logical space of reason is *sui generis*. In Davidson's terms belief is intrinsically veridical.

McDowell holds that in this view the renunciation of experience is possible only in bald naturalism by rejecting the 'natural'- bald naturalism. "Bald naturalism refuses to accept that the relations that constitute the logical space of reasons are anything but natural, in a sense of "natural" that connects with the logical space that figures in Sellars (and, with different terminology, in Davidson) on the other side of a contrast with the logical space of reasons."<sup>133</sup>

McDowell's alternative is to include natural sciences in the logical space of reason. By doing so he tries to distinguish natural scientific intelligibility from the intelligibility we situate in logical space of reason. But it is one thing to single out a logical space of nature from logical space of reasons and it is another thing to equate that logical space with logical space of nature. Sellars agree that the natural science does not belong to the logical space of reasons. But that does not immediately prove that it belongs to logical space of nature. As a solution to this, McDowell introduces the concept of second nature. Just like humans can have different natures, nature may also have a second nature. And that second nature can belong to the logical space of

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133 Ibid. p. xviii

nature with which we can explain how natural can include the second nature as a part of the space of reason.

## **II. 2. McDowell's criticisms on Rorty**

McDowell develops his concept of objectivity based on how our thoughts are answerable to the world. For Rorty, on the other hand, what we need to do is to abandon the discourse of objectivity and engage ourselves with the notion of solidarity. Though these two thinkers appear to stay in the opposite realms, McDowell agrees to many of Rorty's basic tenets. But McDowell disagrees with Rorty's main conclusions about truth and objectivity.

1. McDowell agrees with Rorty that the epistemological problems are the result of the Cartesian ontology and what we have to do is not solving them but to dissolve them. But for McDowell, though some epistemological activities are bound to fail, epistemology itself is not a completely senseless activity. We still requires a theory to explain our relation with the outside world.

McDowell says it is not the answerability to the world which is the problem in philosophy, it is rather, the fear we have when we withdraw ourselves while we try to reach something outside our concept of the world. All the more, the worry can only be resolved by philosophy. He says, "It is the threat of inaccessibility on the part of the world that we need to dislodge, in order to unmask as illusory the seeming compulsoriness of mainstream epistemology."<sup>134</sup>

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134 McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity", *Rorty and his Critics*, (Blackwell

2. Rorty considers the crave for objectivity in philosophy as a part of our wishful thinking to solve the problems of the world once and for all. An objective conception will provide us with the benchmark to evaluate problems. For Rorty, we are trying to create an ideal position for the humans. This ideal position includes the successful engagement with reality and proper use of the knowledge derived by this. Human beings, in that sense, are rationally blessed to engage with the world. But, unfortunately, humans often find these criteria failing. Objectivity, in Rortian idea, is the result of our trying to get absolutely unfailing inter-relative with the world. According to Rorty, we are living in a contingent world of changes.

McDowell says that the limitations we have and the contingency of the world is one thing and the nature and understanding of the world is another thing. None of the reasons Rorty give can deny the answerability we have towards the world.

3. While engaging with the internalist position of Putnam, Rorty says that the internalist picture is harmless as far as the semantic notions are not in an external world but in an internal one. Rorty says, “From the stand point of the representationalist, the fact that notions like representation, reference and truth are deployed in ways that are internal to a language or a theory is no reason to drop them.”<sup>135</sup> But, Rorty thinks that we try to use these notions externally in such a way that they provide objectivity. For Rorty, the innocent internal use of semantic notions has to be distinguished from objectivity.

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Publishers Ltd, Malden, Massachusetts, 2000) , p. 110

<sup>135</sup> Rorty, *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1991), p. 6



McDowell agrees with Rorty in the idea that the discourse of objectivity involves some external use of semantical notions. But he disagrees to Rorty in saying that the rejection of these external uses requires rejecting our answerability to the world.

This innocent internal use, interestingly, is able to disprove the entire Rortian philosophy. According to Rorty, these innocent internal uses consist in giving harmless empty complements to different forms of claim. These empty claims would in turn, for different uses, end up suggesting validation statements like that which includes truth or accuracy. Without having proper mode of explanations of these harmless claims, 'the representationalist' would begin to count it from a non-explainable world picture. These restricted uses are suggestive of a world picture with restricted access and restricted engagement. In that picture, these semantic notions will work as building blocks which will enable the language use itself. Now it will project a world view in which language is meaningful and apparently systematic. This systematic world view cannot be accepted by Rorty. "Thus," McDowell says, "a familiar gulf seems to open between us and what we should like to be able to think of ourselves as able to get to know about. And the only alternative, as Rorty sees things, is to take our inquiry not to be subject to anything but the norms of the current practice. This picture of the options make it look as if the very idea of inquiry as normatively beholden not just to current practice but the subject matter is inextricably connected with the "Augustinian" picture and the impulse to climb outside our own minds"<sup>136</sup>

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136 Ibid. p. 115

4. According to Rorty, there are three different uses to the word 'true'.
- A. Normative use: Commending or validating a claim.
  - B. Disquotational use: When we are simply describing something. In the Tarskian T schema, truth is to be seen as a disquoting principle.
  - C. Cautionary use: We use this when we are not sure whether the claim will be falsified later

A cautionary use is such that the claim we are engaging is accepted by a group of people for the time being. But it is always possible that this can be falsified later by a more competent audience. This is in fact, a part of holding solidarity over objectivity. So for Rorty the only way we could make a strong claim is to continuously confirm it to larger and larger audiences possible. McDowell says that by doing this we naturally are making truth as a norm. McDowell says, "If we try to make sense of a further norm, involving responsibility to the subject matter of inquiry, we land ourselves in the "Augustinian" or sideways-on picture of our relation to that subject matter."<sup>137</sup>

Rorty claims that a disquotational use can never in any discourse treat truth as a norm. The disquotational use tries to recognize its roots in the Tarskian 'T-schema'. The T-schema is of the form that "'X" is true iff X'. Here the object language is contained in the meta language. Davidson's use of this schema for constructing his meaning theory involves this meta language and object language. But, for Davidson, there is no containment relation in them. For him both are ordinary languages and the sentence of one language is interpreted in the other. Here, we can say that we are commending on one sentence in a language using a sentence in another language and through that we

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137 Ibid. p.116

are giving meaning to one. This is, indeed, a normative use of one that is counted as a disquotational use.

5. McDowell says that the philosophical anxiety Rorty intended to impose on us is quite Deweyan in character. Dewey had hostility towards some forms of philosophical activities. Rorty follows him on this point. But truth, according to Dewey, is achievable. According to Dewey truth is a goal which is available through the inquiry in to matters of fact under the scientific methods. Truth, for him, is within our reach. But Rorty thinks that truth is away from our reach. In that sense it is unDeweyan.

As the conclusion to his paper 'Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity' McDowell says, "The way to cure ourselves of unwarranted expectations for philosophy is not to drop the vocabulary of objectivity, but to work at understanding the sources of the deformations to which the vocabulary of objectivity has historically be prone. If we could do that it would enable us to undo the deformations, and see our way clear of the seemingly compulsory philosophical problematic that Rorty wants us to get under. This would be an epistemological achievement in a perfectly intelligible sense of "epistemological" that does not restrict epistemology to accepting the traditional problematic. It is the deformations, to which the Rorty's discussions of truth reveal him to be party, and not the vocabulary itself, that lead to philosophical trouble."<sup>138</sup> This show that McDowell does not approve of Rorty's views on truth and Objectivity.

### **III. Robert Brandom**

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138 Ibid. p.121

Robert Brandom is an influential contemporary American philosopher. His works are primarily on Philosophy of language, mind and logic. He comes under the influence of the American pragmatic tradition. He, however, makes important departures from this tradition.

### **III. 1. Rationalist Pragmatism**

Rationalist Pragmatism is a new model of pragmatism like Neo-Pragmatism, proposed by Putnam and Rorty. In a general sense, pragmatism is a philosophy stating the primacy of practices of different kinds. Brandom's version of pragmatism has affinities towards normative and linguistic practices. His objective is to provide pragmatic explanations for our semantic practices within the purview of a society. In Brandom's own words,

It is a *rationalist* pragmatism, in giving pride of place to practices of giving and asking for reasons, understanding them as conferring conceptual content on performances, expressions, and states suitably caught up in those practices<sup>139</sup>

The general form of pragmatism is something of the view that the theoretical domain can be explained in terms of the practical domain. According to this view our construction of theoretical ideas and theories can be explained in no other way than that of practices in our life. The problem that pragmatism faces is regarding the nature

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139 Brandom, *Articulating Reasons*, (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2000),

of this practicability. It is so wide a concept that it can be vague and confusing. So many competent interpretations are possible for this concept. Any human activity can be explained as a practice. Brandom tries to overcome this problem in his formulations of pragmatism by using the rational standards as the practical commitments. For him, it is our rational activities that needed special attention. That means, it is our activity of asking for reasons that has to be taken into account in the domain of our entire linguistic practices.

Notably, there are two major elements in rational pragmatism, as its name indicates, reason and practice. Reason is a characterizing faculty of weighing and validating beliefs and statements. This is actually a normative process. This concept of normativity is one of the main pillars of rational pragmatism.

Brandom's pragmatism is mainly concerned with the linguistic activities. This semantics, for him, is to be governed by inferential rules. He calls his semantical theory inferentialism. Inferentialism is the theory that the meaning of a sentence is a derivative of its allied sentences. These two theories, the normative pragmatism and the inferentialist semantics, are interlinked, according to Brandom.

### **III. 1. A. Semantic pragmatism**

Semantics, for Brandom, is the study of the act of asserting a sentence. In that sense semantics comes under the purview of pragmatism, for, after all, pragmatism is a study of human acts. The linguistic activity is superior to other activities because it is the home of reason. It is the pragmatic possibilities of linguistic activities which are

central to this semantic theory. The pragmatic possibilities are limited by the rational enterprises. The rational enterprises are confined as normative activities. These normative activities have to be explained within a social system.

### **Normativity**

It is the rational, in turn, the normative linguistic activities that are the primary focus of Rationalist pragmatism. The norms are social norms. What Brandom is trying to do is to tie up two opposite concepts. He wants to tie up the normative and the social in a seamless whole.

Brandom agrees to the idea that everything is governed by norms. People behave either in accordance with it or disagreeing with it. It is very much true about linguistic activities. When we ask for reason to do things we are moving in accordance with rational rules. Thus pragmatics to which semantics is answerable is essentially normative.

### **Inferentialism**

Brandom shows a contrast between inferentialism and representationalism. A representationalist school takes reference as the fundamental tool for explanations whereas an inferentialist school takes inference as the fundamental tool for explanation. Representationalism derives inferential concepts from the representational practices in language. Inferentialism explains representational concepts in terms of inference.

Brandom chooses inferentialism by following a Sellarsian thought. Sellars says that the difference between a judgement and a response is that the judgement can stand as a form of premises and conclusion.

### **III. 2. Brandom on Rorty**

In his book, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism*,<sup>140</sup> he uses the concept of 'vocabularies' extensively. By 'vocabularies', he means a trope of usages based on a particular view. The concept of 'vocabularies' has a Rortian origin.

Kant had a strategy of differentiating the instituting of conceptual categories from the application of them. This has a repercussion on Carnap who tried to divide the linguistic practice into meaning and believing. Fixing the meaning, in this scheme, is completely based on our convictions. But the world imposes itself on us the constraints regarding what are the things to be believed and thus what are the meaningful sentences.

Quine criticised this strategy as an overdescription. For him there are no sharp differences between changes in meaning and changes in belief. It may work both ways. Sometimes the meaning change will cause belief change and sometimes vice versa.

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<sup>140</sup>Brandom, *Between Saying and Doing: Towards an Analytic Pragmatism*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2008)

Rorty, according to Brandom, is reinvoking the Carnapian spirit at a different level and function by introducing the concept of 'vocabulary.' Brandom says, "‘Vocabulary’, is Rorty’s suggestion for a successor notion to do the work for which the positivists appealed to those concepts. Thus where before taking Quine’s point on board we would have had to distinguish change of language or meaning from change of theory of belief, in Rorty’s recommended idiom we can just talk about change of vocabulary. ...the task of articulating and teaching us how to use the idioms of vocabularies of exploring its utility for organizing our thinking about our cognitive and practical activity as knowers and agents<sup>141</sup>.”

## Conclusion

These thinkers present their opinions about Davidson and Rorty keeping their own standpoints. Putnam’s theory is very close to that of Rorty’s, but the major differences are regarding their attitude towards philosophy in general and truth in particular. McDowell constructs his thesis by contrasting it with Davidson’s epistemological positions. Rorty, for him, is right about many of Rorty’s epistemological worries but wrong about their solutions. Brandom tries to give a new interpretation to pragmatism which will incorporate the normativity.

The problem of truth and objectivity is resolved in different ways in these thinkers. For Putnam it is there but available only by the means of epistemic interference. McDowell tries to re-establish the Given. So for him truth is available through the

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141 Brandom, “Vocabularies of Pragmatism: Synthesizing Naturalism and Historicism”, in *Rorty and his Critics* (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Malden, Massachusetts, 2000) , p. 157



tribunal of experience. Brandom considers truth as a pragmatic notion but available through rational semantic activity.

## **Chapter 5**

### **In Defence of Truth and Objectivity**

#### **Introduction**

The philosophies of Rorty and Davidson are a struggle with the question of truth and objectivity. It is impossible to imagine their theories of language and world without reference to the twin issues of truth and objectivity. The problem of truth is the key to both philosophies because it suggests the nature of their analytic approach to language

and world.

To understand the nature of language is a hard task in philosophy because of the puzzle it create. However, to understand language is the basic task of philosophy, for it brings clarity to many other concepts such as truth, meaning, world, objectivity, etc. It is because language as a medium lies between subject and object, and so we need to provide a satisfactory explanation about how language is connected to the world. The language-world relationship is the basic problem which philosophy has to analyse. Both Davidson and Rorty have been struggling with this problem.

Once we landed on a satisfactory explanation of language by resolving or dissolving this problem, we can face the problem of truth and objectivity. That is, whether truth and objectivity is possible or not through language. The rejection of scheme-content dualism is designed to resolve this problem. If we follow the rhythm of this theory it may end up in a monistic picture which will make us epistemically incapable of figuring out the nature of language. This will be quite a disappointment and we need to boot up the program with a new theory. But this theory has to face the challenges posed by Davidson and Rorty in two different ways.

## **I. Issues**

### **I.1. Objectivity vs. Subjectivity**

By definition we cannot hold objectivity and subjectivity together. They are understood as opposite in nature. Though there are various formulations of objectivity

and subjectivity their opposition cannot be ruled out. What is objectively real cannot be subjectively real and vice versa. The concept of objectivity can be understood as standing for something which is independently real. Objectivity can be ontological, epistemic and normative in the sense something, be it reality, knowledge or truth, can stand independently of anything else.

Speaking of different formulations of objectivity, it can be contrasted with subjectivity. Subjectivity deals with as a person's own mental states<sup>142</sup>. Subjective knowledge is the knowledge of one's own mental states, feelings, pain etc., as contrasted with the objective knowledge of world.

The well-known concept of objectivity is that of epistemic objectivity. In that sense an objective knowledge is the knowledge that is based on solid grounds. We claim this knowledge to be true. These claims can be used as justification to other claims. That means we can consider these truth-claims as evidences to figure out the truth value of some other claims. In the field of epistemic enquiry, the beliefs which are likely to be true or false are considered to be objective.<sup>143</sup>

In science the notion of objectivity is taken to be the characteristic feature of the scientific theories. The origin of the notion of objectivity itself is connected with the idea of a scientific theory. The main objective of scientific objectivity is to keep it free from cultural and personal biases. This ensures the universal acceptability of the

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<sup>142</sup> See Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 2001)

<sup>143</sup> Cf. Bernstein, "Pragmatism, Truth and Objectivity", (Philosophical Topics, Vol. 36, Issue 1, spring 2008), p. 37-55

scientific truths. Thus scientific objectivity is the normative foundation of modern science.<sup>144</sup>

### **I.1.A. Absolute vs. Relative Truth**

Objective truth is the truth which science aims at. Objectivity is always associated with truth. Truth is the primary condition for something to be objective. But they are not one and the same thing. Truth pertains to statements which are made regarding the world. The whole of science consists of statements which are true. In that sense, truth ensures the objectivity of the scientific knowledge.<sup>145</sup>

Truth as understood logically is absolute in character in view of the fact that, as shown by Davidson, if a proposition *p* is true, it is true, iff *p*. This brings out semantically the absolute character of the truth of the proposition *p*. The idea of a relative truth fails to make sense, since relativisation of truth to any system of thought or language does not make sense.<sup>146</sup> Those who urge that truth is relative miss the point that truth is not the product of a system but is the normative standard outside the system.

### **I.1. B Against Relativism**

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<sup>144</sup> See Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, (Chicago University Press, Chicago, 1962)

for a challenge to the notion of unconditioned scientific objectivity

<sup>145</sup> See Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, (Routledge Publications, London, 1959)

<sup>146</sup> Cf. Davidson, "The inscrutability of Reference", in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1984)

It is necessary to visualize different relativistic positions based on the afore mentioned pictures. One form of relativism maintains the view that a claim in a particular system cannot be evaluated in some other system. According to this position, the truth value of a truth claim is a product of the system concerned. Each and every claim must be in one or other system. Each system is characteristically different from each other. Epistemic and ethical principles are different in different systems. There cannot be universal principles which apply to all systems. It is because these are no system-independent principles. These principles have value only inside a group which has justifications for these principles. One apparent problem this form of relativism has is its exclusivity. By definition, this form prevents one system to engage with another system. Consider a system in which right way of reasoning is different from another system's right reasoning. A person from this system cannot 'reason' with a person from another system.<sup>147</sup>

### **I.1. C Reinstating Objectivity**

As opposed to relativism objectivity has to be understood as a claim which has value independent of any systems. Objectivity is understood to have two sides. One is the ontological side which is concerned with reality or the world. The other side consists of its epistemic availability in language. Though there are two sides, objectivity is precisely a matter of a claim in language. Human beings use different methods to conceive this relation. One way is to consider language as corresponding to reality. In that case the representational character of a sentence provides us with objectivity.

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<sup>147</sup> See Putnam on Relativism of this type in *Reason, Truth and History*, (Cambridge University Press, New York, 1981)

Another way is to consider a sentence to cohere with the rest of the sentences which are true. Both representationalism and coherentism attempt to define truth and objectivity. Objectivity is an unbiased way of understanding things. Truth is a notion of correctness of a claim whether or not it is connected to something else. Truth cannot be divorced from objectivity at any cost, because when a sentence is true, it is true on objective grounds.<sup>148</sup>

Objectivity is the state of a sentence which is true by virtue of its relation with reality. Relativism is the notion that a sentence gets its values based on the circumstances it is applied in. The value of a sentence is the most important component in both these notions. Language, thus, gets the centrality in our discussion, because language harbours both truth and objectivity.

## **I.2. Language**

Human beings live in groups. We talk and express our thoughts and emotions. We see and imagine things. We have mechanisms to name things. We talk about the different dimensions of things. This could be the simplest short story of language. Yet, in philosophy things do not go as smooth as this. Philosophers ask how and why questions about language. They even ask possibility questions. And the basic of all these is the what question.

Apart from the possible characterization of language as method, medium and mirror

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<sup>148</sup> See McDowell, "Towards Rehabilitating Objectivity", *Rorty and his Critics*, (Blackwell Publishers Ltd, Malden, Massachusetts, 2000)

how do we place language in a metaphysical scheme of things? One possible option is this that language is a collection of words, sentences and other things and they are not connected to the world. This is perfectly tenable until we are required to justify our sentences. So we can try for another possibility and that is considering language as connected to the world. Now we need to specify the nature of this connection. One suggestion for that is to consider language as a mirror that represents the world. But if that is the case human beings do not commit errors in thinking or language using. Everything language always shows is what is really out there in the world. Language may have different functions as well. But the most important among them is to represent the world. But if it has many functions how do we define language? What is that character that is fundamental to language?

We have been using a dualistic ontology all these times to figure out what is the fundamental value of language. We were focusing on the gap between the world and language. Now, let us try a monistic ontology where world and language are one and the same. Imagine a situation where what world is is what language is. It is not that the world and language are connected to each other but they are one single entity. As a matter of fact, such an imagination makes us epistemically bewildered. We are unable to locate the answer to what question of language. Conceivability of that situation may require dismissing our presuppositions of language and world.

'The world' is already a difficult notion. This idea is often synonymous with 'nature' and 'reality'. The world is regarded as composed of material things and the laws governing them. Most of the philosophical worries about the world are concerned with the ontology of these objects and laws. Language is a collected whole composed

of words, sentences and grammar. The purpose of language is communication. These are the common presuppositions we have about language. Notably, these presuppositions have sprung out of a dualistic framework. So conceivability of a monistic framework is often ruled out.

The idea of language must be conducive to the notion of truth and objectivity is that of language as a representation of the world. We can reinstate truth and objectivity if we can reinstate the representational theory of language.<sup>149</sup>

### **I.3. Truth**

As we have already seen truth is a more difficult concept than objectivity is. To repeat, objectivity can be attained if we can find that language has the power to evaluate itself. The reason why objectivity is less confusing than truth is that it works in a limited sanctioned sphere. But truth pervades though out language logically.

Is truth a property? Apart from the seemingly mistaken use of the category of 'property', this could harmlessly mean that truth exists in the semantic structure of a sentence. The initial supposition we make here is that there is a speaker of a sentence. The speaker is a truth-speaker in making statements about the world. The very fact of being spoken by a speaker points to the possibility of correctness in the sentence. The correctness is applied to the way the sentence works vis-a-vis the world. But this framework works under the condition that a sentence is a manifestation of a person's

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<sup>149</sup> The Representational theory goes against Rorty's anti-representationalism. See Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey, 1979)



thought. This whole thing would possibly lead to the subjectivity of the notion of truth. But the semantic structure of the sentence preserves the truth and objectivity.

The applicability of the notion of truth in subjective or relative cases need not be denied. But it is doubtful that this will capture the complete notion of truth. A sentence is true when it goes beyond the domain of subjectivity. Truth is anti-subjective in its logical nature. Truth and objective knowledge logically go together.

Thus truth and objectivity are the twin features of the logical structure of language. Without the logical structure of language, truth and objectivity cannot be placed in secure semantic space.

## **II.Rorty vs. Davidson**

On the nature of relativism, Rorty writes:

The epithet 'relativist' is applied to philosophers who agree with Nietzsche that "“Truth” is the will to be master of the multiplicity of sensations'. It is also applied to those who agree with William James that 'the true is only expedient in the way of believing' and to those who agree with Thomas Kuhn that science should not be thought of as moving towards an accurate representation of the way the world is in itself. More generally philosophers are called 'relativist' when they do not accept the greek distinction between the way things are in themselves and the relation which they have to other things, and in particular to human needs and

interests.<sup>150</sup>

Rorty writes this in the introduction of 'Philosophy and Social Hope' in order to justify relativism. Rorty is a committed relativist in the refined sense of the term.<sup>151</sup> I do not consider relativism to be an enemy camp. Rorty's main thrust is on these two ideas. The one is the impossibility of construing a world-language relationship and the other is the unnecessary worry for constructing an objective outlook. However, Rorty's twin programmes do not succeed, because, as we have argued, the language-world relationship cannot be given up and objectivity of truth cannot be dispersed with.

Davidson agrees to the idea that truth is a relative concept. But it is not relative to the culture, but to the rationality. Rationality enables us to understand the world.

Truth emerges not as wholly detached from belief (as a correspondence theory would make it) nor as dependent on human methods and powers of discovery (as epistemic theories of truth would make it). What saves truth from being 'radically non-epistemic' (in Putnam's words) is not that truth is epistemic but that belief, through its ties with meaning, is intrinsically veridical.<sup>152</sup>

Davidson believes in the knowability of the world. He relies on the notion of rationality. Since human beings have rationality, they are not completely wrong about

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150 Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, (Penguin books, Harmondsworth, Middlesex, England, 1999), p. xvi

151 Cf. Rorty, "Putnam and the Relativist Menace", *The Journal of Philosophy*, Vol. 90, No. 9, Sep., 1993, pp. 443-461

152 Davidson, Donald, "Afterthoughts", *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, New York, 2001), p. 156

their beliefs. This makes the sentences true as these expressing beliefs about the world. Davidson is a firm believer in the truth and objectivity of beliefs in language.

Rorty's emphasis on finitude and contingency does not dislodge truth and objectivity from their central place in language. Finitude and contingency tells us about the limits of language and of truth and objectivity.

The rejection of scheme-content distinction plays central role in the philosophies of both Davidson and Rorty. From this point they go in different directions. The rejection of scheme-content dualism is the foundation of anti-representationalist mode of thinking. The theory says that no conceivable relation between a scheme and its content can be theoretically established. Davidson maintains this theory as an epistemic impossibility of understanding the relation between language and fact. For him, it is impossible to differentiate the two. So it is improper to count them as two. But Rorty visualizes the theory as the ontological impossibility of connecting language and fact. For Rorty, this theory is the proof that the language is not a mirror of nature.<sup>153</sup>

In view of the above position, we can judge the relative merits of the positions of Davidson and Rorty. Davidson discards relativism as an unacceptable position. One part of this rejection is his rejection of the third dogma. The other part is his rejection of ontological relativity.

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<sup>153</sup> See Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (Princeton University Press. Princeton, New Jersey, 1979)

The ontological relativity is the theory that the ontology changes according to the language. The nature of object is construed through language. Another language might not have the same ontology. Davidson agrees to this but this because this theory makes the world relative to language. For Davidson, however, the world is not relative to any particular language; world stands independently of language as such. He rejects the relativist notion of truth as well because, for him, truth is a truth is a semantic notion that is not subject to any linguistic variation.

Rorty goes in a different direction from the rejection of third dogma. He considers it as a proof for anti-representationalism. Apart from this he invokes two theories in support of anti-representationalism. One is Sellar's rejection of the concept of 'the Given'. Another is Quines rejection of meaning as an entity. Altogether he denies any relationship language can have with reality.

Rorty's theory of language and meaning does not accept any of the realist's presupposition like language-reality relationship. He rejects relativism per se but accepts the linguistic community as the basis of language and meaning.

### **III. Problems**

Objectivity is a feature of language, meaning and truth. Davidson's theory takes into the objectivity question squarely. The rejection of scheme-content distinction does not take away the objectivity of truth and meaning. However he does not consider language as completely independent of the human community. In his paper, 'A Nice

Derangement of Epitaphs, he says, “I conclude that there is no such thing as language, not if a language is anything like what many philosophers and linguists have supposed. There is therefore no such thing to be learned, mastered or born with. We must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and apply to cases. And we should try again to say how convention in an important sense is involved in language; or, as I think, we should give up the attempt to illuminate how we communicate by appeal to conventions.”<sup>154</sup> Here Davidson attacks the theory of language which makes language as a rigid system. He nevertheless takes language as community based. Therefore, Davidson's proposal for objectivity lies in the rationality in linguistic framework. If language is non-characterizable, then we will be puzzled about the possibility of rationality. If Even if it is theorized that the world is already available in language and the sentences are truth-functional in their very nature, we cannot but accept truth and meaning as objective.

Rorty, on the other hand, gives some improper characterizations of language. In his book, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* he gives two major characters of language<sup>155</sup>. One is that language is a contingent system and the other is that language is created by human beings. Language is contingent because human beings have brought it into existence. Rorty's theory is based on Nietzsche's theory of human contingency. Human beings are always in the process of change. Change, for Rorty, is a social fact

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<sup>154</sup> Davidson, “A nice Derangement of Epitaphs”, in *Truth, Language and History*, (Clarendon Press, Oxford, New York, 2005), p.107

<sup>155</sup> Rorty, *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, New York, 1989), p. 5

in history. With these changes, language also changes. Now, what does he possibly mean by language change? He may think either that the working rules of language change, or that a sentence gets new meaning. The first possibility is that the entire system of language changes. That means old sentences no longer have meaning in the new system. This may lead to instability of meaning and bring about the collapse of interpersonal communication. Rorty, however, safeguards his theory of meaning by appealing to ethnocentric solidarity of the people using a language.

Second possibility which Rorty has is that he can separate meaning from language. If he goes in that direction, he cannot explain how meaning is possible. For that reason, he comes back to language to explain meaning. His theory does not deny the possibility of different interpretations of a sentence and therefore of different meanings. For him it is not the epistemology but the hermeneutics that could save us from this riddle. It is possible that we do not require a theory of world-language relation in order to understand a sentence. But that does not detach meaning from language. Language and meaning go together for the reason that it is only in language that we can locate norms and meanings.

Another problem is regarding justification. Since the world is unconnected with the language justification is a serious problem. According to the interpretative possibility of sentence, no interpretation is better or worse than any other interpretation. All we can have is different interpretations. Similarly we cannot say one context is better than the other or some are more accurate than the other. Rorty's solution to this is to take recourse to the social beliefs of justification. Since social beliefs are different in different social groups, justification also differs. Here he has to deny the cross-cultural

translatability. If he does that he has to accept that another language is unintelligible from one's own language. If he does not do that then he has to carry the possibility of encountering different beliefs. If that happens, he cannot position which justificatory procedure is to be accepted. Thus Rorty's language fails.

#### **IV. Solution**

Davidson agrees to the idea that human beings have only limited capabilities. She might commit error in understanding the world. But she has the ability to realize and resolve the error. In Davidson's view this happens because of a meta-level concept regulating our understanding. For Rorty, this is an act of recontextualization and should be further reviewed. I agree to the fact that ideas should be further reviewed but I do not think recontextualization will work since change cannot be explained in Rorty's system. We should revisit our 'final vocabularies' keeping truth as our goal of enquiry.

Davidson deals with the idea of change in system with meta-level truth concept and principle of charity. But let us take his theory of rejection of scheme-content distinction. On the basis of that theory we understood that the language and world and indistinguishable. As an extension of that thesis language is shown to be indescribable. If world is already merged with the language, how is human error possible? Since we are rational agents we are able to realize and resolve the error. I consider the idea of rationality as a strong concept which will be difficult to theorize as a context to commit error.

I presume we can use the principle of charity in the place of rationality. Principle of charity is not as rigid as rationality and it shows the fact of human limitation. What I am suggesting is to use the principle of charity as the principle to connect language and world. Just like we are able to visualize the other human being as rational we can systematically consider the world as systematic. This, I think, is what enables us to understand the world. We presume a world of order.

We no longer require thinking that the world is already embedded in our language. I think the world is available to us in language but the 'already' is difficult to comprehend. World is available to us through our engagement with it. Meaning and the other menaces are parts of this engagement. It is true that language and world are indistinguishable. This is not because world and language are together from the beginning, but because any enquiry about relation is possible only after the connection is established. In that sense, it is true that world is present in language but it is possible only after our engagement with world through the principle of charity.

Indeed, the nature of language can be figured out, if we step back from the rigidity of the scheme-content indistinguishability. The nature of language is based on the principle of charity. Based on the principle of charity, we can theorize the 'aboutness' of language while keeping the rules of language as embedded in the human being.

What we do is imagining the world as understandable by us. We are conceiving world as having a pattern which is translatable in our logic. Error in understanding world is not the fault of the logic we use. Error happens as mistakes in combining categories. Committing error is a part of human limitation. It is humans that are limited, not



language.

## **Conclusion**

Human beings are in constant conversation with the world. He uses imagination and Reason to comprehend the world. But it is his inquisitive nature is the most important in understanding the world. The nature of man is not rationality or imagination; it is nothing but his inquisitiveness.

## **Conclusion**

The programme of this thesis is to see to the possibility of truth and objectivity through the analysis of the debate between Rorty and Davidson. The context of the study is in an anti-representationalist paradigm where the correspondence theory of truth is completely ruled out. What is the possibility of truth and objectivity in this paradigm? The paradigm is a philosophical offspring of a group of philosophers including Later Wittgenstein and Quine. On one end the structure of language is holistic and on the other end its content is taken to be the whole world including its social and cultural dynamics. The challenge before Davidson was to save objectivity

and truth from this complex linguistic reality. Rorty, on the other hand, tried to reject truth and objectivity.

It is not the case that we always require correspondence theory to justify objectivity. All we need is a theory of language that shows the possibility of objectivity. Language should be of the form that some of its component sentences are true by virtue of the way language is related to the world. A holistic theory of language enables us to see objectivity as a product of the total linguistic practices based on normativity. But the complexity of the linguistic practices faces the threat of relativism and subjectivism. Davison saves objectivity by keeping world and language together and by refusing to ethnocize the linguistic practices.

Rorty was committed to an anti-essentialistic mode of thinking. Meaning, for him, is a product of our imagination and so is the truth. His version of pragmatism is anti-essentialistic and committed only to solidarity. Every option of interpreting a sentence are equal and we choose to follow a judgement based on our immediate surroundings. As it is evident now, objectivity is long gone in this theorizing.

Davidson thinks that the language and world go together. It is impossible to distinguish world from language. Since the language works as a whole, objectivity can be understood within the language. Since the language is connected to the world, the world related sentences are objectively true. The whole project is justified by the idea that human beings are rational and what he understands about the world is almost

correct.

Rorty's characterization of language is not acceptable. Rorty takes language as a contingent human product. But his system fails to provide any proper characterization of change with respect to language. Justification is another problem that he is facing. There can be different justificatory procedures in one society and they change within the society. But justification in any case must be within the system of shared norms.

I agree to Davidson in his idea that the world is connected to language. I agree to the idea that sentences are connected together and objectivity is possible through this. I also agree that truth is the aim of our enquiry. But I do not agree that language is non-characterizable since it is impossible to differentiate language and world. I also disagree to the idea that rationality is the best way to explain our language using nature.

I think the principle of charity can best explain our language using character. We consider the world to be rational in order to understand. Even if we fail sometimes, we create new techniques of understandability. We retain the principle of charity as the principle of rationality with regard to language and the world.

In this work I defend truth and objectivity as the source of rationality and normativity.

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