# Similarity, Properties and Concepts

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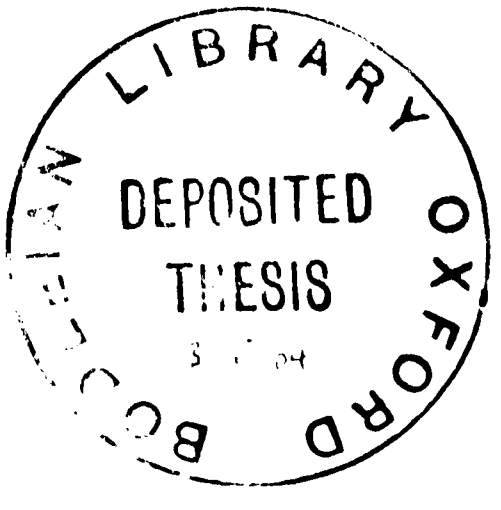

*Similarity, Properties and Concepts*
**Thesis Abstract**
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This thesis argues that one can fruitfully think of Nelson Goodman's New Riddle of Induction as a *reductio ad absurdum* of a certain set of views of the relationship between similarities, on the one hand, and properties, concepts, or predicates, on the other. It argues that any view which takes similarities between particulars to be most fundamentally explained by those objects' sharing a property, satisfying a concept, or falling under a predicate leaves itself without the resources to provide a satisfying answer to a Goodmanian sceptic who proposes that inductive inferences using "grue" are equally as warranted as those using "green."

I argue for an alternative view of similarity and inductive warrant which holds that the content of perceptual experience includes non-conceptual content the satisfaction conditions of which include that concept-independent similarities obtain. I argue further that it is only on the basis of that non-conceptual content that we are able satisfactorily to distinguish predicates like "grue" from those like "green." We must make such a distinction if we are to provide an acceptable account of inductive warrant.

In the course of developing this view, I critique a range of mainstream, contemporary accounts of the relationship between similarities, concepts and properties, and of the role of perceptual experience in justifying empirical beliefs. Chapter 1 argues for a realist view of similarities between particulars which takes our concepts of properties to spring from our observations of those similarities. This view is contrasted with David Armstrong's universal realism, which is rejected. Chapter 2 argues that Goodman's approach to his New Riddle based on entrenchment fails, and argues that if and only if one embraces the view of similarity and concepts that I favor then the New Riddle can be reduced to traditional Humean concerns about induction. Chapters 3 through 5 discuss difficulties for Donald Davidson's approach to the New Riddle, his account of the justification of empirical belief, and his rejection of the very idea of a conceptual scheme, tracing each of these difficulties to Davidson's view that similarities must always be understood in terms of concepts under which particulars fall. Using John McDowell's *Mind and World* as an example, Chapter 6 argues that any account of perceptual justification of empirical belief according to which the content of perception is limited to conceptual content will fall into the New Riddle, while accounts which permit non-conceptual content can avoid this problem.

**"GRUE":**

*Shuddering with fear, dread or loathing.*

- The Scottish National Dictionary IV,
W. Grant and D. Murison (eds.), (Edinburgh,1956).

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## Introduction

Any acceptable metaphysics and epistemology must make possible a tenable account of inductive warrant. Broadly, this thesis argues that a common view of the relationship between similarities, on the one hand, and concepts, properties, or predicates, on the other, makes impossible such an account. It then recommends an alternative account of similarities, concepts, properties and predicates and traces the implications of that account for various related areas of philosophy, with a particular focus on the area of the justification of empirical belief.

The core of the thesis begins with an analysis of Nelson Goodman's "New Riddle of Induction." At least two fundamental issues of inductive reasoning are raised by the following question: From the fact that all emeralds observed in the past have been found to be green, what should we expect about the nature of future emeralds? The simple reply would be that uniform past observations of emeralds' being green are a good basis for concluding that new emeralds will be observed to be the same way in the future, specifically, green. At this point, Hume's sceptic would challenge the simple reply's assumption that we can justifiably expect the world to be uniform -- in other words, she would doubt that there was good reason to expect observations of future emeralds to find them to be the same way as emeralds have been observed to be in the past.

Goodman's sceptic poses a different challenge. Goodman's sceptic challenges the simple reply's assumption that if the world was to be "uniform" that *that* would mean the new emeralds would be observed to be green rather than grue -- where "grue" applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue. In other words, the sceptic would doubt that there was good reason to think that observations that future emeralds were green would be observations that those emeralds *were* the same way. Hume's riddle of induction is the problem of *whether* things in the future will be uniform with the way they have been in the past. The New Riddle of Induction is the problem of characterizing *how things must be* in the future if they are to be "uniform" with how things have been in the past. It is a question of how we know *what real "uniformity" of*

*events and properties consists in.*

Goodman's sceptic threatens us with a total breakdown between inductive evidence and the conclusions derived from it. What has traditionally been posed as a dilemma between predicting that new emeralds will be green or that they will be blue (or "grue") is in reality an open ended choice between predicting that they will be green, blue, red (using "gred"), opaque (using "gropaque"), or soft (using "grsoft").[1] Unless Goodman's Riddle is solved, just about *any* inductive evidence could be taken to warrant *any* conclusion. Thus, without a solution to the Riddle, any account of inductive warrant will be fundamentally flawed.

I think this difficulty can be addressed by limiting induction to "natural properties," where this notion is characterized in terms of perceptible similarities between particulars. Essentially, as I use the term, a "natural property" is a property such that if two particulars are identical except that one has the natural property and one does not, then a third particular which has that natural property will be more similar to the particular which has that natural property than to the one which does not.[2]

This approach to the problem, however, is not open to philosophers who take similarities between particulars to be most fundamentally explained by those objects' sharing a property, satisfying a concept, or falling under a predicate. I deem the views held by such philosophers to be variants of what I call the "Shared Concept View" of similarity, or "SCV." My approach to the New Riddle based on perceptible similarities is not open to adherents of SCV because any such view is unable to rule out sceptically-motivated "similarities" based on particulars' sharing Goodmanian properties -- i.e., objects' being "similar" because they share the property "grue," satisfy the concept "grue," or fall under the predicate "grue." As a result, I argue, these views leave themselves without the resources to provide a satisfying answer to a Goodmanian sceptic. I therefore argue that SCV must be rejected.

To reject SCV is to commit oneself to the view that we can perceive concept-independent ways in which things are similar. This view requires not only that particulars *be* a certain way such that they are similar to one another (independently of any concept), but also that perceivers be able to *observe* these ways things are. If we are to reach justified inductive conclusions on the basis of those observations, then we must be able to hold

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[1] Where each of these predicates is defined analogously to how "grue" is defined, e.g., "grsoft" applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are soft.

[2]This definition provides a general understanding of the notion of "natural property," but I provide a more precise definition in Chapter 2 which avoids certain technical objections.

warranted beliefs on the basis of our observations of the ways things are. Perceivers can only observe and hold warranted beliefs about how things are concept-independently similar if they enjoy non-conceptual perceptual content. Non-conceptual perceptual content allows us to perceive ways particulars are similar to one another independent of any concept. It is that content of perception that allows us to discern natural properties from ones like "grue."

The rejection of SCV and acceptance of non-conceptual perceptual content has a number of significant implications. If SCV were true, the New Riddle would show that one way of going on in the "same" way would be as good as another, so there would *be* no going on in the same way. Therefore, continuing to apply terms in "the same way," -- at least applications of those terms the applications of which are grounded by what we can readily perceive -- is *not* best understood as applying terms to things that fall under the same concept as things to which the terms have been applied in the past, since there is always a bent concept under which any set of particulars can be said to fall. Rather, continuing to apply such terms "in the same way" is better understood as applying them to things that are relevantly non-conceptually, perceptibly similar to things to which the terms have been applied in the past.

Another implication of the falsity of SCV, on the highly plausible additional premise that language must capture the content of perceptual experience, is that there will be little variation in human conceptual schemes, since any human conceptual scheme must capture the non-conceptual content of experience.

The rejection of SCV and the acceptance of non-conceptual perceptual content requires the rejection of what I call "The Deductive Model of Empirical Justification." The Deductive Model of Empirical Justification, whose many adherents include Donald Davidson and John McDowell, requires that

1) Only something conceptually articulated can serve as a justifier
2) The concepts involved in perceptual justification must have a relation like that between elements in a formally valid inference, and
3) Empirical justificatory inference must be truth-preserving.

Finally, if non-conceptual intentional content is possible, this entails that intentional experience is possible independent of concepts or language.

In the course of developing these theses, I critique a range of mainstream,

contemporary accounts of the relationship between similarities, concepts and properties and of the role of perceptual experience in justifying empirical beliefs.

Chapter 1 sets out my "Strong Resemblance Nominalism," (or "SRN") which holds that our skill in discerning similarities between particulars is at least three-fold: (1) we perceive that certain particulars are similar to one another, (2) we can largely perceive the *degree* to which things are similar, at least in some respects, and (3) we can perceive *how* things are similar. It is (3) which separates my view from the Weak Resemblance Nominalism (or "WRN") with which David Armstrong contrasts his favored Immanent Universal Realism.[3] Without (3), WRN is forced to hold that a particular's having a property is constituted by a relation of resemblance to an exemplar set rather than simply consisting of that particular's being a certain way. Therefore, I argue, Armstrong was right to reject WRN. However, SRN does not have this shortcoming and, I argue further, an account based on SRN is superior to Immanent Universal Realism for reasons of explanatory economy, among other things. The idea underlying (3), that particulars have a certain way of being which we can perceive, has a central role throughout much of the thesis.

Chapter 2 explains the differences touched on above between traditional Humean scepticism and the Goodmanian scepticism. It argues that Goodman's solution to his New Riddle based on "entrenchment" is lacking. It is lacking, among other reasons, because it must concede that if we were confronted by an individual from a culture like our own except that it had a long, rich practice of projecting on the basis of "grue" instead of "green," then we would have no winning argument as to why our own projections were warranted and his were not. The chapter goes on to lay out the reply to the Goodmanian sceptic outlined above, which employs on a notion of "natural properties" and, crucially, requires that natural properties be understood in terms of ways things are similar independent of concepts rather than similarities explained in terms of concepts. In other words, my recommended approach to the New Riddle requires the rejection of SCV. Our exploitation of the notion of "ways things are similar independent of concepts" in characterizing "natural properties" is only possible because (as argued in Chapter 1) we can perceive *how* things are similar to one another. Once we allow that we can perceive how things are similar to one another, we can explain *why* concepts apply to certain particulars and not to others, and, along with that, *why* certain concepts are fit for inductive inferences and others are not.

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[3]Armstrong, D. M., *Nominalism and Realism* (Cambridge, 1978), 108.

Once SCV is rejected, there is an easy analysis for our strong intuition that there is something obviously wrong with "grue" as a predicate for use in induction: Grue particulars need not be similar to one another, whereas this is not the case with "green." Broadly, then, to win an argument against a proponent of "grue"-based projections, we simply need to point out this fact and note that inductive evidence does not warrant the conclusion that in the future things will go on in a way dissimilar to the way they have been in the past. This argument is unavailable to an adherent of SCV, because SCV lacks the resources to distinguish between sets of particulars similar because they are "green" and sets "similar" because they are "grue." Because SCV impedes any satisfactory account of induction, it must be rejected.

Chapter 3 uses the important example of Davidson to trace the harmful effects of SCV. It begins by arguing that Davidson's answer to the New Riddle fails. Davidson holds that "grue" and "green" are equally useful in induction so long as they are paired with matching predicates -- "emerire"[4] and "emerald" respectively. I argue that this approach is unhelpful because, among other reasons, it gives rise to the problem of how to match one predicate with another. This problem, as things turn out, is just as difficult as the more traditional problem of how to discern predicates fit for induction from those not fit for induction. I go on to argue that it is Davidson's commitment to SCV that leads him to this unpromising answer, and that if he rejected SCV he could endorse an interpretivist solution to the New Riddle whereby a new "Principle of Charity" would require that interpreters avoid making interpretations which take speakers to be making "bent" projections (i.e., projections based on predicates like "grue"). I also begin to discuss the idea that if one rejects SCV, then one must accept that the content of perceptual experience includes non-conceptual content.

In Chapters 4 and 5 I argue that in spite of the harm that SCV inflicts on Davidson's philosophy, he offers no good reason to reject either the notion of concept-independent similarity or the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content the satisfaction conditions of which include that such similarities obtain. Chapter 4 focuses on his "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," and argues that it provides no compelling considerations in favor of SCV. Although Davidson persuasively argues that non-intentional sense data could not help justify our empirical beliefs, his arguments are not valid as against non-conceptual

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[4]Which applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are emeralds but to other things just in case they are sapphires.

intentional perceptual experience's having a foundational role in the justification of those empirical beliefs. We have good reason to accept that we enjoy such non-conceptual, perceptual content because only it allows us to explain how the Goodmanian sceptic is wrong about induction. I also argue that Davidson's coherentist account of empirical justification, while it is not so obviously flawed as some have argued, is ultimately a failure. This provides us with a further reason to accept that we enjoy the sort of perceptual content that I recommend.

The idea of concept-independent similarity is of a piece with the idea Davidson opposes of a "dualism of total scheme (or language) and uninterpreted content," the latter being something "neutral and common which lies outside all schemes."[5] Chapter 5 looks to Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" for arguments in favor of SCV, but finds no compelling considerations against either the idea of concept-independent similarity or the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that such similarities obtain. I argue that Davidson is right that humans could not have radically different conceptual schemes, but not because the very idea of an alternative scheme is incoherent. Rather, we could not have such schemes because any human conceptual scheme must be able to capture the non-conceptual content of human perception.

In Chapter 5 I further argue that to embrace non-conceptual content involves rejecting "The Deductive Model of Empirical Justification" which maintains that (1) only something conceptually articulated can serve as a justifier, (2) the concepts involved in perceptual justification must have a relation like that between elements in a formally valid inference, and (3) empirical justificatory inference must be truth-preserving. To reject the "Deductive Model" is to reject Davidson's constraints on what could count as an acceptable account of perceptual justification.

In Chapter 6 I argue that McDowell also adheres to the Deductive Model. I argue this forces him into a dilemma of choosing between an untenable account of perceptual justification, on the one hand, and a kind of idealism according to which the world itself is conceptually articulated, on the other. McDowell could avoid this dilemma by rejecting SCV and the Deductive Model. I also argue that, like anyone who accepts SCV, McDowell lacks the resources to acceptably distinguish "green" from "grue" for the purposes of induction, and

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[5]Davidson, Donald, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford, 1984), 187.

therefore lacks the resources for a tenable account of inductive warrant. In the course of this chapter I also note that to reject the Deductive Model -- as I argue we must -- is to reject the idea that concepts and language are preconditions for all intentionality.

## Chapter 1: Armstrong and Universals

In this chapter I shall discuss some different accounts of why certain aspects of the world are brought together in our thought and language and considered to be unitary "qualities," and upon what in the world these divisions made by our thought and language could be based. There are distinct but analogous questions pertaining to things rather than properties, for example, questions of what explains why we observe certain groups of particulars to be groups, and why we think and speak of them as groups or "kinds." Various attempts have been made by philosophers to give an account of these "division problems."[1]

Universals of various descriptions have been posited by some philosophers to explain why some sets of particulars and qualities seem to share in the same nature. Other philosophers, whom I'll call "Conceptualists," have sought to account for our practices of classification by saying that we classify qualities and particulars under general terms in a way that follows from the concepts we happen to have, or in a way that reflects our contingent human interests rather than in a way that reflects metaphysical "truth." In this chapter I shall argue that the best account of our division practices as they pertain to qualities of physical objects is one that takes a realist view of similarities between those objects and takes our concepts of properties to spring from our observations of those similarities. My claim that we can perceive not only *that* things are similar and, to some extent, the *degree* to which they are similar, but also *how* things are similar will separate my view from the weaker nominalism attacked by David Armstrong.[2] The idea that particulars have particular perceptible ways of being which make them similar to some other particulars will play a central role in subsequent chapters. I shall further argue that my account is preferable to an account based on universals because of its explanatory economy, among other reasons.

Patently, there are many different sorts of properties. We should not assume that all

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[1]The "division problems" that I am discussing in this chapter are different from those discussed by Eli Hirsch in his *Dividing Reality,* as his problems deal with the question of whether and why ordinary languages are more rational than certain strange languages -- regardless of whether or not the world might be divided "strangely." My more traditional problems deal with what the "hinges of reality" are, how we know of them, and how this knowledge is reflected in our thought and language. Hirsch, Eli, *Dividing Reality* (New York 1993).

of them can best be accounted for in the same manner. I shall focus on physical properties that are directly perceptible, like color, shape, size, and the like, as these sorts of properties are, in some intuitive sense, at the core of our experience of the world. These are also the properties most obviously apt for the treatment I have in mind. Later in this chapter I shall briefly touch on the fair prospects for extending this treatment to other properties which are not directly observable in the same way.

**The Case for Universals**

Since Plato's time, universals have been postulated to explain how language is possible. A Platonic philosopher of language might express the following old-fashioned argument which I shall call the "Condition for Meaning Argument": Every word has a meaning. A proper name refers to, and thereby "means," a particular object, as "the Parthenon" means a particular building in Athens. And in somewhat the same manner "dog" must mean some *thing*. But no one particular dog can be meant by "dog", since there are many different dogs with different characteristics and any particular dog has extraneous characteristics that it wouldn't have to have in order to be a dog. So there must be some transcendent Form of the Dog, which is the essence of dogness that all and only dogs take part in, since this seems to be the only thing to which "dog" could refer. Now likewise, all red objects share something -- redness -- which is what must be meant by "red." Surely if all dogs or red things were destroyed "dog" and "red" would retain their meaning. So the "forms" or "universals" Dog and Red must not inhere in any physical thing. The item that is the meaning of "dog" or of "red" could not change -- despite the fact that we might use a different-sounding word and mean Red when we say "green." So such items must be unchanging, and therefore wholly independent of humans and of our minds. "Universals," the theorist would conclude, are these immutable, immaterial, mind-independent things that must exist in order for both our qualitative and kind terms to be meaningful.

A different case for universals which is less laden with untenable claims about language has been called the "One Over Many Argument" and is often attributed to Plato. It holds that certain groups of particulars -- say, of dogs, or of red things -- must have something in common that accounts for their having those shared properties or natures.

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[2]Armstrong, D. M., *A Theory of Universals* (Cambridge, 1978).

Some particular dog, Fido, is a dog, and must be such in virtue of its sharing with all other dogs some item which is independent of all particular dogs. Whatever this item necessarily shared by all dogs is is a universal.

I shall call the view supported by these two Platonic arguments "Transcendent Realism," because the universals argued for would exist independently of any particulars' ever existing.

In contrast to these transcendent, Platonic universals, Aristotle's universals existed only inseparably from the existence of particular things. I shall call this kind of view "Immanent Realism." Aristotle held that

> "... it is impossible and absurd that the 'this', i.e., the substance, if it consists of parts should not consist of substances nor of what is a 'this', but of quality [i.e., a transcendent universal]; for that which is not substance, i.e., the quality, will then be prior to substance and the 'this'. Which is impossible; for neither in formula nor in time nor in coming to be can the affections be prior to the substance and to the 'this.'"[3]

So whatever existence such universals do have, they must not exist separably from the "this." Aristotle held that we grasp universals by a mental process of abstraction from particulars. Universals are mind-dependent entities, and Red, for example, though distinct from individual red things, does depend on those things and on minds for its existence.

David Armstrong, an Immanent Realist, has argued persuasively that any form of Transcendent Realism is wrong. His central argument is that if universals are separate from particulars, then to say that

> *a* has the property P iff *a* has a suitable relation to the transcendent universal[4]

is not a good explanation. The "explanation" that particular *a* has a special relation to a certain universal, say White, begs the question of why *a* is specially related to that universal. If the answer is that *a* has P, then we should

> perform the usual thought-experiment and consider *a* without the Form of Whiteness. It seems obvious that *a* might still be white. So *a*'s being white is not determined by

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[3]Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, tr. W. D. Ross (Oxford, 1924), 7.13.

*a*'s relation to the Form.[5]

The idea is that if *a* is separate from the universal White, then *a* is white separately from that universal. So the universal does not do the work for which it was postulated, namely, to explain why certain particulars should be grouped together as white. And if the particular is said to be white because it is related to a completely independent thing, then the question arises why any subset of the particulars is related to *that* independent thing and not to a different independent thing, like, say, Red. So the One Over Many Argument is not a good reason to postulate transcendent universals, and such transcendent universals are no part of an answer to the question of why certain qualities are real qualities, or why certain groups of particulars are kinds.

I take the problem of the relation of transcendent universals to particulars to be grounds for rejection both of transcendent universals that purportedly explain properties of particulars, and of those that purportedly explain the meanings of general terms. If "red" means a transcendent universal then, in order to have even the beginning of an explanation of the meaning of that general term, we must explain the relation between a certain group of particulars and this universal in order to explain why those particulars but not others are correctly described as "red." But this is the same mysterious relation which led to the rejection of transcendent universals as an account of shared properties. For such an account of language to work, it would have to be supplemented by some completely different mechanism for picking out the red particulars. In other words, some solution to the original problem completely independent of the linguistic account would have to be mooted.

If we are to understand why certain particulars come grouped together, or why they seem to be so, or why certain particulars seem to have the same nature, then it appears that we are left with a choice between an account that includes immanent universals, a conceptualist account, or an account that takes similarity to be fundamental. I shall argue here that realism about similarity is preferable to realism about universals. In the next chapter, I shall argue that realism about similarity is preferable to conceptualism.

The best case for an account of selective division based on immanent universals comes from Armstrong, who has argued against the view that universals should be thought of as mirroring predicates. He holds that not every meaningful general term refers to a

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[4]Armstrong , *A Theory of Universals,* 2.

universal, and that we should only admit those universals that play a role in scientific law. He thinks that past philosophers have misused universals in the attempt to explain meaning, and that the desire to avoid these past mistakes has prevented philosophers from understanding the important role of universals in explaining the status of natural laws and causal generalizations.

Having rejected Transcendent Realism, Armstrong argues in favor of his Immanent Realism, opposing it to Nominalism. Nominalism is any view which rejects universals -- including, notably, an analysis based on similarity, or as he calls it, Resemblance Nominalism.[6] I shall focus here on his arguments against Resemblance Nominalism, since I take Resemblance Nominalism to be the only plausible form of Nominalism. Armstrong's arguments begin with his claim that the burden of proof is on the Nominalist, because "the distinction between token and type is all-pervasive and *prima facie* incompatible with Nominalism."[7]

Armstrong uses an argument against Nominalism that is parallel to his argument against Transcendent Realism; he claims that Nominalism is committed to giving a flawed account of what it is for an object to have a property, because it cannot explain the relation between particulars and properties. Whether the Nominalist analyzes *a* 's having the property P as falling under a predicate, falling under a concept, being a member of a class, or suitably resembling the paradigm case(s) of P, Armstrong argues, Nominalism will fail to account for the fact that *a* might have P whether or not that predicate, concept, class, or set of paradigm objects existed. He thinks that this failure leaves all forms of Nominalism with the flaw that they are "unable to explain away ... the apparent identity of nature which is exhibited by certain particulars."[8]

Armstrong thinks that in order to characterize properties, Resemblance Nominalism must "employ the notion of certain paradigm particulars":

> "The necessity for such paradigm objects is easy to see. Suppose, for instance, that we try to supply the uniting principle of the white things by saying that each of them resembles every other one more closely than any of them

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[5]Armstrong, D. M., *Nominalism and Realism* (Cambridge, 1978), 68.
[6]So "Nominalism," as I use that term, is not as spare a notion as some people's "nominalism."
[7]Armstrong , *A Theory of Universals*, 1.
[8]Ibid.

> resemble anything else. The trouble then is that we wish to use the same formula to unite, say, the red things. What then differentiates white things from red things? ... Paradigm particulars are introduced to solve this difficulty."[9]

One might note here that the question of differentiating white things from red things aside, it is an obviously false claim that each white thing "resembles every other white thing more closely than it resembles anything else," and is equally obviously false that such a resemblances between things could be a requirement for their having a property.

Paradigm particulars are a source of many difficulties for the Resemblance Nominalist. For one thing, a single paradigm would be insufficient to determine a property, since any particular has more than one property. So a single red balloon, for example, would no more allow the similarity theorist to characterize red things than to characterize rubbery things. In reaction to this problem, H.H. Price suggests that a Resemblance Nominalist should instead select a range of several diverse "exemplars" of a property, say, a certain brick, a certain balloon, and Mars.[10] He could then claim that a red object is one which resembles the exemplars as closely as the exemplars resemble each other. But even this kind of account seems doomed to fail, because there will be extraneous similarities between any set of exemplars. For example, any red object so large as to dwarf the three exemplars might not come out as red on this account, since the exemplars might be more similar to each other than to the huge object. Generally, "no matter what paradigm objects are chosen to be paradigms they will actually serve as paradigms for a quite distinct property class."[11]

Armstrong further objects that even if some set of paradigms somewhere were able to specify a property, we would not have a common concept or understanding of that property, since

> "it is clear that different people will normally have to use different paradigms for the same class of things. To that extent, for the Resemblance theorists, whiteness for you is not whiteness for me."[12]

Thus, Armstrong concludes that Resemblance Nominalism is wrong because of the

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[9]Armstrong , *Nominalism and Realism*, 46.
[10]Price, H. H. *Thinking and Experience* (London, 1953), 21.
[11]Armstrong , *Nominalism and Realism*, 47.
[12]Ibid. 46.

all-pervasive type-token distinction's *prima facie* incompatibility with nominalism, Resemblance Nominalism's apparent need for paradigm particulars or exemplars, the possible non-existence of any paradigm or set of exemplars, the inability of such paradigms or exemplars to determine a property, and the fact that Resemblance Nominalism seems to be committed every individual's having a distinct concept of, say, red or square. I do not find these arguments convincing, although I do think that they are helpful in placing some important restrictions on just what kind of account a theorist who wants to characterize our division practices in terms of similarity can give.

**Strong Resemblance Nominalism**

Before responding in depth to Armstrong's case for Universal Realism, I would like to outline what I take to be the correct account of our division practices as they pertain to qualities.

I take similarities and dissimilarities between particulars to be the fundamental basis of our division of reality. The notion of similarity can be best explained to someone by showing her pairs or groups of similar particulars which she can perceive to be similar. Most fundamentally, what makes x and y similar is the way that x and y are; their relation of similarity depends on the way they are. It would be wrong -- explanatorily backwards -- to say that the fact that they are related in a certain way *makes* them similar. Rather, to repeat, the way things are is what makes them similar, as well as what makes them related in the way that they are.[13]

Groups of particulars (or different parts of the same particular) can be similar to each other. Because similarities are relations between particulars, there are innumerably many similarities. This does not, however, create an "ontological jungle." The similarities are wholly dependent on the existence of the particulars.

The ability to discern similarities is a skill. The possession of this skill is a condition for the possibility of, among other things, learning language and having the concepts that we do. When we discern similarities between particulars, we can do at least three things:

(1) we can tell that certain particulars are similar,

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[13]I am only discussing *intrinsic* similarities here. That is to say, I am excluding similarities like that similarity which holds between two objects loved by John. Those objects could have been how they are without being similar in this way.

(2) we can largely tell to what degree things are similar, in at least some respects,

(3) we can tell *how* things are similar.

There are some delicate distinctions to be made here. The claim that (3) makes is, of course, not that in all of our veridical similarity judgments we can perceive or discover just how things qualitatively are in themselves independently of us. But (3) importantly goes beyond (1) and (2) as follows. In answer to the question "how are those things similar?", one might say "they are similar in that each of them is red." This claim goes beyond simply saying that the particulars are similar -- or similar in a manner that is completely undisclosed to us. A *manner* in which they are similar, even if it is as narrowly describable as "having a power to produce in us a perception as of redness," is precisely what *is* disclosed to us by color-vision. So my claim (3) that we can tell *how* things are similar is a claim that the particulars in question are disclosed to us as being similar in a certain manner, like that of being red, or square. And it is our perceiving *how* things are similar that allows us to classify things with terms or concepts like "green" and "square."

But my description of the common ground between two similar objects as being red should not be taken to mean that the particulars are similar in that they share the property of being red. This would reverse the correct order of explanation, and, crucially, would result in our having to accept cases of things' being similar in that they are grue as on a par with cases of things' being similar in that they are green, or square.[14] A similarity theorist holds that properties are ways in which things are similar. The better characterization is that properties are ways in which things *could* be similar to other things, since it is clear that even if there were only one square thing in the world it would still be square. And to say that it is square is to say that it could be similar to other things in the manner of being square.

There are at least three different forms that a nominalism based on similarities could take. (These positions are summarized in the form of a chart just below.) The first, and least promising, is a nominalism which takes all similarities between a group of particulars to be similarities because of some shared item. I shall call this view "Item Resemblance Nominalism," or IRN. It is fairly obvious that this is no Nominalism at all. For what could this shared item that explains why things are similar be? It couldn't just be a property, since that would simply raise the question "what determines which things have the same property

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[14]I discuss the importance of the latter point at length in Chapter 2.

and which ones don't?" Since it will not do to say that the group of particulars in question share that item because of a property, the only remaining option seems to be that the item is a universal.

"Weak Resemblance Nominalism" (or WRN) is what I shall call the position that Armstrong criticizes as "Resemblance Nominalism." WRN differs from IRN in that it does not take similarities to be explained in terms of a shared x. It also does not accept that we can tell *how* things are similar, but only accepts that we can tell what things are similar to, and to what degree. So, in other words, it accepts (1) and (2) above, but not (3). Because of WRN's refusal to accept our ability to apprehend how things are, it is forced to give an account of properties as consisting of being related to certain groups of exemplars. WRN's telling weakness is that it is not clear that one could identify properties by seeing degrees of resemblance only -- without seeing how things are.

My position is Strong Resemblance Nominalism, or SRN. SRN, like WRN, does not take similarities to be explained in terms of a shared x. However, SRN, unlike WRN, does accept that we can apprehend *how* things are similar. SRN takes it that *how* things are makes things related in the way that they are, and so *how* things are is the source of their similarities or dissimilarities. It is fairly clear that of these three positions SRN is the only reasonable one.

The chart below summarizes these positions:

| | WRN | SRN | IRN |
|---|---|---|---|
| (1) We can perceive similarities? | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| (2) We can perceive degrees of similarity? | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| (3) We can perceive *how* things are similar? | No | Yes | Yes |
| Similarity explained in terms of a shared item? | No | No | Yes |

**Armstrong's Arguments as Applied to Strong Resemblance Nominalism**

Armstrong's first claim that the burden of proof is on the Nominalist is telling against forms of Nominalism other than Resemblance Nominalism, because, as Armstrong says, "Apparently, there can be something identical in things that are not identical."[15] A

[15]Armstrong , *Nominalism and Realism*, 11.

Nominalism based on classes, concepts or predicates is vulnerable to this claim. When someone asks why certain aspects of the world are brought together in our thoughts and language and considered to be unitary "qualities," and upon what in the world thought and language could reasonably be based, it seems closer to the truth to answer, "We think of red things as a group because they have something in common" than to answer "We think of red things as a group because they are a class." The answers "We think of red things as a group because they fall under a concept," or "...because they fall under a predicate" are also less attractive than the universal theorist's answer. Each of the latter three explanations *seem* further explainable by the claim "We think of red things as a group because they are a certain class [etc.], and they are in that class *because they each have something in common, namely the universal Red.*"

As I have already pointed out, if one takes similarity always to be similarity in terms of some shared feature x, as does IRN, then one would have to agree with Armstrong that their Resemblance Nominalism is vulnerable to the same problem. IRN holds that it makes sense to say "We think of red things as a group because they are similar, and they are all similar because they all have Redness in common." But my position, Strong Resemblance Nominalism, takes similarity to be "similarity full stop." SRN seeks to explain the "x" in terms of which things are said to be similar as *a product* of the similarity rather than as *generative* of the similarity. On such a view, there is no need to further qualify the statement "We think of red things as a group because they are similar": to go on to say "...and they are similar because they each have something in common, namely the universal Red" would simply be a mistake. Any further explanation of why something is red could only be given by a causal history of that thing, which would change the subject to empirical science.

*Contra* Armstrong, I think the claim that two distinct things are identical in some respect is actually less *prima facie* appealing than the claim that two distinct things are similar. In Armstrong's favor, it must be acknowledged that two similar things are often said to "have something in common," but it is not clear what is meant by this admittedly typical phrase. It surely could not mean that two distinct particulars are "partly identical" in the sense that Tony and Blair are "wholly identical"; that would be mysterious indeed. So objects with "something in common" must have a different sort of identity. But the most likely candidate would seem to be similarity. A universal theorist might just say that universals are fundamental and inexplicable. But I think that similarity is a clearer, and

therefore preferable, fundamental basis for explanation than universals. Given that the best idea we have of what "having something in common" means is "being similar," I think that the initial burden is in fact on Armstrong to explain what "universals" are, beyond something fundamentally based on and replaceable in explanation by similarities.

Armstrong's central argument for rejecting Nominalism is based on his thought experiment which is intended to show that Nominalism cannot account for the existence of properties. He suggests that we imagine the non-existence of the item to which an object with a property is putatively related in such a way that it obtains this property, and then see that the absence of this item would not deprive the object in question of its property. An identity of nature would remain between the object and others with the property in question. Armstrong takes this to support the traditional One Over Many Argument, and realism about immanent universals. He puts his argument as follows:

> "One simple line of criticism ... is that in each [Nominalist] analysis the particular, *a*, has the property, *F*, in virtue of its *relation* to something external to it: predicate, concept, class, aggregate, or paradigm. Yet it is intuitively clear that *a* might be F if none of these things existed."[16]

On this basis he concludes that a relational analysis must be wrong.

There seem to be two problems with WRN. The first problem is that of giving an account of what in a particular makes it have a certain property; what makes a certain particular red (in a metaphysical sense rather than a causal sense). The second problem is that of delimiting the particulars that fall under one property, from those that fall under another -- that is to say, loosely, the problem of saying where one property stops and another property starts. A universal theorist might say that falling under a universal makes a particular be of a certain type, and that one particular's falling under a certain universal and another particular's not falling under that universal makes one particular have the corresponding property and the other lack it. These two problems seem to me to be importantly distinct. I shall contend that the first problem, though it is damaging to WRN, does not affect SRN, and that to the extent that the second problem is a problem at all, it affects a theory of immanent universals like Armstrong's as much as it affects SRN. I shall discuss the former problem first, though, of course, the problems are interrelated.

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[16]Armstrong , *A Theory of Universals*, 2.

In introduction to his main argument against Resemblance Nominalism, Armstrong writes

> "It was argued that there must be some "ground" in particulars if certain predicates are to apply to them, if they are to fall under certain concepts, if they are to be members of certain classes. But this "ground" -- which the [Universal] Realist will interpret as the objective properties of particulars -- is not something of which these theories give any account."[17]

His mentioning accounting for a "'ground' in particulars" makes it clear that here Armstrong is discussing the first problem -- accounting for what it is about a particular that makes it a particular of a certain type. He immediately goes on to say

> "On the Resemblance analysis, *a*'s being F is constituted by *a*'s relations of resemblance to other objects: the paradigms"[18]

Armstrong's complaint is that WRN doesn't account for the fact that there is a ground in the object that determines the resemblance relations.

Armstrong seems to analyze WRN's predicament along the following lines: When most of us call something "red," it is because it is red -- because it appears in a certain manner. But WRN refuses to accept that things appear in a certain manner. So his words like "red" must be applied to things on some basis other than the manner in which those things appear. If all that we can perceive are degrees of similarity, then we shall have to supplement these perceptions with exemplar sets to enable ourselves to say which things have one property and which have another. But if these are the criteria we use for calling something "red" or refraining from doing so, then what we mean by "red" is not "red" at all, but rather "something that resembles exemplars a, b, and c as much as they do each other." So then "being red" is *constituted* by a relation of resemblance to an exemplar set, instead of by a ground in a particular. But in fact, what we refer to with the word "red" is not constituted by any set of exemplars in any way. We can see this because if any particular set of exemplars were destroyed, a's nature would be unaffected, and we would still call it "red."

It is important to note what a bizarre claim Armstrong is arguing against. It is highly unintuitive that a thing's external relations could *constitute* its properties, or that in such a case by talking about "its properties" we would be referring to its resemblance to an exemplar

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[17]Ibid. 50.

set. Also, it could only be the *ground* in an exemplar that gives it the ability to be an exemplar of "red" at all and prevents it from being a blank, propertyless, unqualified item incapable of resembling any one item more than another. So WRN immediately seems implausible and incoherent.

If SRN is to avoid Armstrong's first problem with WRN, it must be able to account for there being some ground in particulars on the basis of which we justifiably divide them: something non-relational that makes them particulars with certain properties and not others. Armstrong's response to WRN depends on the fact that *a* would be red whether the exemplars were there or not, which leads him to conclude that redness does not depend on resemblance. This response is intuitive insofar as we do think that being red is an intrinsic feature of an object. But a defender of SRN, unlike a defender of WRN, does not hold that an object's being red depends on any particular object or set of objects *S* in the sense that "if *S* didn't exist, *a* wouldn't be red." For SRN, *a*'s being red depends on the fact that if there were other red things *x, y, z...*, then *a, x, y, z...* would be similar to each other. If (*a*) and red things (*x, y, z...*) weren't similar, then *a* could not be red. SRN holds that being red is an intrinsic feature of an object, namely, being such as to be similar to any other red objects that happen to exist. The grounding power would remain in the objects even if they were not similar to any exemplar (or for that matter to anything else) since what is essential is that to which the objects *would* be similar, not that to which they *are* similar. So for SRN, *a*'s being how it is does not depend on the contingent existence of anything external to *a*. Admittedly, it is a minimal requirement that if an object has a grounding power, then it must in principle be possible that it could be similar to another object with respect to that power. But that is no drawback for SRN.

Armstrong's style of thought experiment is not effective against SRN. There is no particular paradigmatic object, or set of exemplars upon which the existence of red depends that we could imagine not existing. We might imagine the nonexistence of all except for one red object (or even one indivisible red point), but it would remain true that *a* was such as to be similar to any other red objects that existed.

Some insight into the connection between similarity and properties can be gained through a thought experiment a bit different from Armstrong's. Imagine a set *S* of examples of red things and an object *O* which may or may not be red. If *O* is red, then it will be similar

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[18]Ibid.

to each of the members of *S*. If the examples exist, and *O* exists, but there is no relation of similarity between them, then *O* cannot be red. So there is a loose sense in which properties are, as Armstrong might put it, "relational" according to a similarity analysis, but this does not prevent a given object from being the way it is independently of any other similar or different object. If some object is not similar to another red object, it is not red; apprehending what an object is like *is* apprehending how an object is.

If we accept SRN, then we accept that we can perceive (3) *how* things are similar, not just (1) *that* they are similar. If we can see what *a would* be similar to even though we have experienced nothing of the kind, then we are seeing *how a* is, since we would not be seeing that it was *like* anything. WRN's problems, then, spring from its neglect of our ability to apprehend *how* things are similar.

The word "property" can be misleading. We think of individual particulars as having "properties" -- as being certain ways. But we also think of things like 'redness' and 'squareness' as properties, and to have concepts of these properties we need to observe many different particulars. So one might wonder how red can be, on the one hand, the way a particular thing is while, on the other hand, depend on similarity between multiple particulars. When we look at a particular, we can *see* (to an extent) how it is, but in order to *say* how it is we depend on that objects' similarities to other things. Just by looking at a particular, we can *see* the features in virtue of which that particular could be similar to other objects, or the way that particular is -- which amount to the same thing. What we can see when we look at a particular object is independent of any other particulars.[19] Just by looking at a particular we *cannot* see its "properties" if these are taken to be similarities between it and specifically those particulars that fall under our same concepts as it. We see the ways particular things are, but our general terms and general concepts for properties, like "red," depend on *groups* of particulars which are similar. Another way of making this point would be to say that we could not learn the word "red" by being shown just one red object.

I think that the ways particular things are provide the "ground" that Armstrong thinks WRN is lacking. This "ground" is what makes a given particular similar to other objects with a property, and thus is what allows for justified division. The ways particular things are are what in particulars make it the case that they have certain properties and not others. They are the grounds in particulars and the basis on which we justifiably divide them in our thought

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[19]This is true both of particulars that fall under our same concepts as it and of those particulars in the world

and language. We can see *how* particular things are. If properties are based on *how* things are, then they are based on the ways things are, and this is to say that they're grounded in the objects themselves. They are the solution to the first problem faced by WRN -- what *in a particular* makes it have a certain property.

But just because a particular property of an object doesn't depend on resemblance, one should not conclude that there is no sense in which the "property" 'red' doesn't depend on resemblance. The relevant sense of "property" here is the one whereby an object "has the property red" if and only if it has what it takes to fall under our word or concept "red." We could see that an object we were looking at was a certain way, independently of all other objects; but to *specify* how that object was, we would have to point out similarities between that object and others. We can't just point at the way the object is color-wise. But because particulars resemble one another, we can point at a number of different particulars which are similar in their redness (and to no particular which is dissimilar in its lack of redness), and thereby communicate that the redness of the first object was what we wanted to call attention to -- thereby communicate that what we wanted to call attention to was the fact that the object has a color which falls within a certain range and makes it similar to other specified objects in a certain way. The use and meaning of the word "red" depends essentially on there being various particular objects similar in a certain way. It is correct that what we call a "property" -- *not* in the sense of a feature of a single *particular* object -- should depend on resemblance, in one manner of speaking, because we couldn't talk about particulars at all without a language which depends on resemblance. So in this second sense of "property" we see how things are without seeing any properties.

The claim that

> an object's being red is an intrinsic feature of an object,
> namely, its being such as to be similar to any other red
> objects that happen to exist

may at first appear to be a viciously circular explanation. First, it characterizes what it is for one thing to be red in terms of other things' being red. But it is clear upon reflection that it is unreasonable to demand a characterization of a quality like a color without reference to samples of what things with that quality are like. The same is of course true for other qualities like shape, pitch or weight. While one could perhaps explain a particular color,

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which may or may not provide a naturally discrete range of objects similar to it.

pitch, shape or weight in terms of other examples in the same categories, one could no more fully explain color as a whole without the use of any particular colors than one could fully explain what color is to a blind person.

A second difficulty with the above claim might seem more pressing to SRN. A Universal Realist might say that the universal Red was shared by all and only red things, and thus it distinguishes red things from, say, orange things, while a Resemblance Nominalist has to accept and account for the fact that some orangeish red things are more similar to some reddish orange things than to other purplish red things.

One aspect of the solution to this difficulty is the rejection of exemplars or paradigms. Armstrong is certainly right to think that something's being red is not contingent on the existence of some paradigm object or set of exemplars. And he is technically correct to think that no finite set of exemplars could ever be sufficient to precisely characterize the property red. But he is wrong to think that the difficulty of precisely characterizing a property, in the sense of giving necessary and sufficient conditions for it, is a difficulty only for the SRN and not for the universal theorist.

We should remember that in practice, we explain properties to human beings with understandings that are like our own. Though it is true that any actual group of exemplars will be similar in ways that go beyond the property 'red,' it is not true that an explanation limited to those particulars could not be adequate to explain 'red' to another person. I take it that someone who understands the word "red" has a concept of the property 'red.'[20] For the most part, all English speakers understand the word "red." We all learned that word by seeing relevantly similar objects and hearing utterances of the word "red." If an explanation of "red" that was based on such a set of examples were not a good explanation of "red" then none of us would have learned that word. It seems reasonable to me that our shared sense of what is striking would lead us to note the same similarity among a group of objects that are all both red and weigh less than 9,000 tons. Perhaps one might say that our human impreciseness is what allow us to have a shared language. The sense of what is striking that is shared by the explainer and the learner allows them to ignore what is not relevant in an explanation, and thereby allows for the adequacy of explanations without impossibly rigorous exemplars. It is intuitively clear that a fairly small range of examples of red objects suffices

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[20]Though, of course, she may not know it is a 'property.' Furthermore, she could have a concept of 'red' *without* understanding the word "red" if, for example, she acquired the concept 'red' (or at least the concept 'red' as opposed to blue or yellow) by observing similarities in particulars in the world.

for the learning of our shared concepts and understanding the meaning of words like "red." To allow for the learning of language, SRN needs no exemplars, only examples.

Nonetheless, someone might wish (I think unreasonably) for crisper characterizations of colors, pitches, shapes and the like than SRN allows. If so, we should point out that while the Universal Realist might claim that universals will always and exactly pick out natural qualities, the universal realist is in a position with regard to learning universals analogous to the one that SRN is in with regard to learning properties. Armstrong takes Price's Resemblance Nominalism to task for its inability to characterize precisely which similarity is the relevant one for a given property like 'red'. But on Armstrong's account how are we in a better position to learn of the universal Red? It is fine to say that a universal provides a precise means of specifying exactly which particulars are red. But it is a quite useless explanation of what things are actually red when given to a person who lacks our understanding of the universal Red -- of which Armstrong denies that we have an a priori understanding. The only way, on Armstrong's account, to learn of the universal Red is to become acquainted with red objects. This would presumably involve observation of their shared feature, Red. But the only way to observe a universal in this way is by looking at objects that share the feature Red. And, as Armstrong himself points out in the case of exemplars, no matter what objects are used in the alleged learning of Red, they will actually share characteristics not limited to Red. So, by Armstrong's own reasoning, the universals learned of and called "Red" will ideally all be slightly different, and "Red for you will not be Red for me."[21]

Armstrong's erroneous construal of WRN as the best prospect for Resemblance Nominalism springs directly from his taking the Nominalist to be saying that we are unable to see *how* things are, beyond "more like x than like y or z." It is difficult to imagine what it would be like if WRN were really true. We would see a red apple, and see that it was similar to a red cherry and to a red car, and see that the apple and the cherry were more similar to each other than to the car. But we would perform this observation without seeing how the objects were. It would be as if after investigating each of three objects the only information we came away with was which pair most resembled each other. So we would be in a

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[21]In practice, there *are* many cases where what two people would call, say, "yellow" differs. Some people consider tennis balls to be green, while others would call them yellow. It is a strength of SRN that it can account for this kind of vagueness while allowing for the elimination of the "vagueness" of, say, an ostensive explanation of red which makes use of five objects that all happen to be both red and less than 9000 tons. The first vagueness is one that is actually present in our use of language, while the second is not.

situation like that of a person who had not seen the objects at all, but was reliably told "x and y are more similar than z." A person in a world where WRN was true (or who had only been told of the objects in question in this relative fashion) would not be in a position to consider a single object in isolation, since all of her information about objects would be relative to other objects. And she would not be able to discern how other objects would have to be in order to be like that single object. Still, she could take a group of them as a set of exemplars by defining a property, P, based on them. If this were our epistemic situation, there would be some force to Armstrong's criticism that, for an object x with P, if the exemplars had not existed then x would not have P, since we could take P to be the relative property of being as similar to those actual exemplars as they are to each other.[22]

The important point here is that the epistemic position of WRN is nothing like our own epistemic situation. When we consider a single object in isolation, we can discover how it is without considering its resemblance to other objects; and, what amounts to the same ability, by looking at one object in isolation we can tell how other objects would have to be in order to be like that object. This skill is what Armstrong overlooks in his rejection of Resemblance Nominalism. Our having this skill adds *nothing* to arguments for the existence of universals, since objects can be a certain way that we can recognize without being partially identical to other objects. There is no reason why an object could not have an observable nature that is not a universal nature.

**Positive Arguments for Strong Resemblance Nominalism**

I shall finish this chapter by presenting some arguments in favor of a similarity theory as opposed to a theory of universals, giving some possible reasons why Universal Realists fall into the errors into which they fall, and then briefly discussing the extent of the substantive dispute between Nominalists and Universal Realists.

One way of explaining how an object is -- perhaps in response to the question "what is the object *like*?" -- is to say "the object is red." The universal theorist would analyze this explanation as saying that the object falls under the universal Red. But if we have learned of that universal only by acquaintance with other red objects, then whatever explanatory power is derived from invoking the universal Red in an explanation could be provided equally well

[22]Though another option would be to take P to be the less relative property of being as similar to those possible

from simply saying that the object in question is like other red objects. Universals like Red do not explain anything. In deciding between the above explanations we have a choice of (1) "the nature of the object is explained by the universal, and the nature of the universal is explained by other objects similar to the one being explained," or (2) "the nature of the object is explained by other objects similar to the one being explained." It seems fairly clear that the latter is a more straightforward explanation. And, as Armstrong would agree, this situation is not helped by invoking transcendental universals, since to do this would only be to postulate an additional obscure entity, again without gaining any explanatory power. In the end it is the comparison between objects themselves, and their similarities or lack of similarities that does the explaining in cases like these in which we might be tempted to invoke universals as explanatory. I think that this is the decisive argument in the dispute between the Resemblance Nominalist and the Universal Realist. It basically amounts to saying that once we have chosen the correct nominalism, there is nothing left for universals to explain, and thus no reason to postulate them. If we have no reason to postulate them, then, for the sake of explanatory economy, the best account of our division practices will hold that there are no universals.

There are no perfect triangles in the world. When we actually learn words like "triangle," we do not do so by observing a shared quality of a group of several examples, since *no* example actually has the allegedly shared quality. There is nothing in the actual world that answers to the universal Triangle. But despite the examples not sharing the relevant quality, we have no problem learning the word "triangle." The only reasonable explanation of these facts is that we perceive all the shapes to be *similar*, not "*identical in a certain respect.*" Our arriving at a shared, idealized definition of a triangle when presented with a limited set of examples is understandable, given our shared sense of salience, as we have seen.

A difficulty for any theory of universals is to characterize the relationship between universals and particulars. Russell tries to reduce particulars to universals, but Armstrong rejects this view by citing, among other considerations, the traditional argument that

> "this account of particulars requires the truth of the Principle of the Identity of Indiscernible, but that there are good

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exemplars as they would be to each other.

reasons to reject this Principle."[23]

I agree with Armstrong that the reduction of particulars to universals is implausible, but this leaves the question of their relation unanswered. Armstrong's answer is that universals and particulars are not related, since relations between universals and particulars would have to be more universals (on his analysis), which would lead to regress. So he holds that

> "...although particularity and universality are inseparable aspects of existence, they are neither reducible to each other, nor are they related. Though distinct, their relation is closer than relation."[24]

He suggests the way shape and size are united in a particular as a useful comparison with the way universality and particularity are united in a thing. He acknowledges that this is a puzzling position, but takes it to be the most satisfactory one that can be found.

Just what this claim about the lack of relation between universals and particulars comes to is self-evidently obscure -- in the case of the "relation" between shape and size as well as that of the "relation" between universality and particularity. And it is especially awkward, since the claim is made to avoid a vicious regress in the latter relation. The relation between particulars and similarity is quite straightforward; we could explain it in the same way we explain what similarity is -- by pointing to groups of similar objects.

A final important problem with a Universal Realist account of our division practices and their justification is the Universal Realist's odd claim that things "share" universals, or that things falling under a universal are "partially identical." I do not think that this "sharing" amounts to anything beyond things' being similar. As I have already mentioned, the identity necessary for a Universal Realist must be something unlike the identity of Tony and Blair, but also distinct from similarity. What this "sharing" or "partial identity" could be is quite obscure.

Similarity analyses of what does the work of bringing particulars together selectively allow us to do away with this problem of how two objects that are distinct could nonetheless "share a property" or "have the same property." It is uncontroversially true that when we talk of two things both being green we say that they are in a way "the same." But in this case our common way of speaking is not the clearest, most consistent way to express how things are, especially since we also say things like "Tony and Blair are 'the same' person," in which "the

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[23]Armstrong , *Nominalism and Realism*, 91.

same" has a different meaning. If we take the first way of speaking to mean only that the two things in question are similar to each other and also similar to things like grass, leaves, and emeralds, then the apparent paradox that the two distinct items are the same and are different does not arise. This is also an attractive view because we have an ordinary, common sense notion of what similarity is, while we have no such notion of what a universal is.

One source of motivation for the view that, say, red things are partially the same is that our forms of questions about similarities seem to ask for partial identities. We ask, for example, "What do those things have in common?", and this seems to ask for a shared item. But one basic way of answering such queries is to simply point at other objects that are similar to the original two in the right way. This ostensive type of answer is more easily analyzed as pointing out a similarity than pointing out a sameness. In fact, as I have already touched on, when we answer by saying "Red." instead of pointing, this answer is understood only because at some stage the inquirer has learned the word "red" from a previous ostensive explanation of this sort.

We learn *words* like "red" or "square" from hearing utterances of them in situations where we can observe red or square things and the ways they are similar. Analogously, (and in some cases previously) we learn of *properties* by observing similar things and events and noticing the ways they are similar. And we learn the word "property" through people telling us, for example, "Things like 'green', 'square' and 'weighing one ton' are properties."

A strong point of Armstrong's metaphysics is his vigilant opposition to any argument for universals which "moves from the existence of meaningful general terms to the existence of universals which are the meanings of those words."[25] Just because words have meaning does not make it correct to say that meaning has the ontological status of an entity. But Armstrong unfortunately goes on to make a somewhat analogous mistake in giving properties the ontological status of entities. Armstrong moves from the existence of substances with properties to the existence of universals which constitute the properties of those substances. The tendency to look for entities is not helpful here. If we avoid "entifying" properties, then we are in a better position to extend the similarity-based analysis of properties to events, which, it would seem, could not be constituted by universals, but do obviously have important similarities, like happening quickly, or being loud. One would be reluctant to attempt to reduce such similarities to "identities with respect to some shared feature x." The

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[24]Armstrong , *A Theory of Universals*, 3.

similarity analysis better accommodates the great diversity of sorts of properties, because it avoids this reduction.[26]

Someone might claim that all that is going on in the debate between the Nominalist and Universal Realist is a failure to see that there are two different senses of "sameness," one being the sense of "similarity," and the other being the sense of "numerically identical" in which Tony and Blair are identical. To say this is to (correctly) abandon that aspect of Universal Realism which claims to explain why things are how they are by saying that they are partially constituted by universals, so this objector is actually advocating a resemblance nominalist view. But if this person advocates the use of "same" to mean "similar" in some contexts and "numerically identical" in others, then he advocates the misleading use of terminology that helped lead to the confusion of the universal realist. The description both of (1) things like two distinct green things and of (2) a thing like Tony and Blair with the phrase "the same" can easily result in a conflation of the analyses of these two kinds of cases. This is what seems to be going on in the Universal Realist's account when he makes claims like, "Various red particulars are the same because a numerically identical, shared item is what makes all red objects red." Claims like these seem to be a conflation or a hybrid of the two senses of "same." The thought that similar things must have a numerically identical thing in common may spring from this kind of confusion.

This nominalist "objector" does however avoid the error into which the use of his terminology leaves us prone to fall. The equivocation on "same" is tempting to those who desire an explanation of *why* things are as they are, instead of just an explanation of *how* things are -- in other words those who desire an explanation of what in a particular makes it have a certain property. To say that certain things are similar is to explain in the fullest sense how things are, but it may seem lacking as an explanation of why things are as they are. Philosophers have often slipped into thinking that in saying that a red thing takes part in a universal they are giving an explanation of *why* a thing is red. But as we can now see, talk of universals is at best no more explanatory than talk of similarities. So the enticing additional explanatory power of universals is an illusion. Armstrong writes

> "Nominalists are unable to explain away ... the apparent

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[25]Armstrong, *Nominalism and Realism*, xiv.

[26]Also, similarity-based analyses of properties like "is rational" or "is morally wrong" are more promising than those that demand or look for a shared feature or features of sound reasoning or ethical actions.

identity of nature which is exhibited by certain particulars."[27]

It is certainly true that nominalists do not "explain away" this alleged "identity" (which is actually similarity); to attempt this would be to confuse explanans with explanandum. But neither does the Universal Realist explain similarities of particulars in terms of universals. He simply names the problem and calls it a solution. The only way of explaining *why* a thing is as it is, because of the nature of our language and specifically the fact that the meaningfulness of our words for properties is fundamentally based on similarities we have perceived while learning those words, is not to give a metaphysical explanation, but to give relevant facts about the causal history of that thing. But this is not the "philosophical" kind of explanation that those philosophers seem to desire. They seem to want some kind of an explanation of the metaphysically internal nature of physical objects. But this kind of thing does not afford of an explanation. It is the equivocation between "similar" and "identical" that leads to such confusion, since the identical thing alleged to be present in each particular seems to be a candidate for what metaphysically makes a red thing red.

As I have mentioned, I think that our concepts of properties are the products of similarities in ways things are that we observe and call, say, "red," "heavy," or "triangular." If similarities that we observe in the ways things are are just what properties *are,* then it does not make sense to claim that while we learn of properties (or of universals) through empirical observation of similarities, the actual sources of similarities are universals. We have no grounds for holding with Armstrong that "the *identification* of universals must be *a posteriori.*"[28] In fact it seems that the identification of universals could not be *a posteriori*; all we could identify *a posteriori* are similarities, not universals. Armstrong's position is both uneconomical and unfaithful to what we really observe, since universals lack explanatory power and what we actually perceive are similarities -- of which there is no lack of uncontroversial, real examples. We have no reason to hypothesize the existence of universals, and no reason to think that such a hypothesis is true.

Worse yet, the very meaning of the term "universal" might be called into question, since the only way to explain them or identify universals is by way of similarities in particulars. This could lead us to believe that there is actually no substantive dispute between Nominalists and Universal Realists since their positions would come to the same thing. Eli Hirsch suggests that some ontological disputes, like that between Universal Realists and

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[27]Armstrong, *A Theory of Universals*, 1.

Resemblance Nominalists, are only verbal disagreements.[29] I think, however, that the two positions are different in a way that is not purely verbal -- that the two positions are distinguishable and disagree intelligibly over the nature of the world.

A large part of the disagreement between Resemblance Nominalists and Universal Realists, as we have seen, is a dispute over the intelligibility of and the evidence for the Realists' claims about an identical entity that is present in various particulars. A dispute over whether or not universals are in fact entities seems to me to be a disagreement which will retain its content whether or not in the end the Universal Realist is able to meaningfully explain what a universal is, since if he is not, then the Nominalist will prevail, and it will be agreed that the ways that things are are not entities. We have a good enough common sense understanding of the word "entity" to know that entities either exist or they do not, and their existence does not depend on the outcome of any purely linguistic dispute.

The issue of whether such an entity can explain *why* a thing is (metaphysically) the way that it is also seems to me to have content. Again, if the Universal Realist were unable to characterize universals in a satisfactory manner -- i.e., so that they were something more than just similarities -- then it is not that there will be no debate, but rather that the Realist would lose the debate. In fact, this characterization is an easy task, since he simply has to say that universals are entities. Similarly, if the Universal Realist fails to characterize "partial identity" beyond similarity, he will fall into a form of Nominalism.

So the debate between the Universal Realist and the Resemblance Nominalist is substantive. Because of the implausibility of Armstrong's alleged "non-relation" between universals and particulars, because of the obscurity of how "partial identity" goes beyond similarity, because the Resemblance Nominalist account avoids the illusion that we can metaphysically explain why things are as they are, and, most importantly, because of the explanatory inertness of universals, I think we should conclude that Resemblance Nominalism is a better account of our division of the world into properties than Universal Realism.

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[28]Armstrong , *Nominalism and Realism*, 133.
[29]Eli Hirsch, *Dividing Reality*, 180-91.

## Chapter 2: Goodman and Grue

In this chapter I shall assess Nelson Goodman's "New Riddle of Induction" from his *Fact, Fiction and Forecast.*[1] Broadly speaking, this thesis argues that the New Riddle is a *reductio ad absurdum* of a certain view of the relationship between similarities, on the one hand, and concepts, properties, or predicates on the other. It argues that accounts according to which similarities are most fundamentally explained by similar objects' sharing a property, satisfying a concept, or falling under a predicate are unable to adequately distinguish properties, concepts or predicates like "green" from those like "grue." As a consequence, on any of these views an adequate account of induction is impossible. This chapter contains much of the argument for these conclusions, and opens the discussion of "grue" which will occupy most of the rest of this thesis.

This chapter begins by identifying the specifically Goodmanian scepticism which I intend to address by distinguishing it from two other kinds of scepticism characteristic of Hume and Descartes. I evaluate and reject some arguments in favor of a sceptical view of induction akin to Goodman's, and then argue that Goodman's solution to his New Riddle based on "entrenchment" of predicates is unsatisfactory. The central argument of this chapter will be that on (and only on) a proper understanding of the relationship of similarities, concepts, properties and predicates, there is nothing *new* about Goodman's "New Riddle" that is paradoxical or worrying: While we might have more traditional sceptical concerns like those of Descartes or Hume, the problem of justifying our inductive inferences has been made no worse by the "New Riddle." I conclude that we should take on that understanding of similarities, concepts, properties and predicates.

My approach to the New Riddle depends in part on a notion of "natural properties" explained in terms of ways things are similar independent of concepts. This account of natural properties is available only because -- as my Strong Resemblance Nominalism claimed in Chapter 1 -- we have the ability to perceive *how* particulars are similar to one another. It will become clearer in subsequent chapters that it is this same ability which

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[1]Goodman, Nelson, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast,* 4th Edn. (Cambridge, Mass., 1983).

allows us to understand *why* concepts apply to certain particulars and not others.

**Cartesian, Humean and Goodmanian Scepticisms**

The principal scepticism to be addressed in this chapter must be distinguished from two kinds of scepticism with even more distinguished pedigrees. First, I shall not attempt to address the global Cartesian Sceptic, who holds that we have no reason to believe that the external world is really there, since we could be dreaming, or being deceived by an evil demon, or really be a brains in vats. If such an extreme sceptical scenario obtained, then the phenomenology of our perception would not be a good guide to how the world really is, and the unjustifiedness of our inductive reasoning -- based as it is on the reliability of our observations of how things are with the world -- would immediately follow. I of course do not suggest that global Cartesian Scepticism can be put aside lightly. In fact I think that it creates a big problem for the justification of our beliefs about the external world. But Goodman's "New Riddle" can be raised in a form which has force even if we conditionally grant, for the sake of argument, that Cartesian Scepticism is wrong.

Second, the position against which I am arguing here is not Humean Inductive Scepticism. A Humean Inductive Sceptic of the sort I have in mind is one who reasons as follows. As a first premise, he would take it that between events there are no synthetic, necessary connections knowable independent of all experience. For example, we could not know that fire is hot just by looking at it. Then, he would claim that our belief that in the future there will be conjunctions between any two events is only justified by our experience of constant conjunctions between such events in the past. So our grounds for believing that all future, particular event tokens of type *A* will be followed by event tokens of type *B* consist wholly in the fact that in the past each time we observed an event token of type *A* it was followed by an event token of type *B*. Each time we observed a fire in the past and put our hand near it, we found that it was hot. To justify our belief that in the future all events of type *A* will be followed by those of type *B*, we have to hold that the course of events in the future will be uniform. If we could justify the belief in the uniformity of future events, then faith in our inductive inferences would be justified. The problem, the Humean Sceptic would continue, is that it is impossible to justify our belief in the uniformity of future events without begging the question of uniformity. The belief that future events will be uniform does not

arise from a "relation of ideas"; there is nothing conceptually amiss with the possibility of future events' not continuing as events have in the past. As Hume puts it,

> "These two propositions are far from being the same, *I have found that such an object has always been attended with such an effect,* and *I foresee, that other objects, which are, in appearance, similar, will be attended with similar effects.*"[2]

So if the belief that future events will be uniform is not true by virtue of a relation of ideas, it could only be a matter of fact. And matters of fact can only be justified on the basis of past experience. But justification purely on the basis of past experience depends on the future course of events being uniform. So without circularity, we cannot justify our belief in the uniformity of future events.

> "It is impossible, therefore, that any arguments from experience can prove this resemblance of the past to the future; since all these arguments are founded on the supposition of that resemblance."[3]

In *The Problems of Philosophy,* Russell gives the following example:

> "The man who has fed the chicken every day throughout its life at last wrings its neck instead, showing that more refined views as to the uniformity of nature would have been useful to the chicken."[4]

This problem of "the uniformity nature," on my view, should not be thought of only in terms of the uniformity of events through the course of time. The problem can be applied to reasoning about spatial regions apart from where we are at a certain time just as well as temporal regions apart from where we are at a certain time (i.e., the past or future). How can we know that in distant space slightly different laws of nature do not obtain? Any time we take a certain sample of things from a certain spatio-temporal area and take it to justify inferences we make about things from a different spatio-temporal area, we are assuming the uniformity of nature.

The taking of samples from one region and using them to justify inferences about other regions is just what inductive reasoning is. If so, it is clear that unless the world is a fairly uniform place (at least in the regions in question) our inductive reasoning has no

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[2]Hume, David, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* (Selby-Bigge (ed.), Oxford, 1902), 22.
[3]Ibid. 24.
[4]Russell, Bertrand, *The Problems of Philosophy* (London, 1912), p. 63.

purchase on how things are. The formidable difficulty that Hume raises and Russell explicates is whether we could have any good reason at all (i.e., one that is not based on a blatantly circular argument) to believe that the as yet unobserved parts of the world are uniform.

As interesting as this problem is, it is not the topic of the present thesis. I have described this Humean Scepticism because I wish to contrast it with Goodman's different, but related form of inductive scepticism. Again, I shall assume for the sake of argument that we can answer the Humean Sceptic, not because I think that an answer to Hume is something which will come easily or because I do not think that Hume's scepticism is something to be taken seriously, but because I want to make clear both that Goodman's scepticism goes beyond Humean scepticism and how it does so. Because the Goodmanian Sceptic attempts an even more radical scepticism than Hume's, it is a viable philosophical project to reduce Goodman's scepticism to Hume's. It is with *this* project that I shall be concerned in this chapter.

Goodman's own position and what I am calling "Goodman's Sceptic's position" must be distinguished. Goodman claims that he has a solution for his own "New Riddle of Induction" -- a riddle which I shall imagine is being posed by "Goodman's Sceptic." It is my view that Goodman's proposed solution is lacking and his sceptic's position remains to be confronted.

Goodman divides the problem of induction into two parts: what he calls the "old problem of induction" and his "New Riddle of Induction." The New Riddle concerns the problems for justifying inductive reasoning that spring from predicates like "grue."[5] The old problem of induction is Hume's problem, which, in his *Fact, Fiction and Forecast,* Goodman claims has been "dissolved."[6] Goodman takes the central question involved in the old problem of induction to be why we should make one prediction rather than another. He is sympathetic with Hume's answer that our predictions arise out of custom and habit. Many philosophers, according to Goodman, have criticized Hume for explaining why we make certain predictions, but failing to explain why those predictions are justified. But, writes Goodman, Hume's answer to the central question is actually closer to the truth than his critics allow. For Goodman, the question of the justification of induction should not be sharply

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[5]As is discussed at length below, "'grue' ... applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue." Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, 74.
[6]Ibid. 62 ff.

separated from the question of how induction takes place.

The answer to the question of the justification of induction, for Goodman, could not be such that it entails that we know that some particular prediction will turn out to be correct, since that some particular prediction will certainly turn out to be correct is not something that we in fact know, and

> "Now obviously, the genuine problem cannot be one of attaining unattainable knowledge or of accounting for knowledge that we do not in fact have."[7]

If we keep this fact in mind, says Goodman, we shall be more open to the correct analysis of the "old problem." He makes an analogy between the justification of deduction and that of induction.

> "... we justify a deduction ... by showing that it conforms to general rules of deductive inference."[8]

These rules, of course, remain to be justified; they cannot simply be arbitrary. So those rules will in turn be justified by their conformity to cases of accepted deductive practice. Goodman describes this as a "virtuous circle," because

> "The process of justification is the delicate one of making mutual adjustments between rules and accepted inferences; and in the agreement achieved lies the only justification needed for either."[9]

A straightforward analogy is available to the case of the justification of inductive inferences. And as a result, we can "stop plaguing ourselves with certain spurious questions about induction," namely Hume's old problem.[10]

I do not think that Goodman successfully "dissolves" the old problem of induction. A justified inference is something like a well aimed shot at a target. The target is a correct prediction or conclusion. In deduction, given that A and that if A then B, the conclusion that B is aimed well at the truth. No further qualifications are necessary. With induction things are different. In induction, given that in the past all A's have been accompanied by B's the conclusion that in the future, given an A, a B will accompany it is aimed well at truth -- but here the further qualification that things in the future will continue as they have in the past is

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[7]Ibid. 62.
[8]Ibid. 63.
[9]Ibid. 64.
[10]Ibid.

required. Otherwise the concept of justification, or of a "well aimed shot" will not apply at all. In normal archery, there is a fixed target, so one can aim at it. In normal archery, then, the concept of a well aimed shot has an application. But if the "target" is entirely erratic such that its placement at the time the arrow is shot and its placement when the target is hit or missed have no consistent relationship at all, then the concept of a well aimed shot no longer applies. Likewise, if the aspect of the world about which we are reasoning inductively is not generally uniform, then the concept of inductive justification does not apply. We cannot know whether the aspect of the world about which we are reasoning inductively is or will be uniform. If we did, then we would no longer be engaged in inductive reasoning. Uniformity is such an essential requirement for justified induction that it must be assumed both in particular inductions and in rules of inference for induction. If this is so, then even if a particular inductive inference conforms perfectly to whatever our general rules of inductive inference are, its justification depends on the assumption of uniformity. If both the general rules of inductive inference and particular inductions require this assumption, then, unlike the case of deduction, an agreement or balance between these rules and particular inductions will be insufficient justification of induction. So Goodman's dissolution of the old problem of induction is not successful.

If the Humean Sceptic is right, it is not just that our predictions about future events are not entirely justified; it is that they are entirely not justified. We have no reason at all to think our predictions about the future to be justified, since those predictions depend directly on the premise that events will continue in the future as they have in the past, a premise for which we have no non-circular justification. So Goodman's position, which holds that the justification of induction which we seek when faced with Humean Scepticism doesn't have to give a reason to believe in the uniformity of nature, concedes more than he seems to realize. We cannot so easily accept that we are not *at all* justified in our inductive inferences. In accepting that our good justifications only have to reflect a balance between rules and accepted inferences without having to justify our belief in the uniformity of nature, Goodman is accepting that we have no more reason to expect a justified inference to yield a correct prediction than to yield a false prediction. But then why make predictions on the basis of justified inferences rather than on unjustified ones? It is surely wrong to say, "I have no more reason to think that my prediction will turn out right than that it will turn out wrong -- but, of course, it is justified."

Goodman's "New Riddle of Induction" is not Hume's problem of how we can have any justifiable reason to expect that the future will continue on in a manner uniform with that of the past. Rather, it is the problem of having a justifiable basis for claiming that one set of events is "uniform" with another set of events, or that a property of one set of objects is the same as a property of another set of objects.

The problems raised by Humean Inductive Scepticism, as I have mentioned, do not depend on time as an essential element. One could not only be a Humean Sceptic about the uniformity of future events, but also about events in a distant place, or about unobserved events generally.[11] Similarly, Goodman's New Riddle does not essentially involve a contrast between, say, objects observed before *t* and objects observed after *t*. It could just as well involve a contrast between objects in our spatial region and objects in a different spatial region,[12] or a contrast between objects observed and unobserved objects generally. Except where the distinction is important, I shall use the traditional formulation in terms of time.

If we believe that all emeralds are green on the basis that every emerald that we have observed before a certain time has been green, then, on the assumption brought out by Hume that the world will be uniform, we would appear to have evidence for the conclusion, and a good reason to believe, that emeralds observed after that time will also be green. Goodman's Sceptic challenges this appearance.

Goodman invites us to imagine a predicate, "grue" which

> "applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue."[13]

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[11]For example, a Humean Sceptic could claim that although water has always been observed to freeze when it reaches 32 degrees Fahrenheit on earth, we have no reason to believe that water has always frozen at that temperature on the surface of Jupiter. Or, she could claim that although water has always been observed to freeze at 32 degrees, we have no reason to believe that unobserved water freezes at that temperature.

[12]For example, a Goodmanian Sceptic could claim that water's freezing at 32 degrees Fahrenheit on earth is uniform with water's freezing at 100 degrees on the surface of Jupiter (and hence that consistent observations of water freezing on earth at 32 degrees are good evidence for water's freezing on Jupiter at 100 degrees). Or, she could claim that observed water's freezing at 32 degrees warrants the conclusion that unobserved water freezes at 100 degrees.

[13]Goodman, *Fact, Fiction and Forecast*, 74. I should note that there are distinct ways in which Goodman's definition of "grue" can be understood. On the one hand, "grue" could apply to x at time T iff [(x is green at T and $T < t$) or (x is blue at T and $T \geq t$)]. In this case in our ordinary way of speaking, grue things would have to "change color" from green to blue at *t* to remain grue. On the other hand, "grue" could apply to x at T iff [(x is examined by *t* and is green at T) or (x is not examined by *t* and is blue at T)]. In this latter case, grue things would not have to "change color" in our ordinary way of speaking, and whether or not x had been *examined* would become important. For the most part, I consider the latter of these interpretations more interesting, and will use "grue" in that sense unless otherwise specified.

Why couldn't we equally well believe that all emeralds are grue on the basis that every emerald we have observed before time *t* has been grue, and our assumption that the world will be uniform? We would again appear to have evidence for the conclusion, and a good reason to believe, that emeralds observed after *t* will also be grue. Our evidence that emeralds are grue, according to the Goodmanian Sceptic, would be identical to our evidence that emeralds are green: before *t*, every case of an examination of a green emerald is also a case of an examination of a grue emerald.

An objection that the strange predicate "grue" and others like it could be ruled out because of their reference to time would, according to the sceptic, be misplaced. We might imagine a strange person, Mr. Grue, who used not only the word "grue" but also the word "bleen," which applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are blue but to other things just in case they are green. To Mr. Grue, our predicate "green" would seem to make an essential reference to time, since for him "green"

> applies to all things examined before *t* just in case they are grue but to other things just in case they are bleen.

Any argument attempting to rule out the grue-type predicates based on the necessity of mentioning time if we are to translate them into normal predicates could be met with an analogous argument attempting to rule out the normal predicates based on the necessity of mentioning time if Mr. Grue were to translate them into strange predicates.

The same could be said of an attempt to rule out a predicate "grue" which applied to all observed things just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are blue. Someone arguing in this manner might claim that in order to translate this "grue" into a normal predicate one would have to make essential reference to what is observed, while to understand "green" one does not have to consider whether an object has been observed. But for a speaker of the strange language, the analogous, opposing argument would be available as well.

The strange predicates are not limited to strange colors. They might also include predicates like "trisquareular." Nor are they limited to non-compossible properties. For example, one could construct a predicate "greensquareular" which applies to things examined before *t* just in case they are green but to other things just in case they are square. Strange predicates, therefore, can be constructed such that a set of evidence appears to confirm almost *any* conclusion one would like; here, for example, "greensquareular" makes it

appear that observations of green emeralds confirm the conclusion that newly observed emeralds will be square. Given an appropriate predicate, observations of green emeralds could (according to Goodman's Sceptic) be taken to support the conclusion that future emeralds will be green, blue, square, round, soft, heavy, or just about anything else.[14]

Unless we can find some other way to characterize and rule out these strange predicates, the prospects for a justification of induction will have suffered a devastating blow -- one distinct from the blow dealt by the Humean Sceptic. The old riddle of induction is the problem of *whether* things in some spatio-temporal region will be uniform with the way they will be in a different region. The New Riddle of Induction is the problem of characterizing *how things must be* in a certain region if they are to be "uniform" with how things are in a different spatio-temporal region. It is a question of how we know *what real "uniformity" of events and properties consists in.*

The answer to the question of what is justified by a certain body of evidence is a significant part of what hangs on the result of an investigation into the nature of uniformity. Before *t,* on the sceptic's view, the body of evidence for the claim that all objects of a certain sort are green will always be the same body of evidence as that for the claim that all objects of that sort are grue, gred, or greensquareular. But what conclusion should be drawn based on that evidence -- that other objects of that sort will be green, blue, red, or square? Until this New Riddle of Induction has been solved the terribly obvious claim that we should expect them to be green will lack explicit justification.

Another important set of issues that hangs on the answer to this question of the nature of uniformity center around causality. I shall not discuss the issue of the nature of causality in the present thesis, but there are obvious and important parallels between attempts to justify inductive reasoning and attempts to characterize causation. At some point in most analyses of causation, whether a regularity, probability or possible worlds-style of analysis is preferred, a theorist will have to take *token* causes and effects to be of some *type* of cause and effect, in order to generalize about the group of tokens, and in order to use them as examples that support a certain law of nature or a certain causal generalization (like, "damp wood smokes when burned"). In any causal theory in which tokens fall under certain types, there is potential to have strange, grue-like types. We might think that all events of the type "billiard ball *A* hitting billiard ball *B* under normal circumstances on billiards table" will be followed

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[14]Furthermore, these predicates needn't come in pairs (one could use the trio of "grue," "redgreen" and

by events of the type "billiard ball *B* moving away from billiard ball *A* (in a certain describable trajectory)." But we could always encounter someone who might argue that our second category is very strange, and we should instead use the category "billiard ball *B* moving away from billiard ball *A* (in a certain describable trajectory) in cases observed before *t*, but in all other cases billiard ball *B* doesn't move." So there is a general problem of ruling out strange types which has ramifications that reach beyond inductive reasoning. Because I am focusing on Goodman's work, I shall principally address the problem with regard to the case of inductive reasoning, but I think that the results of the present investigation can illuminate other type-token areas like those present in causal theory and other areas of philosophy.

So, broadly speaking, while Hume asks "How can we have reason to believe that the world will be uniform?," Goodman asks "*What is* 'uniformity'?" -- or, similarly, "Which hypotheses are confirmed by your evidence?" If we have no good answer to Goodman's question, we would not justifiably be able to reason inductively even if we *did* have good reason to believe that the world was uniform, or, in Hume's words, that "the future would be conformable to the past."[15] Hereafter I shall call cases where things in the future (or things in distant spatial regions, or unobserved things, etc.) were *not* conformable to the past "Humean cases." Goodman's New Riddle is a scepticism about our ability to discern what constitutes a Humean case.

In the last section of this chapter, I shall examine to what extent we can reduce Goodmanian Scepticism to Humean Scepticism about other spatio-temporal regions and Cartesian Scepticism about the external world. In so doing, I shall provisionally assume that we can set aside the Humean Sceptic's worry by taking it as granted that if we can determine what uniformity is, then we can expect the world to be uniform. I shall also provisionally set aside the Cartesian Sceptic's worries about our knowledge of the external world. Now that the issues I shall address have been set out, we can see that setting aside these sorts of scepticism does not drain the subject of its interest, since real controversy remains -- specifically, our disagreement with the strange person, Mr. Grue, over his claim that:

> "Even given that Cartesian and Humean sceptical scenarios do not obtain, the emerald we are going to observe tomorrow will be grue, just like the times before, and that those emeralds

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"bluered," for example). I discuss these issues in greater depth in Chapter 3.

> will be grue is confirmed by our observation of other grue emeralds."

**Some Motives for Relativism About Similarity**

Among other things, in this chapter I am opposing the view that there are no objective similarities between things in the world. That view is *prima facie* unappealing. But, a number of eminent philosophers have held that view. Before arguing against that view, I shall describe some of the forms in which it comes and offer whatever considerations I can find in its favor. These largely come from Goodman and Quine.[16]

One path to a relativism with respect to similarity begins with the idea that similarities can be similarities in terms of any concept under which two objects each fall, in terms of any property shared by two objects, or in terms of any sentence which is describes two objects. These are all variants of what I call the "Shared Concept View" of similarity or "SCV," the ramifications of which I discuss throughout this thesis. This kind of view leads toward relativism about similarity, because it cannot close off the possibility of innumerable arbitrary similarities in terms of "bent" properties (or concepts).[17] We have just seen that a set of evidence can be made out through an inductive inference making use of an appropriately constructed predicate to appear to confirm most any conclusion. In the same way, a group of particulars can be argued to be similar to one another through the use of such a predicate -- as in "they're similar in that they're both grue." Even without bent predicates, concepts or properties, one might hold that there is always an unlimited number of respects in which any two objects are more similar to each other than to a third, and that it is only our parochial opinion of what respects are most "important" that leads us to take two objects to be more similar overall to each other than to a third. So similarity might be thought only to be "relative" to the predicate (concept, or property) selected.

Donald Davidson holds a version of SCV which he expresses by saying

> "Similarities are geared to concepts. It doesn't make sense to say two things just *are* similar."[18]

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[15]Hume, *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding,* 23.
[16]I go on to search Davidson's philosophy for arguments in favor of SCV in the following three chapters.
[17]By "bent predicate" I simply mean "predicate like 'grue,' 'bleen,' 'trisquareular,' 'greensquareular,' etc."
[18]Davidson, Donald, Lecture at The University of California at Berkeley (17 April 1995).

Goodman holds a closely related version of SCV:

> "I do not think we can answer ... the question what resemblance the objects a term literally applies to must bear to each other ... a reversal in order of explanation might be appropriate: the fact that a term applies, literally or metaphorically, to certain objects may itself constitute rather than arise from a certain similarity among those objects."[19]

If philosophers like Davidson and Goodman hold that similarities are geared to concepts (rather than concepts' being geared to similarities), then they will have to find a way of ruling out strange concepts that does not depend on the things that fall under those strange concepts' not being similar. The prospects for such a discovery are, I think, dim. So, failing such a discovery, philosophers with views like Davidson's and Goodman's will have some motivation to accept relativism about similarity.

In "Seven Strictures on Similarity," Goodman argues that there is no matter of fact about the degree of two things' overall similarity.[20] Because, for Goodman, the sole requirement for having a property is that a thing be a member of a class of objects, the conclusion that all objects share the same number of properties is a matter of simple mathematics.

> "If there are just three things in the universe, then any two of them belong together in exactly two classes and have exactly two properties in common: the property of belonging to the class consisting of the two things, and the property of belonging to the class consisting of all three things."[21]

This is perhaps an implausible view, since what most of us require before considering something to have a "property" goes beyond that thing's being a member of a class of objects -- at least when we are not worried about properties like grueness. Nevertheless, because Goodman takes similarities to be based on shared properties, and because he believes that all objects share an equal number of properties with all other objects, similarity is an entirely relative matter.

Goodman holds that the judgments of comparative similarity which we undoubtedly

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[19]Goodman, Nelson, "Seven Strictures on Similarity," *Problems and Projects*, (New York, 1972), 440.
[20]Ibid. 437 ff.
[21]Ibid.

make in our everyday life are merely contextually relative. He gives the example of two glasses filled with clear liquid, and a third filled with red liquid. We would initially take the two glasses of clear liquid to be most similar. But if we are thirsty, and the glasses are actually filled respectively with water, hydrochloric acid, and water with a drop of harmless red coloring, then we would take the first and third to be most similar. Goodman concludes that our judgments of similarity are relative to context.

Quine famously examined the idea of understanding natural properties in terms of similarity. He rejected that idea as unpromising in the face of what he called "the problem of imperfect community."[22] An acceptable characterization of "natural properties," as I (and Quine) will use the term must include what we normally think of as properties, while excluding both "bent" properties like 'grue' and, more pertinently to Quine's discussion, disjunctive properties like that of 'being either green or square.'[23]

After rejecting some prior, flawed proposals, Quine's most promising suggestion for characterizing natural properties in terms of similarity is:

> [A set whose members all have a property is a set whose members have a natural property iff] "all its members are more similar to one another than they all are to any one thing outside the set. In other words, each non-member differs more from some member than that member differs from any member."[24]

But this attempt cannot be a sufficient condition for being natural because, according to Quine, it would fail the test of "imperfect community." The strange "property" SP where

> Something has SP iff it has two of the properties green, round, and wooden

should be excluded from being natural, but, Quine claims, qualifies under the attempted characterization of naturalness being evaluated by him. If a particular object O is green, square, and metal, it necessarily will lack SP. For SP to pass the proposed test for naturalness, O must differ more from some object which has SP than that object differs from any other object with SP.[25] SP passes this test. Take the "some object which has SP" to be a

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[22]Quine, W.V., "Natural Kinds," *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York, 1969).
[23]Quine's discussion is in terms of "sets of natural kinds of properties," but the issues remain the same.
[24]Quine, "Natural Kinds," 120.
[25]Eli Hirsch points out that though Quine does not include possible objects with SP as objects with which to compare O, it is clear that unless they are included, the question of which objects have properties will be a

non-green, round, wooden object (object "RW"). As such, RW does have SP. But it can be as different from O as we like, since O is green, non-round, and non-wooden. RW will be more similar to any object with SP than to O, since any object with SP will have to be either round or wooden.

So, according to Quine, this best attempt to characterize natural properties in terms of similarity fails as well, since it fails to rule out strange properties like SP. If an anti-relativist can get no further than Quine in characterizing properties in terms of similarity, then he has failed to give an account of properties at all. This failure could be taken by a relativist as more support for his view that there is no such thing as a natural property to characterize.

A obvious concern about relativism about similarity -- a concern that is ultimately compelling and decisive -- is that such a relativism appears to leave us without a means of ruling out "bent" predicates (or concepts or properties) like "grue." Such a relativism would be more palatable if this concern could be addressed. Goodman attempts to address it through his account of "entrenched predicates."

On Goodman's account, what separates a valid projection from an invalid one, is not a function of how the things are with the part of the world about which we are making a prediction, but rather a function of how frequently in the past projections have been made with the predicates being used in our projection. He suggests that to make valid projections we should use predicates in induction which are more "entrenched" than other predicates the predictions made by which are supported by the same body of evidence (i.e., we should use "green," not "grue").

> Plainly, "green," as a veteran of earlier and many more projections than "grue," has the more impressive biography. The predicate "green," we may say, is better *entrenched* than the predicate "grue."[26]

A predicate, or the class selected by it, becomes entrenched by actual past projections.

Entrenchment has nothing to do with the relationship between the members of the class of things that fall under that predicate.

> "The significant difference [between "green" and "grue"] appears only if we consider just those occasions when each predicate was actually

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contingent matter. Hirsch, *Dividing Reality*, 58. For our present purposes, I shall assume either that all of the pertinent examples are actual, or that possible objects are allowed in comparisons.

[26] Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 94.

projected ... entrenchment derives from the use of language."[27]

The dissimilarity of green and blue grue objects is not a factor in "green's" being entrenched and "grue's" not being entrenched. Rather, it is a *product* of the frequency of predictions made with those predicates.

> "To speak very loosely, I might say that in answer to the question what distinguishes those recurrent features of experience that underlie valid projections from those that do not, I am suggesting that the former are those features for which we have adopted predicates that we have habitually projected."[28]

Entrenchment of predicates is not a product of how things are with the world, but rather of how things are with our predictions. It is not that we project with certain predicates because they are fit for projection; rather, and contrary to our common sense view, it is that certain predicates are fit for projection because we project with them.

> "... in the case of our main stock of well-worn predicates, I submit that the judgment of projectibility has derived from the habitual projection, rather than the habitual projection from the judgment of projectibility. ... The reason why only the right predicates happen so luckily to have become will entrenched is just that the well entrenched predicates have thereby become the right ones."[29]

So if we had a well entrenched practice for projecting with "grue" and lacked such a practice for "green," our projections based on "grue" would be valid, and our projections based on "green" would be invalid.

Goodman goes on to characterize genuine as opposed to artificial kinds in terms of predicates.

> "... two things are the more akin according as there is a more specific and better entrenched predicate that applies to both."[30]

So again, two things' shared terminology leads to those things' being similar rather than the converse.

Goodman's "solution" to his New Riddle of Induction is to characterize justified

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[27]Ibid. 95.
[28]Ibid. 97.
[29]Ibid. 98.
[30]Ibid. 121.

induction as induction based on the predicates that we have used in the past. Such induction is justified *because* of such past projection -- we did not project in our particular manner in the past because that manner was the way to make justified predictions. On his view, Goodman must accept that if "grue" were entrenched instead of "green," then predictions based on "grue" would be justified instead of those based on "green." It would be mistaken to think that Goodman would try to avoid this conclusion by somehow claiming that our past use had been a certain way because that way had always come up with correct predictions, since "grue" would always have come up with correct predictions as well.

So Goodman's position is not relativistic to the extent that he thinks that predictions using "grue" and predictions using "green" are equally justified. It *is* relativistic, however, in that he thinks that predictions using "grue" might have been justified and predictions using "green" might have been unjustified even if the state of things in the world were just as they are, with the exception of our past catalogue of predictions.

**Relativism About Similarity Rejected, and a Characterization of Natural Properties in Terms of Similarity Proposed**

Goodman's "solution" to his problem is inadequate. We should not accept that the conclusion that "all emeralds are grue" would be justified if in the past we had had a different inductive practice.[31] To accept that conclusion would be to accept its unattractive consequence that if we encountered a strange person (Mr. Grue) from a culture with slightly different inductive practices who claimed that "all emeralds are grue," his statement could be equally as justified as ours is when we claimed that "all emeralds are green." Goodman's holding that before *t* each of these predictions might have been equally well justified amounts to holding mistakenly that the original problem of determining what evidence supports what hypothesis was not a problem at all; in reality, the possibility of an encounter with a Mr. Grue from such a culture shows that his solution is was not a solution at all. The justifiedness of one prediction as opposed to another is precisely what is at stake in the dispute with the Goodmanian Sceptic. If *any* other arbitrarily different and even conflicting prediction could have been equally justified by our same body of evidence, had our practices (or those of the strange people) been different, then there is no justification for any prediction. I shall argue

[31]There is an issue here related to assessing the meaning of the statement "all emeralds are grue" when uttered

that we need not settle for this impoverished "solution" to the New Riddle.

If Goodman's basis for dividing reality into kinds is essentially bound up with how we have divided reality in the past, then it is unclear on his account how learning language or acquisition of concepts would be possible. If green things were "more akin" to each other than grue things, *only* because

> "there is a more specific and better entrenched predicate that applies to both,"[32]

then before we had learned a language we would have no means of discovering which similarity between objects was relevant to the word "green," since we would have no access to the entrenchment of various classes of objects. Whatever problems, Goodmanian or otherwise, there may be with an account of properties or the reference of terms based on similarity, if a philosopher's account of similarity depends on a prior understanding of language, then he or she owes an account of how the learning of language is possible. Such an account, it would seem, will be extremely difficult to give, since *prima facie*, at least, it seems that a predicate is applied to a group of things because we perceive their similarity.

Goodman's account fails to explain why "green" is preferable to "grue" in deductive inferences because it fails to explain *why* a predicate's being entrenched should make it more fit for inductive reasoning. Our strong intuition is that there is another, deeper explanation which accounts both for why certain predicates are entrenched *and* for why certain predicates are fit for induction. When evaluating Goodman's explanation, one should keep in mind that at the time of prediction (i.e., before *t*), by hypothesis, any time "green" had been used, "grue" could have been used with equal success. Given the predicates' equal footing in this respect, it is unsatisfying to hear that using "green" in predictions is more justified "because that's how we've always done it before." What we want is an explanation of *why* strange predicates are not fit for induction, not merely an *ad hoc* means of ruling them out. Mere entrenchment seems to have little to do with *why* one predicate is more fit than another for induction.

So Goodman's entrenchment approach fails to provide us with a winning argument against a Mr. Grue from a culture with an entrenched practice of using "grue" in induction, it appears to foreclose any satisfying account of how learning language could be possible, and it fails to provide an explanation of *why* a predicate's being entrenched should make it more fit

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before *t* which I address in Chapter 3. For now, we can ignore such issues.

for induction. For these reasons Goodman's entrenchment "solution" to the New Riddle must be rejected, and it provides no reason to embrace relativism about similarity.

If we accept SCV, holding with Goodman, Davidson and others,[33] that similarities between two things are always in terms of properties shared by those two things, concepts that apply to those two things, or the entrenched classes into which those two things fall, then we shall end up with a relativistic view like that of the Goodmanian Sceptic.[34] If similarities are thought of as always in terms of a shared property (or a concept applicable to both objects, or a class into which an object falls), then we won't be able to use the lack of similarity between many grue objects as a reason to disallow grue as a natural, non-strange property. Grue objects, on all such views, will have grue in common, just as green objects have green in common, so the two properties will seem to be on equally good footing. To claim that grue objects do not share a property appropriate for them to be considered similar would, on any form of SCV, be to beg the question why grue is not such an appropriate property. Once we accept the starting point of Goodman and Davidson, SCV, there is no prospect for an answer to this question.

But if properties are thought of in terms of similarity, (and concepts are thought of as arising from observed similarities), then bent properties can be characterized and ruled out as inappropriate for induction, since many particulars with a bent property would not be similar to each other in the relevant manner. To say that the grue objects were similar because they shared the property 'grue' on this account would just be wrong, since to qualify as a natural property (i.e., as a property which is appropriate for inductive inferences, in a sense to be clarified below), tokens with that property must be similar in the appropriate manner, and grue tokens are not similar in the appropriate manner, as we can readily perceive. For these reasons, an account of properties in terms of similarity would be very attractive.

If the phenomenology of perception is not a good guide to the world -- that is, if the "information" we garner through our perceptual experiences is not correlated with how things in fact are -- then the Cartesian Sceptic is right. Goodman wants to do more than simply

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[32]Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 121.

[33]Including, as we shall see, Quine.

[34]That similarities are in terms of shared, entrenched property classes is Goodman's view in *Fact, Fiction and Forecast.* He changes his view in *Problems and Projects.* The change is, I think, for the worse, since on his latter view similarities are so context-relative they are even less fit to be a basis upon which to eliminate strange properties.

embrace Cartesian or Humean Scepticism. On my account, more is required for two things to be similar or have a property than their common membership in an extensional set of objects. When we perceive objects, on my account, unless phenomenology is not a good guide to the world, our perceptions tell us more about two similar objects than that they belong to some set.[35] In fact, their membership in some extensional set has nothing to do with whether or not they are similar, precisely because *any* two objects are members of any number of such sets. If we can give an account of properties based on similarities then properties equally will have nothing interesting to do with membership in such a set. Goodman's claim that all objects have the same number of properties because those properties correspond to sets of objects is unfaithful to our common sense view of things. This account has the odd implication that all things are equally similar, which should make us wonder whether he is talking about the same thing as we are when he uses the word "similar." Without significant further argumentation, Goodman's view that all particulars share an equal number of properties is no reason to worry about the philosophical viability of "similarity" in its normal sense and its prospects for being the basis of properties.

A fundamental aspect of Goodman's position is his view that similarity couldn't ground properties because similarity is incurably context dependent. Goodman seems right to hold that if similarity is context dependent, then properties of objects, which we think of as context independent, could not fundamentally depend on similarity. But I do not think that it follows from the fact that many of our judgments of similarity are context dependent that we are unable to make judgments of similarity that are not context dependent. This is not to say that we are infallible, or that there are not difficult cases. But the presence of borderline cases should not make us lose our grip on obvious cases of context independent similarity. There is no situation, I would argue, in which context could inhibit our evident ability to determine that two ordinary pencils are more similar to each other than one of them is to Mars.[36] Goodman raises the example of a glass of water, a glass of water containing a bit of harmless red dye, and a glass of hydrochloric acid. In the context of initially looking at these things, the first and third seem most similar. But to a thirsty person, he goes on, the first and

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[35]Chapter 1 argues that in perception (1) we can tell that certain particulars are similar, (2) we can largely tell to what degree things are similar, in at least some respects, and (3) we can tell *how* things are similar.

[36]Admittedly, a philosopher can always concoct a hypothetical situation in which just one of the pencils and Mars shared an overwhelmingly salient property (say, their presence means that a prisoner won't be executed). But in any such hypothetical situation the extreme nature of the example would be obvious, and even the prisoner would accept that as a general matter the pencils were far more similar to each other than

second will seem most similar. All of this seems correct to me. But why should it follow from any of this that the first and second are not also most similar *in*dependent of context, and that this is something that we can discover -- though perhaps not with our initial glance? I think that we are strongly inclined to believe that there are context independent similarities that we can observe to a reasonably large extent, at least in many cases.

So because Goodman's view has the unintuitive implication that all objects are equally similar since on his account similarities are based on properties and to have a property is just to be a member of an extensional set, and because the conclusion that *all* of our similarity judgments are context-dependent does not follow from the fact that many of our similarity judgments are context-dependent, I think that there is good reason to think that Goodman's arguments for his Seven Strictures should not worry someone who wants to base an account of properties on similarity.

If we accept, *pace* Goodman, that there are objective similarities in the world, then if we can overcome Quine's problem of imperfect community, an account of natural properties based on similarity will be an attractive view. Quine's problem is finding a means of distinguishing natural properties from strange ones like SP, which applies to objects that are either green and round, green and wooden, or round and wooden.

We should notice at the outset that Quine, like Goodman, is thinking of similarity in terms of shared properties, and thus is yet another philosopher adhering to SCV: In a sense, members of the set SP are not so much "more similar" to one another than they all are to any one thing outside the set -- as Quine deems them -- as they are "more the same" as one another than they are as any one thing outside the set. By "more the same" here, I mean that they share numerically more properties.[37] Hirsch presents an example of an object "AGAR" which is almost green, almost round, and wooden.[38] For property SP to pass Quine's test for naturalness, AGAR must differ more from some object which has SP than that object differs from any other object with SP. To obtain the informative result from this test, we should pick the object with SP which is farthest from AGAR. The object with SP that is farthest from AGAR is one that is green and round, but not wooden, and otherwise as different as possible

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to Mars.

[37]I shall temporarily assume that "sharing numerically more properties" makes sense, for the sake of examining Quine's argument.

[38]Hirsch, *Dividing Reality*, 214.

from AGAR. Call this object "GR." But since AGAR is almost green and almost round, it doesn't seem that it must differ more from GR, which is green and round, than GR differs from some object with SP, (call it "G"), which might be a distant shade of green, but otherwise would be as different as possible from GR. So, as Hirsch points out, Quine's example of a case of imperfect community property (SP) actually *fails* to pass the test for a natural property.

In such a case, AGAR and GR might be more similar than GR and G, but they would not be "more the same." In thinking of similarity only in terms of sameness with respect to certain properties, Quine overlooks the possibility of AGR and GRs' being more *similar* than GR and G despite their being less "*the same*."

In spite of the fact that Quine's principle in fact passes the test of imperfect community, it fails to successfully characterize natural properties in terms of similarity. The problem is that Quine's principle entails that properties, like red, which apply only to certain particulars in a range of gradually changing particulars, are not natural properties. For example, take a group of particulars that are extremely similar except in their color. Some orangeish-red particulars will be more similar to some reddish-orange particulars than they are to some purplish-red particulars. So red will fail Quine's test for properties, since it is not the case that for the set of red things

> "all its members are more similar to one another than they all are to any one thing outside the set" ... [nor is it the case that] "each non-member differs more from some member than that member differs from any member."[39]

So Quine's principle fails to characterize natural properties in terms of similarity.

The intuition that underlies our notion of a natural property can be better captured by a principle different from Quine's. Hirsch helpfully suggests a characterization of "natural property" which springs more directly from our intuitive idea of what a "natural property" is. His suggestion is that natural properties are "similarity-making," in the sense that they are properties

> "the sharing of which necessarily increases the similarity between things."[40]

To say, as Hirsch does, that natural properties are "similarity-making" is essentially correct,

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[39]Quine, "Natural Kinds," 120.

although it is somewhat misleading in its implication that natural properties "make" similarities rather than similarities rather than *vice versa*. Hirsch's important insight is as follows: Say there is some object X that lacks a certain natural property P, and there is some object Y which has P. If X had P (but otherwise were to remain just as is), then X would be more similar to Y than it actually is. This all seems correct, and none of it misleadingly implies that natural properties make similarities rather than that similarities make natural properties. The important point is that on this account natural properties can be characterized in terms of similarity. It is not that properties make similarities, but, rather, that if there is a shared natural property, there is necessarily a similarity which makes it.

Except for his misleading terminology, Hirsch's account of natural properties is a good one which I accept. The account clearly solves the problem of imperfect community as well as the difficulty presented by properties that apply only to part of a range of gradually changing particulars (like red). Hirsch suggests this more precise formulation "N" of his characterization of natural properties in terms of similarity:

> (N) If property P is natural, then for any *x* and *y*, if *x* has P and *y* lacks P, there is a *z* such that *z* has P and for any *w*, if *w* has P and *w* is at least as similar to *y* as *z* is, then *w* is more similar to *x* than *y* is.[41]

This definition avoids the problem of imperfect community as follows. Take our SP (i.e., green and round, green and wooden, or round and wooden). There will be some *x* which is green and round, but not wooden, which thereby has SP. There will be a *y* which is green, but not round and not wooden and thereby lacks SP. If SP were a natural property, then for *y* to have had SP it would necessarily have been more similar to *x*. But as things are, if *y* had been wooden, and therefore had had SP, it would not necessarily have been any more similar to *x*. In fact being wooden might have made *y* *less* similar to *y*, depending on what substances they are, and how similar each is to wood. So SP, as we had hoped, fails to qualify as a natural property under the test supplied by N, and thus N avoids the problem of imperfect community. Intuitively, it is pretty clear that a green, square, wooden object would not necessarily have been more similar to a blue, triangular, wooden object if the former had

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[40]Hirsch, *Dividing Reality*, 58.

[41]Ibid. In this formulation, *w* is an object just like *y* except that it has P. Hirsch explains that he cannot explicate "just like *y* except for having P" as "nothing that has P is more similar to *y* than *w* is," since there could be an infinite amount of P bearers, and, for any one of them, there is another one more similar to *y*. The complexity in this definition is a way of getting around this problem. *z* serves to mark some high degree of similarity to *y* beyond which any P-bearer must be more similar to *x* than *y* is.

been round.

On Hirsch's better characterization of natural properties in terms of similarity, properties like red *do* turn out to be natural properties. Imagine a color spectrum along the following lines:

Orange | Red | Purple

2 4 5 1 3

The numbers stand for particular colors at various points along the spectrum from orange to purple. Quine's problem is that the principle he discusses has the result that because 1 and 2 are more similar to each other than 1 and 3, red is not a natural property. On Hirsch's account, 1 and 3 are not required to be more similar to each other than 1 and 2 are. It simply must be the case that if 2 were red, (i.e., if object 2 had the color of object 5), then it would be more similar to object 1.[42]

One feature of this account of properties which might be thought of as a drawback is that properties like 'color in the red or orange range' will come out as natural as well. But I think that this feature is acceptable, and even an asset, since it reflects an arbitrariness present in the grammar of some color words in our language. First, notice that not *any* color that we would ordinarily call "a range of colors" will pass the test for naturalness. If such a candidate for naturalness spans two primary colors, like 'color in the yellow through orange through red range' (call this "YOR"), then it will fail the test. For YOR, it is no longer true that a purple object y that lacks YOR would have been more like a yellow object x that has YOR if it had had YOR by virtue of being red. A red object is no more like a yellow object than a purple object. We do seem to perceive natural "breaks" in the phenomenology of primary colors. For example, if we move along the spectrum from blues through greens we shall come to a point where there is no element of blue in the color we are observing, specifically when we arrive at pure yellow. After this point some element of red will be present as the yellows become more red. As we proceed along through the range of yellows and oranges there will be no element of blue until immediately after pure red. So I think that it is fair to say that there are what I shall call "breaks" in the phenomenology of primary color, since there is a range of colors with an element of blue which then is completely absent but eventually

[42]More technically, it must be the case that there is an object (5) which is red and for any object 4 if 4 is red and

returns.

Second, we should notice that in the case of the distinction the grammar of our language makes between orange and red we do not perceive such a natural break in nature; all pure oranges have an element of yellow and red but no blue, while there are reds with an element of yellow but no blue.[43] In other words, there is nothing in our phenomenology that corresponds to the "|" marks in my diagram above. The distinction between orange and red is provided by our normative standards of our language. We obviously can see a difference between reddish oranges and orangeish reds, but it is an arbitrary matter just where (or whether at all) we should draw a line between these colors if we want our language to be convenient but also for the most part to reflect natural properties. Hirsch's principle N reflects just that fact, since it allows that there can be an arbitrary element in which properties we choose to use, while nonetheless those properties can be fully natural properties that are based on real similarities in nature.

Of course none of this should somehow be taken to imply that the word "orange" is not a good word to have in our language. The point is rather that there is no reason that we might not have had a language with four words that apply to the range of colors from pure red to pure yellow instead of three; they might be "red," "redyellow," "yellowred," and "yellow." The range of each of these would have to be determined normatively. We might perfectly well use that language instead of ours if we found it convenient to have more numerous and specific color words. Still, "redyellow" would qualify as a natural property, which I think is an acceptable result. To be a natural property on this account, there needn't be a "break" in nature at each limit of what is considered to have that property. It is just that if a property spans too many breaks -- as with a color that spans from pure yellow to pure red -- it will no longer be a natural property, since, as we have seen, if a green object had been yellow, it needn't have been any more similar to a red object.

So N characterizes something acceptably close to what we would call "natural properties" in terms of similarity.[44] Imperfect community is no obstacle to such an

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4 is at least as similar to 2 as 5 is to 2, then 4 is more similar to 1 than 2 is.

[43]Of course in reality there are plenty of oranges with an element of blue, but in the context of this discussion I am just considering colors with elements of one or two of the primary colors. I do not think that such an idealization affects the point of the discussion -- that there are "breaks" in primary color phenomenology, but that nonetheless there is a normative element to our divisions of reality based on color which can and does coexist peacefully with the account of natural properties based on Hirsch's principle.

[44]Hereafter I shall use the term "natural property" as inclusive of properties like "redyellow" as described above, which means something like what "orange" means.

approach.[45]

## Facing the Goodmanian Sceptic

Goodman's Sceptic challenges the claim that the fact that every emerald we have observed before *t* has been green is a good ground for the belief that emeralds observed after *t* will be green. He suggests that this fact is equally good evidence for all emeralds' being grue. Now that we have defended the notion of objective similarities from Quine and Goodman and have found a good characterization of natural properties in terms of similarities, we are in a good position to confront the Goodmanian Sceptic.

Our initial response to the Goodmanian Sceptic and the New Riddle of Induction should be to say that green emeralds observed before *t* support the conclusion that emeralds after *t* will be green, and give no support to the conclusion that emeralds observed after *t* will be blue because green is a natural property, and inductive inferences are justifiable only to the degree that those inferences are based on natural properties, where natural properties are characterized in terms of similarity via Hirsch's principle N.

The sceptic might reply that we shall realize that grue qualifies as a natural property by Hirsch's lights once we see that grue objects are just as similar to each other as green ones are: green ones are similar in terms of greenness, while grue ones are similar in terms of grueness. The correct response to this challenge will, I hope, be clear at this point. We should argue that similarities should not be thought of in terms of shared properties, but rather natural properties should be thought of as springing from similarities that we can perceive or otherwise discern. We could support this claim by saying that it, unlike Goodman's account of properties, yields an account of properties that matches our pre-theoretical intuitions about what properties are like. On Goodman's account of properties, similarities must be in terms of shared properties, and properties are explained in terms of

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[45]Of course it can always be that each member of a set of things *appears* to have some natural property NP, when in fact only some of them have one natural property NP1 while the others have a different one, NP2. Jade offers such an example: Originally all jade objects were thought to be of a single kind, but then it was discovered that there were at least two distinct chemical formulae underlying seemingly identical appearances. In such cases, science augments our skill at similarity perception and helps us winnow properties ideally suited for inductive reasoning from those that only at first seemed to be so suited. Scientific techniques can take apparently similar particulars and place them in situations where they are perceptibly dissimilar. As it happens, color is like Jade in this respect. Nevertheless, if we perceive straightaway that two objects are sufficiently *dissimilar* in some respect, we can eliminate them as sharing a natural property in that respect -- as with the case of green emeralds and blue sapphires. Trial and error will

sets of objects. So his account results in any arbitrary set of objects' sharing an equally good property, and thus any arbitrary set of objects' being equally similar. At this point we are so far from our intuitive notions of "similar" and "property" it is not clear that we are still discussing properties and similarities. For example, surely the determination of what objects are most similar should require that we look at how things are in the world.

Faced with our account of similarities and properties, if the Goodmanian Sceptic is to convince us that the Goodmanian account of those features of reality is on a par with ours, then he will have to come up with some new arguments. I cannot see any good way for him to back up the claim that similarities depend on shared properties. Furthermore, whatever support he could muster for such a claim would have to be strong indeed, since it would seem to have the consequence that grue-type properties are as viable as non-strange ones. In order for the sceptic's claim about the priority of properties to similarity to be plausible he would have to provide either convincing reasons for embracing this kind of relativism, or a whole new account of how to avoid strange predicates. And this new account of how to avoid strange predicates could obviously not make any claims about the greater similarity of green things to green things than grue things to grue things, since that would be question begging. I think that the sceptic's task is impossible. The whole "grue" story is a reductio of similarities' being in terms of shared properties.

Someone at this point might suggest that we could take properties as fundamental, and then still characterize similarities in terms of them. I do not think this is a good approach. Firstly, it would beg the question of why grue is not a natural property by just stipulating that it is or it is not. I think that there is a good *reason* that grue is not a natural property, namely, that its tokens need not be similar in the certain manner in question. Secondly, to take properties as fundamental would amount to Universal Realism, and as I argued in Chapter 1, such an account is explanatorily uneconomical. We would be said to learn of these natural properties by similarity discernments, and then explain our similarity discernments in terms of properties. So why not simplify things by taking similarities to be fundamental?

I do not know what, if anything, actual physicists say about similarity. I suppose it is likely that they say nothing about it. But at this point we can see that it would be a mistake for a physicist or a philosopher to make something like a claim that our best scientific account of reality does not recognize natural similarities, so we should not recognize

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help us address cases like jade.

similarity as a part of reality. On the contrary, it seems that our best scientific account of reality should countenance properties like green and not those like grue. So this account depends on similarity.

Having had time to think about his next move, the sceptic might say, "When you say that grue things are not as similar to each other as green things are to each other, you are mistakenly assuming that your concept of similarity is not actually the bent concept of 'grsimilarity.' Maybe our friend the strange person who thinks that grue things are similar while green things are not (because they look grue and then bleen) has the real concept of similarity, while yours is a bent concept."

My response to this objection would be to explain that our way of discerning between similar things and grsimilar things depends on no concept of similarity or grsimilarity. In fact, it depends on no concept at all. Our capacity to perceive similar and dissimilar objects is a *skill*, not a concept. To say otherwise would be to make a category error. We learn our *concept* of 'similar' ostensively by observing similar things in the world, and in doing so are already using our skill of similarity discernment. The concept of similarity, no doubt, is learned rather late in a child's development. If we needed the concept of similarity to pick out similar objects, we could never learn the concept "similar." So this skill is a preconceptual skill; it depends on no concept, and therefore is unlike the skill at picking out "grsimilar" things.[46]

A natural next move for the Goodmanian Sceptic would be to claim that we don't know whether our skill at picking out what we think are similar things is actually a skill at picking out "grsimilar" things. What if we encountered a grue-speaker who insisted that grue things looked phenomenologically similar to him, while green things did not? The grue-speaker might insist that he had access to the real similarities in things, and that it was our judgments of similarity which were mistaken.[47]

It is worth noticing that we are now quite far away from anything Goodman ever wrote. Goodman made the mistake of thinking of our judgments about similarity either as being determined by something apart from simple perceptions of similarity, like the

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[46]Michael Ayers has argued that individuation precedes conceptualization. Ayers, Michael, "What is Realism?" unpublished manuscript, (1996). I would add that similarity discernment skill precedes conceptualization as well. Similarity discernment is a condition for the possibility of preconceptual individuation as well as a precondition of the acquisition of concepts.

[47]Such a scenario would have to be after *t*, since otherwise we would simply translate his word "grue" as our green.

predicates in our language, or as indeterminate and philosophically useless. So in wondering whether our preconceptual skill in similarity perception is veridical, the "Goodmanian" sceptic has backed up (actually, I think, moved forward) into quite a different position from the one in which he started.

There are several different possible versions of what might be going on in a scenario like the one described by the sceptic. None, I think, lead to the sort of paradox that Goodman envisioned, though some might be disturbing. I think that all can be accounted for in one of four ways: (A) as cases where the grue-speaker is simply wrong, (B) as cases where it will turn out that there is no substantive disagreement between the grue-speaker and us, (C) as Cartesian cases where the phenomenology of our perception failed to be a dependable guide to the world, or (D) as Humean cases where future events simply failed to be uniform with past events.

First, imagine cases where after *t*, the new emeralds still look green to us. These cases are not paradoxical, since our prediction would not have been wrong. If the grue-speaker claims that the new emeralds look grue to him -- i.e., he claims that there has been a change in the emeralds that he can perceive -- then we might imagine giving him a test. We get him to tell us which of several emeralds was observed before *t* (since he claims to be able to tell the difference just by looking at them), and then show them to him in a different order and see if his alleged powers of perception are consistent (call this the "empirical test"). If they are not consistent, then he would simply be wrong ((A) above), and we should pity him for having a flawed perceptual mechanism (or be annoyed at him for being a fake). If his answers *are* consistent, then we shall have made a remarkable discovery of a person who can perceive a new property of some emeralds. Scientists will want to study the man and the old and new emeralds to see what property it is that he is perceiving. If we find that the link between emeralds with this new property is uniform with the time of their first observation, this will be an extremely odd turn of events, but not particularly paradoxical for our inductive practices, since the new property would not be what our predictions were about, and it would not be what we call "color" -- even if it appeared phenomenologically to the grue-speaker as a color. This would be situation (B) above.

The more troubling group of cases are those in which, after a certain time, all newly observed emeralds began to appear blue to us. In such a case, we might test our own ability to consistently discern which emeralds are what color. If we failed such tests then this would

be a case where how emeralds looked to us was not consistently linked to do with how emeralds are, or as Robert Nozick might put it, where we are unable to "track" how things are.[48] Perhaps in such cases we would be unable to administer the test, or would think we are administering it and passing when in fact we were not. Such cases would indeed be very worrisome, but they would not be cases of a specially Goodmanian Sceptical scenario. They would be cases where our phenomenology failed to be a good guide to the world -- what I am calling "Cartesian cases" ((C) above).

Finally, consider a case where the newly observed emeralds look blue to us, but the grue speaker cannot tell them apart from the old emeralds. Imagine that we consistently pass the empirical test. This would be a case like the one where the grue-speaker perceived a new property, except we would be in his place. The grue-speaker would claim rightly (as we rightly claimed, in the other example when newly observed emeralds remained green) that his prediction had been correct. Emeralds had remained grue both before and after *t*. Here, as in that other example, "grue" and "green" would not both be colors. One would be a new and different property, since emeralds could evidently be only grue, or be both green and grue. (So we would have discovered that "grue" was not "green if observed before *t* or otherwise blue.") In such a case, assuming that people like us were in the vast majority in the community of language speakers, it would, I think, be fair to continue to call what we perceive "color," and to re-name the quality perceived by the grue speaker. This would be a Humean scenario ((D) above), since as to greenness, things failed to continue as they had in the past (although of course we would assume that there was an explanation). We have a criterion for determining whether our ability to perceive how things are is veridical, and not simply due to changes in us unrelated to the objects, (i.e., the empirical test), and we can perceive that things did not continue in a uniform manner. Our previous observations of green emeralds failed to be good justification of our prediction that newly observed emeralds would continue to be green, but only because future events failed to continue as they had in the past. So, as with the Cartesian case, although this is a strange, disturbing scenario, it is not paradoxical in any particularly Goodmanian way.

A natural next step for us to take in such a situation would be to try to find a physical difference between the green and blue emeralds. If we were able to find one, then we might go on to ask why we suddenly started to find these emeralds now. If we could explain *this* as

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[48]Nozick, Robert *Philosophical Explanations*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1981), 178 ff.

well, then the situation would in fact not strictly have been a Humean scenario at all, since we could give a good explanation in terms of other natural properties as to why the situation was actually uniform with the past. But suppose that we could not find any physical difference between the emeralds at all. We would have to maintain that the two sorts were different, because difference in color alone is a criterion for there being two sorts of emeralds, even if all of our other tests for difference fail. This scenario seems unbearably implausible. Its implausibility is indicative of the deep faith we have that the world is uniform. Our scientific explanations are based on the assumption that natural kinds like emeralds will behave in similar ways under similar circumstances, so they are unable to explain such a "bare," Humean change of color after time *t*. Even if that were what had happened (as it is by stipulation in this case), we would be extremely reluctant, to the point of refusal, to explain the difference in the emeralds in terms of a bare, unpredictable, non-uniformity. Nonetheless, this is a logical possibility -- one "not ruled out by relations of ideas," as Hume might have put it.

As a last desperate attempt to defend his scepticism, the Goodmanian Sceptic might point to two green things and a blue thing and say, "Even if no Cartesian scenario obtains, those things are all equally similar." At this point we can -- *and have to* -- look and literally *see* that he is wrong. So the Goodmanian Sceptic is wrong: He has failed to show that his position adds anything to Cartesian or Humean Scepticism.

So what of the strange person's claim?

> Even given that the Cartesian and Humean Sceptical scenarios do not obtain, the new emeralds we are going to observe tomorrow will be grue, just like the times before, and that those emeralds will be grue is confirmed by our observation of other grue emeralds.

We can now see that this statement can be taken in many ways, and in each of them would be false. The strange person may hold that even though the world looks to him the way it looks to us, our concept of 'green' is no different from his concept 'grue,' because grue things are as similar to each other as green things, since there are as many sets which include grue things as there are sets which include green things and therefore they share an equal number of properties. If that is what he means, then we should explain that grue fails to pass Hirsch's test for natural properties, and only natural properties can be used in justifiable inductive

inferences.

The strange person may hold that although we may *think* that green things are more similar to each other than grue things are, it might only be true that green things are more *gr*similar to each other, while grue things are more *similar* to each other. This is to say that the strange person may challenge what he takes to be the concept of similarity behind our similarity perceptions. Since, to him, we can have no more reason to use the concept of similarity than that of *gr*similarity, we cannot determine which properties are natural by using Hirsch's test -- since if we used Hirsch's test based on *gr*similarity instead of on similarity, grue properties would come out as "natural." If that is the strange person's position, we should explain to him that the best account of similarity perception is that it is a preconceptual skill, so there are not various "concepts of similarity" which could be used in conjunction with Hirsch's test. We could not learn the concept of similarity or grsimilarity without already having the ability to perceive similarities.

Finally, the strange person might be expressing a scepticism about whether our "skill" in perceiving things allows us to discern what things are similar at all. If we do not actually have such a skill, then we could not perceive that green things are more similar than grue ones, and we could not thereby rule them out by means of Hirsch's test for naturalness. If this is what the strange person means, we should argue that to express this scepticism is no more than to say that our alleged perceptions may not be a good guide to how things are in the world, and that this amounts to a Cartesian Scepticism, which he has conditionally allowed to be ruled out, since he thought he was making an additional sceptical claim.

If a Cartesian scenario does not obtain, and we seem to perceive things to be similar, then they *are* similar. If emeralds continue to fall under the natural property 'green,' then this aspect of nature will be uniform. There is uniformity when kinds, like emeralds, have the same natural properties in diverse spatio-temporal regions, and in both observed and unobserved contexts.[49] Lack of uniformity is a criterion for a Humean case. Uniformity is lacking where the course of how things are in some spatio-temporal realm is not similar to the course of how things are in another such realm, (and this asymmetry is not better explained in terms of other natural properties).

It is true that before *t,* the set of positive instances of green emeralds will always be identical to the set of positive instances of grue emeralds, but that does not entail that these

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[49]This of course includes natural properties like the propensity of kind "H2O" to become H2 and O2 during

instances are equally *evidence* which provides *justification* for the claims that "all emeralds are green" or "... are grue." In order for a generalization about future or unobserved cases based on a property to be *justified* by a set of observed instances, the generalization must be such that the future or as yet unobserved cases are predicted to have the same natural property as the positive instances. It makes no sense to predict that unobserved cases will have natural properties different from those of observed cases on the basis of those observed cases' being as they are.[50] Goodman claimed that

> the fact that every emerald we have observed before *t* has had property P

is not a good basis upon which to believe that emeralds observed after *t* will have P. Put this way, he is right, since "property P" might include grue. Such a generalization would only be warranted if P were limited to natural properties in Hirsch's sense. Because grue fails Hirsch's test, it is not a fit basis for inductive inferences, and predictions based on grueness cannot be justified by instances of grue things. Positive instances of grue things are not evidence for projections based on grue.[51]

My arguments in this chapter have principally been intended to show that Goodman's New Riddle of Induction has a solution, insofar as being reducible to the old Humean problem of justifying our faith in uniformity and the old Cartesian problem of justifying our faith that our perceptions of the external world are veridical can be called having a "solution." Insofar as it is a "new" riddle, it can be solved. There is no problematic, specially Goodmanian Scepticism about induction.

Perhaps the most important claim discussed on the way to this conclusion is that we must reject the view that similarities can be explained in terms of shared properties rather than *vice versa* -- i.e., that SCV must be rejected. If properties were thought to be "similarity making," where this implies that properties are ontologically more fundamental than similarities, then it would be impossible to give a non-question-begging account of what prevents properties like 'grue' from "making" grue things similar. Ruling out grue would be

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electrolysis, since that propensity obtains in all tokens of H2O.

[50]Unlike Goodman's entrenchment "solution" to the New Riddle, which only tells us *that* certain predicates are not fit for inductive reasoning, my solution to the New Riddle gives an account of *why* those predicates are unfit for induction. The reason is that what one does when reasoning inductively is predict that things will go on in a manner similar to the manner in which they have proceeded in the past. To use "grue" in an inductive inference is to predict that things will fail to go on in a manner similar to that in which they have in the past.

[51]As I have mentioned, though this discussion has been conducted as applied to the determination of which natural properties are useful in making justifiable inductive inferences, I think it could equally be applied to the determination of which natural properties are factors in genuine causal laws.

impossible without making use of the notion of similarity, because, I think, a lack of similarity among its tokens is precisely what prevents grue from being a natural property. Failing to rule out 'grue' would lead to relativism about similarity and would amount to a severe indictment of our perceptual skills. According to this relativism, any two things are equally similar. An account of similarities and properties which does not entail relativism must employ a notion of similarity to explain natural properties. Though we might want our account of similarity and properties to allow that relativism is a logical possibility -- as the possibility of Cartesian Scepticism allows, the conclusion that all things are equally similar should not be *entailed* by our account of what similarity is. A related claim which I endorse is that similarities are in general not metaphysically relative to our concepts because, if similarities were metaphysically relative to concepts, then we would have no way of learning those concepts by perceiving such similarities. The concept of similarity is distinct from the skill of similarity discernment.

The best account of how we divide reality into properties begins with similarity relations and builds natural properties from them by means of Hirsch's principle. Such an account, which takes similarities in particulars to be the fundamental aspect of our division practices could accurately be described as a mid-position between, on the one hand, a Universal Realist's account like Armstrong's which uses particulars' alleged taking part in the "same" universal to explain the similarity of those particulars and their identity of nature, and, on the other hand, a nominalist account like that given by Goodman, who holds that properties, and subsequently similarities, are explicable in terms of sets of particular objects. My account avoids both the lack of explanatory economy of the Universal Realist's account and the relativism entailed by Goodman's Nominalist account, and other accounts which take similarities to be dependent on properties.[52]

[52]The Universal Realist holds that properties are ontologically prior to similarities, but it avoids the relativism normally entailed by such a view because she claims that we can simply "see the universal nature" of green. Such a claim is not unlike my claim that we can see natural similarities; but it exemplifies the Universal Realist's lack of explanatory economy, since it explains that we learn of universals by observing similarities, and explains similarities in terms of universals, rather than simply explaining that we learn of natural similarities by observing natural similarities.

## Chapter 3: Davidson, Grue, and Perceptual Justification

In the next three chapters I shall examine Donald Davidson's approach to Nelson Goodman's "New Riddle of Induction" and the relationship between this approach and some central aspects of Davidson's philosophy. I shall begin this chapter by arguing that Davidson's response to Goodman in "Emeroses by Other Names" does not solve the New Riddle. In Chapter 2 I proposed that the New Riddle is best understood as an unintentional *reductio ad absurdum* of a certain view of the relationship between concepts and similarity. I call this view, which takes particulars' falling under some shared concept to be the best explanation of their similarity, the "Shared Concept View" of similarity, or "SCV." Here I argue that it is Davidson's espousing this view that most immediately causes his difficulties with the New Riddle. I endeavor to show that his attempt to address the New Riddle leaves Davidson in some rather "un-Davidsonian" positions: his suggested analogy between "grue"-type predicates and mental predicates serves only to obscure his deep, characteristically Davidsonian account of the anomalism of the mental, and his account of the New Riddle leaves him in a position whereby inductive warrant is relative to conceptual scheme. Furthermore, his attempt to address the New Riddle by arguing that strange predicates can be matched with other strange predicates in a way that "cancels out" their strangeness prevents what could be a successful, characteristically Davidsonian approach to the New Riddle based on how a Grubleen speaker would be interpreted by an English speaker. I describe this interpretivist approach to the New Riddle, and argue that it can be successful, but only if SCV is eschewed and Davidson's Principle of Charity is expanded in a plausible manner which enables (indeed *requires*) interpreters to avoid interpretations that take speakers to be making "bent" projections. In the course of this discussion it emerges that if one rejects SCV, as I recommend, one must also accept an account of perception according to which we enjoy non-conceptual perceptual content.

The discussion in this chapter of the problems that result from Davidson's holding SCV raises the question of what reasons Davidson has for taking the relationship between concepts and similarity to be as he does. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 I attempt to answer this

question, by first examining Davidson's "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," and subsequently his arguments against "a dualism of scheme and content" in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."[1] Davidson rejects the idea of concept-independent similarity. Along with this, he rejects the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that concept-independent similarities obtain. The notions of non-conceptual content and concept-independent similarity are of a piece with the idea of the aforementioned dualism of "organizing system and something waiting to be organized."[2] It will be my contention in those two chapters, however, that Davidson's arguments in his two papers provide no good reason to reject (1) the idea of concept-independent similarity,[3] or (2) the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that such similarities obtain. Indeed, I shall argue that Davidson must accept these notions or pay the unaffordable price of being committed to an untenable account of inductive justification.

The conclusion of these three chapters together, then, will be that Davidson provides us with no good reason to eschew non-conceptual content as playing an important role in perceptual justification, and that we ought to embrace non-conceptual content. To embrace non-conceptual content is to reject what might be called the "Deductive Model of Perceptual Justification" which maintains that (1) only something conceptually articulated can serve as a justifier, (2) the concepts involved in perceptual justification must have a relation like that between terms in a formally valid inference, and (3) empirical justificatory inferences must be truth-preserving. To reject the Deductive Model is to reject Davidson's constraints on what could count as a good account of perceptual justification. It will become clear over the course of the rest of this dissertation that to reject that model by embracing the sort of non-conceptual content that I recommend is also to reject the idea that concepts and language are preconditions for all intentionality. Nonetheless, I finally contend that Davidsonians can reject the deductive model while preserving some of their important insights about the nature of the mental and about the idea of alternative conceptual schemes.

## Davidson's Proposed Solution to the New Riddle

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[1]Davidson, Donald, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, (Oxford, 1986), 189.

[2]Ibid.

[3]That is, the kind of similarity we perceive when we perceive *how* things are similar, which is the kind of similarity that my Strong Resemblance Nominalism exploits in Chapter 1.

Davidson is among the many philosophers who take concepts to be prior to similarity. He claims that

> "Similarities are geared to concepts. It doesn't make sense to say two things just *are* similar."[4]

He further displays his propensity toward this kind of a view in his response to Goodman and the New Riddle of Induction, "Emeroses by Other Names," which he includes as an appendix to his paper "Mental Events" in *Essays on Actions and Events*. There he argues that Goodman's analysis of lawlike predicates in terms of entrenchment is mistaken. He bases this claim on the fact that hypotheses like

> H1: All emeroses are gred

are lawlike.

> "Not only is 'All emerires are grue' entailed by the conjunction of the lawlike statements 'All emeralds are green' and 'All sapphires are blue,' but there is no reason, as far as I can see, to reject the deliverance of intuition, that it is itself lawlike."[5]

According to Davidson, it is *statements* that are lawlike or not. Statements' lawlikeness is due not to their predicates' entrenchment, but to their predicates' being well matched:

> "What H1 suggests, however, is that it is a relation between the predicates that makes a statement lawlike, and it is not evident that this relation can be defined on the basis of the entrenchment of individual predicates."[6]

This sort of view runs contrary to my claim that inductive inferences which afford justification by positive instances (i.e., "lawlike" inductive generalizations) are lawlike because their predicates are based on natural properties. On my view, predicates useful in inductive reasoning can be identified *individually*. On Davidson's view, the relevant question is not one of identifying lawlike predicates individually, but rather one of using appropriately matched predicates.

I agree with Davidson, and have already argued in Chapter 2, that Goodman's account of entrenchment is lacking. But Davidson is wrong to suggest that simply matching

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[4]Davidson, Donald, Lecture at The University of California at Berkeley (17 April 1995).
[5]Davidson , Donald, "Mental Events," *Essays on Actions and Events*, 218.
[6]Ibid. 226.

predicates more carefully helps solve the Goodmanian Sceptic's problem. In this section I shall argue for three theses related to Davidson's response to Goodman. First, Davidson is wrong to claim that hypotheses like H1 are lawlike, because they are not confirmed by their positive instances. Their apparent lawlikeness is parasitic on the lawlikeness of other hypotheses whose lawlikeness springs from the fact that they use predicates based on natural properties. Second, Davidson's response to Goodman does not address the real paradox raised by "grue," because the problem of determining which predicate pairs are compatible for lawlike statements is in essence the same problem as the original problem of determining which conclusion a set of positive instances supports. Finally, I shall argue that even if we knew which predicates were well matched, an efficient language based on a large number of strange predicates would be impossible, because it would either unacceptably multiply the number of terms in the language or require almost all inductive inferences to be disjunctive.

Davidson gives two necessary conditions for general statements to qualify as lawlike:

> "Lawlike statements are general statements that [1] support counterfactual and subjunctive claims, and [2] are supported by their [positive] instances."[7]

H1 meets the first condition. It supports counterfactual and subjunctive claims because it is a hybrid of (and entailed by) the confirmable generalizations

H2: All emeralds are green

H3: All roses are red.[8]

But it fails to meet the second condition: H1, the hypothesis that all emeroses are gred, is not supported by positive instances of gred emeroses before *t* alone. In order for H1 to be supported, positive instances of both H2 and H3 would have to be observed. If only positive cases of H1 were needed to support H1, then

H4: All emeroses are grblack

H5: All emerubies are green, and

H6: All emeroses are greensquare

and a virtually unlimited number of other generalizations would be supported as well. So if H1 were supported by its positive instances, then any prediction about anything would be supported by those same positive instances. If we are to avoid an account of the justification

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[7]Ibid. 217.

of induction which entails that any hypothesis about the future is equally justified, (and surely Davidson would want to avoid such an account), we must hold that hypotheses like H2 and H3 are lawlike, while those like H1 are not. The inductive justification enjoyed by H1 is in a sense "parasitic" on H2 and H3; it is not lawlike itself, but is entailed by lawlike statements, so it supports at least some counterfactual and subjunctive claims.

The New Riddle of Induction, as Goodman presents it, is essentially the problem of knowing which of any number of hypotheses is confirmed by a set of positive cases. Davidson does not explicitly claim to have an answer to this problem -- though he does enigmatically say that his example of H1 "cuts pretty deep."[9] But if he intends his reaction to Goodman to be any sort of response to Goodman's riddle, then he has missed his mark. This is because the problem of justifiably matching predicates compatible for lawlike induction is just as difficult as the original problem of matching positive cases with the hypothesis they confirm. The crucial question is how Davidson could justify his selective pairings of predicates if he thinks that similarity is concept-dependent -- that is, if he maintains SCV.

If an account of lawlikeness based on well-matched predicates is to avoid relativism about justification, and thereby avoid failing to be an account of justification at all, it must find a way to rule out ill-matched pairs of predicates like "emerald" and "grue." With this much Davidson would surely agree. But if similarity is relative to our concepts -- that is to say, if similarity based on a thing's grueness is on par with similarity based on a thing's greenness (i.e., if what I call "SCV" is true), then how are we to judge "grue" to be incompatible with "emerald"? I do not think that Davidson's account of similarity leaves him with the resources to justify such a judgment. Our intuition would be to explain that inductive generalizations exploit our justifiedness in expecting the future to be uniform with the past. What we have counted as an emerald in the past is uniform with what we will count as an emerald in the future. So we expect emeralds to be the same color in the future as they have been in the past. So we expect emeralds in the future to be green, not grue. But on Davidson's view that similarity is geared to concepts, we would have to accept that blue emeralds in the future (i.e., after *t*) would be grue, just as they have been in the past. We wouldn't be able to differentiate between uniform greenness and "uniform" grueness, and thus wouldn't be able to rule out the badly matched pair "grue" and "emerald." The only way

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[8]I shall pretend, with Goodman and Davidson, that these generalizations are true.

Davidson (or anyone) could justify the judgement that these predicates were badly matched would be by exploiting his knowledge of natural properties. But to do so would be to abandon Davidson's account of similarity as relative to concepts.

Justifiable inductive inferences depend on the identification of natural properties, because judgments of well-matchedness must be based on judgments concerning which properties are natural properties.[10] Identifying well-matched pairs depends on the identification of natural properties *individually*. So, *contra* Davidson, Goodman's error was not his concerning himself with individual properties or predicates rather than with good pairings. And thinking about ways to match predicates correctly is not a fruitful approach to the new riddle. If Davidson retains his flawed account of similarity, then he will encounter a different version of Goodman's new riddle. For Davidson, instead of coming in the form of the question "What conclusion does a set of positive instances support?," it will come as, "What are well-matched predicates?"

Finally, contrary to what Davidson suggests, a language which included "gred" and "emerose" as fundamental elements would be worse off than our language. A language built out of compatibly bent words with the capacity for expression of all that English can express is not a straightforward possibility. In fact, I shall argue that if we make the two minimal requirements that (1) this strange language not have a great deal more words than our language and that (2) inductive inference in the language not nearly always be disjunctive, then there is good reason to think that such a language would be logically impossible. For "emerose" and "gred" to be as useful as, or at all analogous to, "emerald" and "rose," they would have to be part of a language which would meet these two requirements. Davidson suggests that something like this is possible. But is it possible?

If "grue" is compatible with "emersapphire" in justifiable induction, then with what color predicate will "grass," "trees" and "moss" be compatible? If the language we are imagining is to avoid disjunctive induction, then each of these names of kinds of green things must be paired with the name of a kind of blue things, since all the names in the language would have to be compatible with "grue" in justifiable induction. So unless we are to have a multiplication of terms, the number of kinds of green things in the world would have

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[9]Davidson, "Mental Events," 225.

[10]And, as I have argued in Chapter 2, judgments that a given property is natural must ultimately depend on our ability to perceive similarity.

miraculously to be equal to the number of kinds of blue things. Because this language is stipulated to have a large number of bent predicates, this problem would occur again and again: the number of kinds that satisfy "each side" of every bent predicate would also have to be equal. That is remarkably implausible (though admittedly not logically impossible). Immediately the prospects look dim for a language that includes "grue" and many other bent predicates, yet meets our two requirements. But this is the least of the problems for such an allegedly possible language.

In order to have a bent language on a par with our normal language, for each property predicate in our language (e.g. "green") the bent language would have to have a property predicate (e.g. "gred") which was well-matched with all the other substance predicates in his language (e.g. "emerose," etc.). Otherwise either his language would have to have a great deal more words than ours but no greater expressive capacity, or speakers of his language would have to almost always use disjunctive inductions. The apparent possibility of changing all of our normal words for things to well-matched words for strange things is not as easy a task as it may seem. Take the following examples of substance predicates followed by their compatible property predicates:

| Substances: | Properties: | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Emerald | Green | Hard | Light |
| Rose | Red | Soft | Light |
| Jade | Green | Hard | Heavy |
| Ruby | Red | Hard | Light |
| | | | |
| Emerose | Gred | Hardsoft | Light |
| Jaderuby | Gred | Hard | Heavylight |

The problem with the sort of strange language to which Davidson's suggestion would lead is that because it would not be based on natural properties, either [1] the number of its terms would multiply unreasonably, or [2] inductive inferences in the language would have to be disjunctive such that they could only be justified by taking recourse to inductive inferences in a non-bent language like ours. (Why this recourse would have to be taken will become clear in a moment.) So such a language could not meet both of our minimal requirements.

The impossibility of a "uniformly bent" language which meets our requirements can be seen as follows. Say the construction of this new language begins with the selection of the word "emerose." Then (as shown above), to have a well matched language, we'll include the predicates "gred," "hardsoft" and "light," since they are well matched with "emerose." We shall not be able to have the kind-name "ruby" in our language, since it is not well matched with "gred." So instead of "ruby," we'll try "jaderuby," which is compatible with "gred."[11] But "jaderuby" would not be compatible with "hardsoft" or "light." So "jaderuby" and "emerose" are themselves incompatible -- that is, they cannot be part of the same "uniformly bent" language, because they are not compatible with the same set of predicates.

The problem with this extrapolation of Davidson's suggestion is now evident. The construction of a "uniformly bent" language in this manner is impossible. Say we begin our language with a bent substance term built from terms for two substances A and B. Then each property term will have to be bent such that it matches the properties of A and B. Say our next substance term is based on substances C and D. Then for each property which C shared with A, D must share the matching property with B. To find a second bent substance term which meets this requirement is highly unlikely. To build a strange language of this sort, one

[11]For the sake of the example, we'll say that jade is always green, and is heavy.

would have to match a whole language's worth of substance terms in this manner with all of the other substance terms. This is an impossibility. The only alternatives are to multiply property predicates unreasonably, or to allow that in this language inductive inferences are almost always disjunctive.

"All emeroses are grue before *t* or otherwise yellowred" is an example of a disjunctive inference that might be used in a bent language. A uniformly bent language that used such inferences as a matter of course could match the expressive capacity of our language while having the same number of words as our language. The problem in this case is not that such a language would be impossible. Rather, the problem is that such a language would still not be on a par with our language. For one thing, in our language, because our words are for natural properties and kinds, we never have to use such disjunctive inferences; only if we introduce an entirely redundant set of Goodmanesque terms is there a role for disjunctive inference. But beyond this, how could the a speaker of this language choose which inference to make? If his language were *uniform* like ours, any substance predicate would be compatible with any property predicate in the language. But because his language is *not* uniform, he faces the same basic problem faced by Goodman and Davidson. He faces the version of the problem that Davidson faces, "What are well-matched predicates?," or, more precisely in this case, "What pair of property predicates is well-matched with the substantive predicate?" I do not see how he could answer this question without taking recourse to thinking of natural properties as discerned on the basis of his perceptions of non-conceptual similarities, and then using a pair of inferences like ones a non-bent language speaker would make -- in this case, H2 and H3. Only by seeing that [H2] all emeralds are green and [H3] all rubies are red can he know that all emeroses are grue before *t* or otherwise yellowred. So to separate good inferences from bad ones, this strange language speaker will have to take recourse to non-strange inferences. So his language is not on a par with ours, and is in this way parasitic on non-strange language. Our language is the more natural language -- indeed, it is a "natural language." Neither endorsing the use of disjunctive inferences which must take recourse to non-strange languages nor turning to a strange language with many more terms but no increased expressive capacity is an appealing option if we are to maintain that this new strange language is on a par with our language

Davidson's claim that "All emeroses are gred" is a lawlike hypothesis suggests that he thinks that there could be a reasonable language in which this hypothesis could be stated

(without using disjunction). But such a language is impossible. So

H1: All emeroses are gred.

on this count again falls far short of being a hypothesis on a par with H2 and H3, since only H2 and H3 could be part of a full blooded natural language.

Also, and importantly, the impossibility of a uniformly bent language shows that Davidson cannot explain why matching predicates match simply by pointing out that they are both predicates in the same language. He might want to take recourse to this claim when faced with the problem of discerning which predicates are well matched. The idea would be that Goodmanian strange predicates should be dealt with in the same way as predicates in Quineian alternative translation manuals. According to Quine, we might take a certain tribe to be speaking a "cosmic complement" language. According to our translation manual, when they utter "that rabbit" we should translate them not as referring to that rabbit, but rather to the "cosmic complement" of that rabbit -- that is, to everything in the universe except for that rabbit. At first glance, with such a translation we might not know how to make sense of the utterance "That rabbit is going to be eaten." But, of course, as the story goes, our manual will translate "eat" in a compensating manner according to which assent will be prompted in all the same situations as it would have been if we had translated "rabbit" and "eat" normally. The speaker of a cosmic compliment language doesn't have to worry about matching strange predicates because all the predicates in the language compensate for one another. I have a strong suspicion that the compensating role that Quine's predicates play for one another was the inspiration for Davidson's reply to Goodman.

But the claim that matching predicates match simply because they are in the same language is of no help to the proponent of a "uniformly bent" language. For one thing, it would explain only how we match predicates successfully, not *why* they match. But we are now also in a position to see that if Davidson were to make this claim, we should agree that being in a single language is a condition for well-matchedness, but point out that that is only so because *naturalness* is a condition for being in a single language at all, since, as we have seen, a reasonable language cannot be constructed from "uniformly bent" predicates.

Our language and others like it in having words referring to natural properties and natural kinds naturally fit how things are with the world. This fit suggests that our words spring quite directly from the ways we can non-conceptually perceive things to be similar in the world. Natural kind terms and natural property terms match naturally, while artificial

terms, as we have seen, ultimately cannot match at all. They only appear to match if we fail to carry through the program of constructing a language that includes them. How things are with the world to a degree *suggests* that we have a word for green or emeralds. If things are similar, and we see them to be so, and we see *how* they are so, then it is only natural that we should categorize them in thought according to how they are similar, and that our language, which communicates our thought, should reflect those categorizations. In this respect, the structure of the world leads to the structure of our language. Indeed, I shall argue that in a strong sense we have no choice but to exploit in our thought and language our perception of concept-independent ways in which things are similar, as our thought and speech have the capacity to refer as they do only because of such concept-independent similarities and our perception of them.

**Bent Predicates vs. Mental Predicates**

Davidson first published "Emeroses by Other Names" as part of a discussion of "grue" involving Goodman and others,[12] but he subsequently included it in *Essays on Actions and Events* as an appendix to "Mental Events." In the latter paper he reiterates the view expressed in "Emeroses" and adds to his discussion of lawlike generalizations. In "Mental Events" Davidson makes an analogy between alleged psychophysical laws and allegedly lawlike generalizations that mis-match bent predicates and with normal ones. In this section, I shall argue that this analogy is unhelpful and only obscures the deeper explanation of the anomalous nature of the mental that forms part of the core of Davidson's account of the mind.

In his comparison of generalizations using mis-matched predicates to psycho/physical generalizations, Davidson explains that

> "Nomological statements bring together predicates that...are made for each other...'Blue,' 'red', and 'green' are made for emeralds, sapphires and roses; 'grue,' 'bleen,' and 'gred,' are made for sapphalds, emerires, and emeroses...The direction in which the discussion seems headed is this: mental and physical predicates are not made for one another. In point of lawlikeness, psychophysical statements are more like 'All

[12]Davidson, Donald, "Emeroses by Other Names," *Journal of Philosophy*, 63 (1966).

emeralds are grue' than like 'All emeralds are green.'"[13]

The thought is that just as "grue" and "emerald" are incompatible predicates, so are "believes that p" and "has neuronal firing N" incompatible predicates. But this is not an instructive analogy.

There are four sorts of generalization in play:

(1) Generalizations using mis-matched predicates at least one of which is bent, like "All emeralds are grue,"

(2) Generalizations using well-matched bent predicates, like "All emeroses are gred," (our H1),

(3) Psychophysical generalizations, like "Every time neuron configuration N is found, the subject believes that p," and

(4) Physical/physical generalizations, like "Every time the retina receives stimulation S, neuron group N fires."

Davidson holds that lawlikeness is "a matter of degree."[14] I think that each of (1), (3), and (4) has a different degree of lawlikeness (while Davidson deems (1) and (3) to be interestingly similar in point of lawlikeness).

I have already argued that generalizations in category (2) -- for example, our H1 -- are not lawlike, because they are not supported by their positive instances. If that is correct, then the same point applies even more obviously to generalizations in category (1) above: They are not supported by their positive instances, and therefore are not lawlike at all. So generalizations involving bent predicates, whether they be mis-matched or not, are not lawlike at all.

Psychophysical generalizations ((3) above) are not exceptionless; that is, they don't yield *strict* laws. So psychophysical generalizations aren't *as* lawlike as physical/physical ones. Nonetheless, in the spirit of Davidson, we should allow that some psychophysical generalizations enjoy at least a *degree* of lawlikeness. When studies of a large body of neurological evidence reveal a correlation between brain state B and mental state M, we would never expect (and wouldn't accept) that the correlation was exceptionless, because of the nature of mental states -- especially the holistic prerequisites for our attribution of them (which I discuss just below). Thus, we do not treat such correlations as a strict laws. But, to some extent, a generalization based on such a correlation would support counterfactuals and

[13]Davidson, "Mental Events," 218.

be supported by its instances. So we have no reason to deny a degree of lawlikeness to psychophysical generalizations as a whole. Psychophysical generalizations, then, occupy a middle ground between generalizations like (1) and (2) above, which are not lawlike at all, and paradigmatically lawlike physical/physical generalizations, like (4) above.

It appears, then, that each of the kinds of generalizations in category (1), (3) and (4) has a different degree of lawlikeness. In any generalization involving a bent predicate (including those in categories (1) and (2) above), there is no evidentiary connection between what is treated as the "evidence" and the conclusion; such generalizations are not lawlike at all. Psychophysical generalizations are supported somewhat by positive cases, but that support is still quite fallible. At least some of such generalizations have a degree of lawlikeness. Physical/physical generalizations are the most lawlike as a class of generalizations; such generalizations could potentially be strict laws.

In this light, Davidson's analogy between mis-matched bent generalizations and psychophysical generalizations comes to appear unhelpful. The greater lawlikeness of physical/physical generalizations shouldn't lead us to conclude that "In point of lawlikeness, psychophysical statements are more like 'All emeralds are grue' than like 'All emeralds are green.'"[15] This is wrong, because bent generalizations are simply not lawlike at all.

The strangest thing about this analogy is that it obscures an central, interesting aspect of "Mental Events," namely, Davidson's discussion of the role of mental predicates in intentional explanation. Commentators on the essay have disagreed about what Davidson believes prevents strict psychophysical laws. It will be worthwhile to have a brief look at two accounts of Davidson's point.

We might call the first interpretation the "Holistic Account" of why there are no strict psychophysical laws. According to the Holistic Account, even if we found an as yet perfect correlation between a type of mental event and a type of brain state we would not take there to be a lawlike correlation. Davidson explains why in this comment on the mistakes of behaviorism:

> "We know too much about thought and behavior to trust exact and universal statements linking them. Beliefs and desires issue in behavior only as modified and mediated by further beliefs and desires,

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[14]Ibid. 217.

> attitudes and attendings, without limit. Clearly this holism of the mental realm is a clue both to the autonomy and the anomalous character of the mental."[16]

On this interpretation, Davidson's point is that the content of any mental state is constituted by its interrelations with all other beliefs. Thus, a mental state's relations with things external to it (including both other mental states and, indeed, things in the world around that individual) determine its identity. Thus, the idea of a strict correlation between a mental state and a neural state, the identity of which would not depend on things external to it, would not make sense.

Still, on this understanding of the anomalous character of the mental, one could reasonably hold that generalizations involving mental predicates enjoy *some* support from their instances. This is because all language speakers learn language and come to hold through similar experiences large bodies of shared, true belief. So there is good reason to expect a fair amount of uniformity in the pattern of language speakers' mental states and neural states, and therefore there is some, limited, evidentiary support for psychophysical generalizations.

An alternative interpretation of why Davidson thinks there are no strict psychophysical laws might be called the "Constitutive Ideal Account." This account holds that mental predicates are at home in a kind of explanation distinct from that in which physical predicates are at home. Physical predicates exploit the intelligibility offered by patterns of *regularity* with which physical phenomena occur. Mental predicates exploit a different intelligibility: that offered by the pattern of a *rational agent acting in the light of a normative ideal of rationality.*

> "There are no strict psychophysical laws because of the disparate commitments of the mental and physical schemes...There cannot be tight connections between the realms if each is to retain allegiance to its proper source of evidence...It is a feature of the mental that the attribution of mental phenomena must be responsible to the background of reasons, beliefs, and intentions of the individual. ... when we use the concepts of belief, desire, and the rest, we must stand prepared, as the evidence accumulates, to adjust our theory in the

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[15]Ibid. 218.

> light of considerations of overall cogency: the constitutive ideal of rationality partly controls each phase in the evolution of what must be an evolving theory."[17]

So when we use mental predicates and give intentional explanations of a person's beliefs or actions, we have an ongoing responsibility to make that person out to be acting in the light of an ideal of rationality. Mental explanations are essentially in terms of how things ought rationally to be. Because of the disparate sources of evidence for mental and physical predications, there is no reason, on this account, to expect that because there was a brain state/mental state regularity in the past there will be one in the future.

As on the Holism Account, Davidson's view here that all language speakers learn language and come to hold through similar experiences large bodies of shared, true belief nevertheless could be taken to explain the limited degree of lawlikeness that psychophysical generalizations do enjoy.

John McDowell is a proponent of the Constitutive Ideal Account. In a recent exchange,[18] Richard Rorty attributes to Davidson a view more like the Holist Account. Rorty thinks that McDowell over reads the above passage, taking it as "a sort of *Haupttext*," while his "hunch is that what Davidson thinks of as the irreducibly distinct constraints which the idea of shared rationality places on psychological explanation *are* simply the familiar constraints of holistic explanation."[19]

Our present concern needn't be to settle this dispute, since we can evaluate Davidson's analogy in light of both accounts of why there are no strict psychophysical laws. On the Holistic Account, psychophysical generalizations are not strict because for any one mental state M, there will always be other, external, content-determining mental states that can defeat a psychophysical generalization correlating M with some physical state. But in this respect psychophysical generalizations are quite unlike generalizations such as "All emeralds are grue," on which the holism of the mental has little bearing. In fact, with respect to the holism of the mental, 'All emeralds are grue' is far more like 'All emeralds are green' than a psychophysical generalization. Furthermore, on this account, it is not mental predicates' being "mis-matched" with physical predicates that leads to the absence of strict laws. "Psycho/*psycho*" generalizations would lack the potential to be strict laws on this

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[16]Ibid. 217.
[17]Ibid. 222-23.
[18]McDowell, John, et al., "Précis of *Mind and World*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58 (1998).

account for the same reason that psycho*physical* generalizations do. So it is mental predicates' fitness for inductive reasoning as *individuals* that makes generalizations based on mental predicates less dependable than those based on physical predicates. Thus, on the Holistic Account, the analogy between 'All emeralds are grue' and psychophysical generalizations only obscures Davidson's more interesting point about the relation between holism and psychophysical laws.

Matters are no better on the Constitutive Ideal Account. According to The Constitutive Ideal Account, the normative intelligibility provided by mental explanations explains the impossibility of strict psychophysical laws. There would be no reason to think that non-normative *regularities* could capture the *normativity* essential to mental explanations. So, what amounts to the same point, there is no reason to think that there could be a strict law between something characterized physically and something characterized mentally -- that is, characterized as having a role in normative explanation. On this account, Davidson's analogy again only obfuscates his valuable insights about the mental. As on the other account, the interesting point isn't that mental and physical predicates "are not made for one another." More interesting is that mental predicates' limited fitness for inductive reasoning *as individuals* makes generalizations based on mental predicates less dependable than those based on physical predicates. Mental predicates are no more well-matched to each other for strictly lawlike explanation than they are to physical predicates, because their principle role is not to take part in regularity-based explanation. Although they are of some use in regularity-based explanation, this is because of the large body of true beliefs that all language speakers share. In this light, we can see that we shouldn't expect mental predicates to enter into *strictly* lawlike generalizations; although for Davidson all language speakers share a large body of true belief, there are no particular beliefs necessarily shared by all that might lead to strictly lawlike mental generalizations. So again the deep, interesting distinction isn't between strict physical laws on the one hand, and mis-matched bent generalizations and psychophysical generalizations on the other. Mis-matched bent generalizations may not be lawlike, but predicates like "grue" *do* seem closer to being at home in regularity-based explanation as opposed to normative, mental explanation.

So on either interpretation of "Mental Events," Davidson's analogy only obscures his more interesting insights about the mental. To say that

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[19]Ibid. 393.

> "In point of lawlikeness, psychophysical statements are more like "'All emeralds are grue' than like 'All emeralds are green.'"[20]

is to brush over important distinctions and to miss much of what is interesting in Davidson. Paradoxically, Davidson's use of "grue" in "Mental Events" is "un-Davidsonian," because the interesting, deep differences between mental and physical vocabulary that Davidson is normally at pains to bring out are obscured by his ill-conceived analogy.

**The Interpretivist Approach and the "Shared Concept View"**

I have described Davidson's raising the example of bent predicates in "Mental Events" as in a sense "un-Davidsonian," because the deep differences between mental and physical vocabulary that Davidson is normally at pains to bring out are obscured by his unhelpful analogy. Davidson is a well-known enemy of conceptual schemes. But, strangely, his response to Goodman is very friendly to such schemes: a consequence of his approach to "grue" is that the conclusions we are justified in drawing from a particular set of evidence depends on what concepts we employ. For example, on his approach, one's past observations of what we would call "green emeralds" justify one's concluding that future emeralds will be green or that future roses will be red depending on what language one speaks, or what concepts one employs (these are close to the same thing for Davidson). There is a strong sense, then, in which this view of the New Riddle runs contrary to Davidsonian intuitions. In this section I shall describe an alternative, interpretivist approach to the New Riddle which could very plausibly have been Davidson's response to the New Riddle. I shall argue that this approach could be successful and would cohere well with a good part of Davidson's work, with the one major exception that to make it work he would have to give up SCV. In Chapter 4 and Chapter 5 I shall argue that if Davidson gave up SCV it would have significant consequences for his accounts of conceptual schemes and empirical justification, but that he must do so to avoid the consequence of having no answer to Goodman's New Riddle, and thus no account of inductive justification.

Davidson's reply to the New Riddle doesn't work, and appears to be friendly to conceptual schemes. These observations raise the question: Why Davidson doesn't give what

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[20]Davidson, "Mental Events," 218.

seems like an obvious, straightforwardly interpretivist answer to the New Riddle? The interpretivist answer that I have in mind would argue that it would be impossible for strange languages to have the meanings that their proponents conceive them as having, because an interpreter would not come to interpret our alleged Grubleen speaker, Mr. Grue, as actually making projections in Grubleen.

Before *t*, Mr. Grue's use of the world "grue" would be indistinguishable from our use of the word "green." Mr. Grue might utter "that's grue" while pointing at a green object, ask for "a grue sweater" for his birthday and be pleased to receive a green one, or use "grue" in any number of other ways. In all of these cases, an interpreter would have good reason to suppose that he meant "green." In fact Mr. Grue's friends would probably try convince him to stop being so quirky and just use the word "green" instead on these occasions. They could ask him "What color will emeralds be next year?", and he would reply "Grue, just like they've always been, why do you ask?" -- which would be a good question, since there would be no reason to suspect that he thought emeralds would be any other color.

Always Quine's student, Davidson famously holds that there is nothing more to meaning than what a radical interpreter could in principle discover. The obvious interpretivist thought in our case is that when Mr. Grue says "All emeralds are grue," he is best understood as having said "All emeralds are green." So, the interpretivist argument would conclude, "bent" projections cannot be made.

I shall argue that the proposed interpretivist answer is a good one, but only if it rests on the assumption that we can base interpretation on our perceptions of concept-independent ways in which things are similar. That is, the interpretivist answer will work, but only if the interpretivist rejects SCV. The interpretivist will also have to enlarge Davidson's Principle of Charity in a plausible manner to be described. For an interpreter to base her interpretations on her perception of non-conceptual similarities she will have to exploit non-conceptual perceptual content. So in arguing, as I have been, that a good answer to Goodman's New Riddle requires exploiting our awareness of particulars' similarities that do not depend on those particulars both falling under a certain concept, I have been committing myself to the view that a good answer to Goodman's New Riddle requires that at least some of the content of our perception is non-conceptual. Indeed, I shall go on to argue over the rest of this dissertation that the New Riddle gives us good reason to hold that we enjoy non-conceptual perceptual content.

Without allowing non-conceptual similarity perception, our interpretivist approach cannot solve the New Riddle. To see why, we'll need a version of Goodman's Riddle that demonstrates the flaw in this apparent interpretivist solution while preserving the insight about perceptual justification that the paradox provides and to which I have just alluded -- namely, that we use non-conceptual perceptual content in interpretation.

We must first face the difficulty that it seems impossible to justifiably interpret any speaker as having made a prediction in Grubleen rather than a natural language. I shall argue that unless SCV is false we cannot justifiably claim to have solved the New Riddle with the interpretivist argument that Grubleen predictions are impossible. In the following example one should keep in mind that Mr. Grue is *not* having the sort of perceptual problem that he would be having if he were being deceived by an evil demon -- a problem in which he perceives an emerald to be a certain way which is not how that emerald is. I shall return to this point. I think the interpretivist is correct that before *t* there is nothing to differentiate Mr. Grue's predictions about the color of newly discovered emeralds from our own. This example will show that the New Riddle can come about in spite of this fact.

It is the morning of January 1st of the year *t*, and, as usual, John and I are mining for emeralds with our friend, Mr. Grue. It has been extremely snowy, and none of us has come across any green or blue things before we arrived at the mine. Mr. Grue has always seemed like a perfectly normal person. He, like John and I, has often remarked "All emeralds first observed before the year *t* have been green, so we are warranted in concluding that all emeralds first observed thereafter will be green."

Soon after our arrival, John discovers a good sized stone. Upon seeing it I happily exclaim, "Eureka! A typical green emerald." Mr. Grue rushes over for a look. He turns to us with a puzzled expression, and says "How strange, a blue gem. We have never found any sapphires around here in the past." John and I, perceiving that the gem is green, are quite puzzled by Mr. Grue's remark. We insist that it is green, the same color that emeralds always have been. Mr. Grue insists that is "blue," the same color that sapphires always have been; "green," he adds, is the color of grass and emeralds, not the sky.

Fortunately John is an inductive logician, and before too long suggests an account of what has happened, namely, that Mr. Grue has been using the word "green" to refer to grue objects, and the word "blue" to refer to bleen objects. Mr. Grue insists that he is referring to

things in the same way he always has. But graciously, he offers to use the word "grue" the way he has been using "green," and "bleen" the way he has been using "blue," but on the condition that it is only for the sake of clarity. He refuses to concede that the newly observed gem is an emerald, because emeralds are grue, and this gem is bleen, like a sapphire.

The typical exchange ensues: We ask why he takes the set of grue things to be the same color. "Because they're all grue," he answers, and asks the parallel question why we think the green things are all the same color (since, after all, some are grue and others are bleen). At this point SCV comes into play. We respond to Mr. Grue by arguing that grue things needn't be similar just because they're grue, whereas this is not true of green things. If SCV were correct, then Mr. Grue could say "You only think this because you are assuming that similarity in falling under your term "green" or your concept 'green' is more important than similarity in falling under my term "grue" or my concept 'grue.' But surely similarity in terms of grueness is in fact more important than your "similarity" in terms of greenness. Clearly green things needn't be similar just because they're green, whereas this is not true of grue things."[21]

I think that this last statement by Mr. Grue shows how untenable SCV is. It is clear that things' similarity in being green is *not* on a par with their "similarity" in being grue. That is an initial reason to reject SCV. But additionally, unless we reject SCV, Mr. Grue's last move will remain available to him. So the miners will not have a resolution to their dispute over whether or not to believe that the gem is an emerald. This is just to say that they will have no reason to prefer the generalization "All emeralds are green" to "All emeralds are grue." And *that* is just to say that they have no solution to the New Riddle. I shall argue that if SCV is rejected, the miners would be able to resolve their dispute rationally. If this is right, then we will have a second reason to reject SCV, namely, because SCV is directly

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[21] This version of the New Riddle is as paradoxical as the original because it prevents any explanation of what evidence warrants what conclusion. Mr. Grue's argument that the new gem's failure to be grue is good reason to believe that it is not an emerald seems perfectly parallel to and just as rational as our argument that the gem's being green is a good reason to believe it *is* an emerald; the connection between evidence and hypothesis has completely broken down. A more extreme version of the hypothetical case just discussed could make this total breakdown even more obvious. For example, a different version could have Mr. Grue finding a red rose in the cave and declaring that it was "just another green emerald" -- where we would later find out that he meant "just another gred emerose." In such a case, too, if SCV were correct, we would be at a standoff over who was correct. The point of this example is to show that even in my "cave" hypothetical there remains a total breakdown in the justifying relation between evidence and conclusion. The problem with SCV is that, on that view *any* inductive evidence (i.e., our past observations of green emeralds) can be taken as counting toward *any* conclusion (i.e., that future roses encountered will all be red). If we accept SCV, we will have to accept that we have no good grounds for deciding what evidence supports what conclusion.

responsible for the New Riddle.

Mr. Grue's last statement is the crucial stage of the example, since it shows that the New Riddle can arise even if we accept the Davidsonian point about meaning and interpretation. It shows that a neo-Davidsonian's valid point that before *t* an interpreter would conclude that "grue" just means "green," doesn't solve Goodman's problem. And for any projection, an analogous problem exists, it's just that given the Davidsonian point, to *state* the problem we have to work retrospectively.

If the interpretivist adheres to SCV, I don't think he can justifiably claim that Mr. Grue was speaking English all along, and simply reacting strangely to a new case. It is true that before *t* there was nothing to distinguish Mr. Grue's language from English. But of course there *was* after *t* (irrespective of whether we ignore his courteously altering his way of speaking). And for any claim that Mr. Grue has failed to make a bent projection because he has just been speaking English all along, Mr. Grue can make a parallel claim that the English speaker has failed to make a bent projection because the English speaker has just been speaking *Grubleen* all along. So on SCV, the argument that the New Riddle can never arise because of the interrelation of meaning and interpretation is a failure.

Perhaps the failure of the interpretivist approach when combined with SCV is the reason that Davidson included his reply to Goodman as a part of "Mental Events" rather than replying to Goodman in one of his papers more centrally concerned with interpretation and meaning. As I have mentioned, Davidson's reply seems uncharacteristically friendly to conceptual schemes. If one didn't know better, one might have expected Davidson to look to considerations of the sort he looked to in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" as providing the basis for a treatment of the New Riddle. But if such a treatment had taken the form of what I have been calling "the interpretivist approach," and Davidson had endorsed SCV along with it, then the treatment would have been doomed to fail. So perhaps this is why Davidson offers the flawed account based on predicates' well-matchedness that he does, rather than an account based on the unintelligibility of projections based on alternative concepts.

If we reject SCV the scenario becomes unparadoxical, and Mr. Grue's claim just becomes odd. Without SCV, when we say to Mr. Grue that grue things needn't be similar just because they're grue, whereas this is not true of green things, he will just have to accept the point if he is honest and his perceptual mechanisms are not malfunctioning. If he accepts

this, then all that remains is for us to remind him that for an inductive inference to be justifiable it must at least predict that things will be similar in the future to how they were in the past, and that his inference should have been ruled out for failing to do so. We could all rationally conclude, then, that we had good reason to believe that the new gem was an emerald. So without SCV, the miners wouldn't face any paradoxical problems characteristic of the New Riddle. With SCV they would. This provides our second reason to reject SCV.

Furthermore, without SCV, this case would give us no reason to doubt the efficacy of the interpretivist approach. Without SCV, in the scenario described we were able to determine what conclusion our past observations of green emeralds confirmed. Also, without SCV an interpreter would be able to determine whether or not a term should be applied to some future case. When John, Mr. Grue and I each uttered "All emeralds first observed before the year *t* have been green, so we are warranted in concluding that all emeralds first observed thereafter will be green," the interpreter would have had a good basis for interpreting us as having said what John and I later took ourselves to have said. In fact, without SCV, the right thing to say about Mr. Grue's actions would be that he made a true projection, but then reacted strangely to a confirming instance of it. So without SCV, it appears that the interpretivist would be correct to claim that it is impossible for the New Riddle to arise.

In the important sense, then, it is correct to say that it is impossible to speak Grubleen, because the meaningfulness of our predictions depends on our being committed to the application of terms to similar cases in the future. In this sense it is impossible to speak Grubleen because someone who said "grue" whenever we say "green" would be saying the same things we are but in a different language.[22] But we can only take this line after having examined and rejected the view that similarities depend on shared concepts, and instead embraced the view that it is concept-independent ways in which things are similar that explain why those concepts apply. Davidson thinks of all similarity in terms of shared concepts, so this line is not available to him.

## Charity and Bent Projection

[22]I write "in the important sense," because, of course, it would be possible for someone to speak Grubleen while acknowledging that grue particulars aren't all similar in the same way, and explaining the meaning of her terms by exploiting a language like English. But such a case would be philosophically uninteresting.

The claim that meaning depends on our commitment to the application of terms to similar cases in the future may seem bold. In fact, it raises the possibility of an additional move that Mr. Grue may wish to make, even in the case where SCV has been rejected. Perhaps I was a bit hasty in declaring victory for the Interpretivist. Mr. Grue might say, "All right, I accept that the new stone is similar in color to the emeralds we have observed in the past. And I accept that we all learned "green" through our dealings with objects similar to this one in a certain non-conceptual manner that we all recognize. But you assume that these things alone are sufficient to determine that "green" should be taken to apply to this new gem now which is similar in that manner to the things we called "green" in the past. That assumption is not warranted."

I think the interpretivist who has rejected SCV has a good answer to this challenge. It involves what is essentially an extension of Davidson's Principle of Charity. Davidson holds that in interpreting the beliefs and language of others we must attribute to them a large degree of agreement with ourselves. This charity

> "is not an option, but a condition of having a workable theory, [so] it is meaningless to suggest that we might fall into massive error by endorsing it. Until we have successfully established a systematic correlation of [our] sentences held true with [a native's] sentences held true, there are no mistakes to make."[23]

It is a methodological requirement of interpretation that we assume massive agreement with the native; without such an assumption, interpretation could never get started.

Although he accepts that we have used "green" in the past in connection with a certain set of similar objects, Mr. Grue here claims that we are unwarranted in assuming that this is sufficient to commit us to using it in connection with such objects in the future. Another way of describing the situation is that Mr. Grue is questioning our normative claim that because we have used this word in a certain way in the past, we *should* use it that way in the future. But is this assumption unwarranted? The suggestion would be that, even given that SCV is wrong -- that is, even if language speakers can perceive ways things are similar independently of concepts or language -- language users never somehow "agreed" to apply words to cases in the future similar to the ones they applied those words to in the past. So they're not committed to doing so.

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[23]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 197.

It seems to me, however, that the aforementioned assumption is at least as much "a condition of having a workable theory [of meaning]" as assuming that other language users are largely in agreement with us. If we didn't make this assumption, successful interpretation would be impossible: we would have no basis on which to interpret an utterance of "The next emerald will be green" as saying the next one will be green rather than saying that it will be grue, gred, grsquare, or "gr-"anything else. An utterance that is indeterminate between these things fails to predicate *anything* of the next emerald. So it is a condition for the possibility of interpretation that we take speakers to apply words to cases in the future non-conceptually similar to the ones to which they applied those words in the past. Far from being unwarranted, the assumption in question is a methodological requirement on interpretation.

This methodological assumption, like Davidson's Principle of Charity, is not optional, because without it the interpreter would have no basis on which to take speakers to be committed to using their terms. So without it, the interpreter couldn't get started. If a native regularly failed to use terms in a uniform manner, an interpreter couldn't take his utterances to be meaningful; in fact, there would be no reason to take the native to be a language speaker at all. Faced with such an individual, an interpreter's plight would be something like that of a person confronted by the New Riddle. A person confronted by the New Riddle seems to have no basis on which to predict the future color of emeralds, because emeralds' past greenness, grueness, gredness, and so on all appear to be equally good bases for prediction. Similarly, an interpreter faced with a native who didn't utter words in a uniform manner would have no basis upon which to expect the native to use his terms, since that native could go on in any number of different ways. In such a situation, a Davidsonian ought to say, there would be no reason to suppose that the native was speaking a language at all. In order for a native to count as speaking language, he must be committed to going on in the same way. That is why it was right to say that Mr. Grue's original utterance of "All emeralds first observed before the year *t* have been green, so we are warranted in concluding that all emeralds first observed thereafter will be green," was a true projection (to which he subsequently reacted strangely).

This expanded version of the Principle of Charity requires of anyone who is to count as a language speaker that he use words in a uniform manner. Mr. Grue wants to deny that he is committed to going on using "grue" in a uniform manner. So to press his point in the face of this expanded Principle of Charity and the rejection of SCV, Mr. Grue would have to give

up the idea that he had been speaking language at all. Then, indeed, there might be good reason to doubt that he was committed to uttering the sound "green" rather than the sound "blue" in the presence of a newly observed green emerald after *t*.

There are a few things to note about this most extreme of cases. First of all, Mr. Grue couldn't himself claim that this was his situation, since he would have given up his right to be considered a language speaker. Still, a neutral observer could suggest that Mr. Grue had all along just been making noises rather than speaking, and therefore was not committed to future emeralds' being green -- that all along he had only *appeared* to be "playing the language game." It is up to Mr. Grue what game he wants to play. But the neutral observer's suggestion is irrelevant to the case for the possibility of bent projections. If Mr. Grue is not to be considered a language user, his utterances can of course not justifiably be considered to be projections at all, much less to be bent projections, and still less to be *bent* projections that somehow compete with our normal projections.

While this expanded Principle of Charity enables us to understand what is wrong with alleged "bent projections," it also enables us to understand how our own projections are possible. It is only with this expanded Principle of Charity that we can explain how our own projections can be determinate -- that is, how they can predict that things will be green rather than grue. So our projections can be understood as possible only through the expanded Principle; an interpreter has no choice but to exploit his perception of non-conceptual similarities in order to be able to expect a speaker to continue to call "green" just things that are similar to each other in a certain way, so that is the only kind of projection that the speaker can possibly be understood as having made by using the word "green." Therefore, that is the only kind of projection that he can possibly make by using the word "green" -- or by using any other word that has always been used the way that "green" has.

For obvious reasons, the point that interpretation would be impossible without the expanded Principle of Charity is in a sense Davidsonian. It is also in a sense anti-Davidsonian in that it requires the falsity of SCV and the recognition of non-conceptual similarity perception. My suggestion is that continuing to apply terms in "the same way" -- at least applications of those terms the applications of which are grounded by what we can readily perceive -- is not best understood as applying terms to things that fall under the same concept as things to which the terms have been applied in the past, since there is always a bent concept under which any set of particulars can be said to fall. Rather, continuing to

apply such terms "in the same way" is better understood as applying such terms to things that are relevantly non-conceptually, perceptibly similar to things to which the terms have been applied in the past.[24]

The New Riddle can be seen as leading to a *reductio ad absurdum* of SCV. If SCV were true, the New Riddle would show that one way of going on in the "same" way would be as good as another, so there would *be* no going on in the same way. So if SCV were true, the New Riddle would show that meaning and language are impossible. So SCV must be false. Because SCV is false, however, the New Riddle cannot arise, since a speaker's retrospective claim to have made a bent projection would be false; that speaker would in fact have made a normal projection.[25]

**Perceptual Content and the Shared Concept View**

In the scenario under discussion, as I stipulated above, Mr. Grue is *not* having the sort of perceptual problem that he would be having if he were being deceived by an evil demon -- a problem in which he perceives an emerald to be a certain way which is *not* how that emerald is. We are now in a better position to see why I made this stipulation. Without this stipulation, Mr. Grue's surprised response could have come from his perceiving the new gem non-veridically -- that is it might have come from his perceiving the new gem as being non-conceptually similar to other blue particulars. But this is not the sort of scenario that concerns us. It would be what I called in Chapter 2 a "Cartesian Case" -- one in which our "perception" was misleading in the way it can be when we are dreaming. In Chapter 2 I argued that even if an external world sceptic of the sort that Descartes engages were wrong, the New Riddle could arise. In confronting SCV, I am concerned to distinguish two accounts of perception while setting aside the challenge of the Cartesian Sceptic.

On the first account, which embraces SCV, all perceptual content is conceptually articulated. All the information we take in about the particulars is to the effect that they fall under some concept or another. (In Chapter 6 I shall argue that John McDowell espouses

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[24]Having said this, one must not forget that applying a term correctly may *also* require knowledge of artificial boundaries provided by the grammar of one's language, such as that between cases of things counting as "red" and "orange." See Chapter 2 on the property 'color in the red or orange range.' But none of this diminishes the indispensability of perceptions of concept-independent similarities to our ability to apply terms "in the same way."

[25]Of course none of this implies that she couldn't have made a false projection!

such a view in *Mind and World.*) On the second view, which rejects SCV, there is at least *some* non-conceptual perceptual content. At least some of the information we take in about particulars in the world is not to the effect that some particular falls under some concept. Some of the information that we take in tells us *why* that particular falls under some concept. When the latter is not just a version of the former, the information taken in is in the form of non-conceptual content.

On the first view, which embraces SCV, in the scenario I have described above, Mr. Grue's perception could be perfectly veridical. All the information he receives in perception is veridical: he sees that the new green gem is not grue, and is thus unlike all previous emeralds. So Mr. Grue's case is unlike a Cartesian case. On the second view, which rejects SCV, in the scenario I have described, Mr. Grue's perception is also perfectly veridical. But in this case, he sees not only *that* the new gem does not fall under the concept 'grue,' but also he sees *why* the new gem does not fall under the concept 'grue.' He sees *why* it doesn't by seeing how the new gem is non-conceptually similar to other green objects. (So, of course, his ability to see why the gem doesn't fall under 'grue' is the same ability that allows him to see why the gem falls under 'green.') His ability to see why the gem doesn't fall under 'grue' is the same ability that eventually forces him to admit that grue things needn't be similar just because they're grue whereas this is not true of green things. So it is the same ability that allows us to resolve the dispute characteristic of the New Riddle.

If we could not perceive concept-independent ways in which things are similar, then instead of receiving the non-conceptual information about how things are that I think we *do* receive in perception, it would be as though we are simply receiving information about what concepts things fall under without finding out *how things were* such that they fall under those concepts. It is the fact that Mr. Grue's argument (and the New Riddle in general) depends on the view that we do not receive this additional information -- which upon reflection it seems obvious to me that we do receive -- that makes Mr. Grue's claim seem odd.

In this light, we can see SCV as a kind of scepticism: a scepticism that denies the existence of non-conceptual content. The difference between the two positions above is very reminiscent of the difference I discussed in Chapter 1 between my nominalism, "Strong Resemblance Nominalism" (SRN), and the nominalism attacked by Armstrong, "Weak Resemblance Nominalism" (WRN). According to SRN, our skill in discerning similarities between particulars is at least three-fold: (1) we perceive that certain particulars are similar,

(2) we can largely perceive the *degree* to which things are similar, in at least some respects, and (3) we can perceive *how* things are similar. WRN, accepts (1) and (2), but rejects (3), because it holds that having a property is constituted by a relation of resemblance to an exemplar set, rather than by a ground in a particular.

It emerged in Chapter 1 that WRN's denial of (3) leaves WRN with the problem that a ground in a particular is required to explain that particular's resemblance to other objects that share properties with it. It is only a *ground* in an object that could give it the ability to *be* an exemplar of red at all, and prevent it from being a blank, propertyless, unqualified item incapable of resembling any one particular more than another. In *this* chapter, it has emerged that SCV's denial that we can perceive *why* particulars satisfy concepts renders SCV unable to account for what it is about some concepts that renders them useful in inductive reasoning.

Although Chapter 1 had a more metaphysical emphasis than this chapter, which is more epistemological, we are now in position to see the close relation between the problems of WRN and SCV described by the two chapters. The view that we can perceive *that* particulars are similar to each other but not *how* they're similar (WRN) and the view that we can perceive *that* objects satisfy concepts but not *why* they satisfy them (SCV) are odd in the same way. Both views implausibly hold that we enjoy less perceptual information about particulars than we do, and as a result both views leave it mysterious how we get general information about the world without the *particular* information that it would be much more natural to say the general information follows from.[26]

The two positions arrive at this scepticism from different directions: WRN takes the metaphysical view that there is no ground in particulars to be perceived, and thus no information on offer from a particular object about what it could be similar to. SCV holds that (1) because anything that can justify a belief must be conceptually articulated, the information that we obtain from particulars must be conceptually articulated -- or alternatively, that (2) because logical relations can only hold between conceptual things all content must be conceptually articulated, or alternatively still, that (3) because there is no sense to be made of thought that lacks categories and differentiation, all content must be conceptually articulated. But in any case the resulting scepticism is the same at root: WRN

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[26]Compare with Ayers's criticism of Quine, Dummett and others' view that the concept 'dog' is a prerequisite for individuating token dogs, as contrasted with the view that "a child is able to pick out 'token' or individual dogs long before it learns language ... [and having] picked out these natural individuals, the child can, as it comes to learn language, come to classify them." Ayers, Michael, "What is Realism?," unpublished manuscript (1996), 18.

can be shown to be committed to the view that there is no fact of the matter as to whether certain particulars are similar to one another, so such similarities could play no part in a division of the world. SCV holds that while there *is* a fact of the matter as to whether certain particulars are similar to one another, the way it explains these similarities renders them ubiquitous and thus ultimately useless in either an account of inductive reasoning, or in a non-arbitrary division of the world.

**Davidson and SCV**

In some places, this discussion of SCV has taken us some distance from Davidson's actual positions. In particular some of the things I have speculated that a defender of SCV might say about perceptual justification certainly contradict Davidson's actual views on that subject. For example, I sought to qualify my suggestion that "continuing to apply terms in the same way" should be understood in terms of non-conceptual similarity by saying that it applied "at least [to] applications of those terms the applications of which are grounded by what we can readily perceive." Davidson, who is a Coherentist, thinks that there *are* no "terms the applications of which are grounded by what we can readily perceive." (Though he does hold that we are *caused* to apply certain terms to what we perceive.) So Davidson would take this "qualification" to render my point completely empty.

There are several reasons for this divergence. One is that in arguing against SCV I have tried to make it as plausible a view as possible, and in some instances I do not think that Davidson's actual position is the best one. For example, on a Coherentist view, it is difficult to understand how an interpreter has a rational basis for offering one interpretation rather than another for the language of a native, since there would be no perceptually *justified* beliefs about the native's utterances and the shared environment. I shall discuss this further in Chapter 4. In Chapter 6 I criticize the account of perceptual justification offered by John McDowell in *Mind and World* as espousing SCV, so at times it has been convenient to diverge from Davidson's view in anticipation of this criticism. In the preceding discussion I have taken McDowell's view of perceptual justification to be available to the proponent of SCV since, as I shall argue in Chapter 6, it is a somewhat more plausible, though ultimately flawed, form of SCV than Davidson's.

In spite of this, we can draw a number of conclusions from the preceding discussion.

I have argued that Davidson's approach to the New Riddle in "Emeroses by Other Names" fails. I have emphasized that in "Mental Events" this approach obscures Davidson's interesting account of the mental, as he makes an analogy between mis-matched bent generalizations and psycho/physical generalizations, when, as I have argued, these sorts of generalization are not in fact interestingly similar. I have described what would seem to be an obvious, "Davidsonian," interpretivist approach to the New Riddle and argued that it could be a solution to the New Riddle, but have pointed out that Davidson cannot accept it. All of these problems for Davidson can be traced to his espousing SCV -- the view that, as he puts it,

> "Similarities are geared to concepts. It doesn't make sense to say two things just *are* similar."[27]

The obvious question, then, is: Why does Davidson hold the Shared Concept View? Why is he unwilling to countenance the non-conceptual perceptual content that serves as the basis of our judgments about concept-independent ways in which particulars are similar? Davidson, of course, is not without answer to this question. In the next two chapters I shall examine Davidson's case in favor of SCV as expressed in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," and "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."

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[27]Davidson, Lecture at U. C. Berkeley (17 April 1995).

## Chapter 4: Davidson and Empirical Justification

This thesis opposes a common view of the relationship between similarity, concepts, and properties -- what I call the "Shared Concept View" of similarity, or SCV. Chapter 2 argues that Goodman's New Riddle of Induction is best understood as a *reductio ad absurdum* of SCV. In Chapter 3 examines the damage to Davidson's philosophy that results from his accepting SCV. Among my conclusions therein was that SCV leads Davidson into a version of the New Riddle,[1] and I recommended that he give up that view.

Thus far, however, I have focused primarily on arguments against SCV, and I have not considered Davidson's arguments in favor of that view. My case against SCV will only be complete after considering such arguments from Davidson and elsewhere. Although Davidson does not explicitly argue in favor of SCV, he has of course written influentially both on the possibility of perceptual justification of empirical belief, and on the relationship -- or lack thereof -- between conceptual schemes and the world.

In this chapter I shall reconstruct and evaluate some arguments in favor of SCV from "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," the paper in which Davidson most explicitly rejects the possibility of perceptual justification of empirical belief. I shall conclude that although Davidson argues persuasively against non-intentional sense data's having a justificatory role, his arguments have no force against non-conceptual, intentional, experiential content having such a justificatory role, and that we have reason to think that it does have such a role. I shall also argue that while Davidsonian Coherentism is perhaps stronger than some critics have suggested, it ultimately fails to provide an account of how humans can come to any justified positive assessment of their own mental states' epistemic merit. I conclude that "A Coherence Theory of Truth an Knowledge offers no telling considerations in favor of SCV or against the sort of intentional, non-conceptual perceptual content which I argue we require to answer the Goodmanian Sceptic properly. In the following chapter I shall reconstruct and evaluate some arguments in favor of SCV from "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."

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[1]This conclusion should not have come as a surprise, given that in Chapter 2 I argued that one can avoid the problems presented by the New Riddle only by rejecting SCV.

**Davidson's Arguments Against Perceptual Justification of Empirical Belief**

Does Davidson offer considerations that weigh against the idea that we enjoy the non-conceptual perceptual content that I think we do enjoy and *must* enjoy if we are to avoid Goodman's New Riddle? Davidson famously espouses a Coherentism about the justification of empirical belief in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge." He characterizes this sort of view as follows:

> "What distinguishes a coherence theory is simply the claim that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief. Its partisan rejects as unintelligible the request for a ground or source of justification of another ilk."[2]

So for Davidson, on a coherence theory of knowledge (or, more generally, a coherence theory of epistemic justification), the thought that something other than a belief could be a reason for holding a belief is "unintelligible."[3] In rejecting SCV I have committed myself to perceptual justification's being based at least in part on non-conceptual perceptual content. So I am committed to its being intelligible that something other than a belief could "count as a reason for holding a belief"; for example, I am committed to the view that my non-conceptual perceptual content can be a reason to hold my belief that in the future newly observed emeralds will be green, not grue. So Davidson's arguments for his Coherentism, will also be arguments for SCV of the sort I am looking for, since, if they are sound arguments, they will show that non-conceptual perceptual content could not provide a good reason for any belief -- in particular, the belief that in the future newly observed emeralds will be green, not grue.

Davidson's Coherentism can be instructively thought of in contrast with -- and as a response to -- views of empirical justification like those of Quine and C. I. Lewis, which take sense data to be (1) an unconceptual given element of experience, and (2) the ultimate justifier of all empirical knowledge. Lewis writes that

> "... I seem to find only two alternatives for a plausible account of empirical knowledge: either [1] there must be some ground in experience ... which plays an indispensable part in the validation of

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[2]Davidson, Donald, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," *Truth and Interpretation* (E. Lepore (ed.), Oxford, 1986), 310.

[3]The title of his paper not withstanding, Davidson only argues for a coherence theory of *knowledge* (or, more

empirical beliefs, or [2] what determines empirical truth [must be] merely some logical relationship of a candidate-belief with other beliefs which have been accepted."[4]

The problem with the latter alternative is that

> "... no logical relationship, by itself, can ever be sufficient to establish the truth, or the credibility even, of any synthetic judgment."[5]

So, according to Lewis, we are left with the former alternative, which then must be true if we are to avoid scepticism, which he describes as "an intellectual disaster."[6]

In *Word and Object*, Quine also argued that our knowledge of the external world must depend on sense data. He claims that

> "... physical things generally, however remote, become known to us only through the effects which they help to induce at our sensory surfaces."[7]

Fourteen years later, Quine still maintained this sort of view:

> "It is a matter of scientific fact ... that our only avenue of information about external objects is through the irritation of our sensory surfaces by forces emanating from those objects ... science itself teaches that ... the only information that can reach our sensory surfaces from external objects must be limited to two-dimensional optical projections [and the like]."[8]

Quine conceives of the "irritations" at our "sensory surfaces" as having no propositional content. In fact, for Quine, these irritations have no intentional content whatsoever. The naturalized epistemology envisioned by Quine is a scientific study of the relation between the "meager input" of the senses and the "torrential output" constituted by what we claim to know. Quine believes that the "meager input" of sense "data" must be conceived non-intentionally in order to give it scientific respectability.

We shall return to Quine's account of the relation between meager sensory input, or

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generally epistemic justification), not a "coherence theory of *truth*."

[4]Lewis, C. I., "The Given Element in Empirical Knowledge," *The Philosophical Review*, 61 (1952), 169.

[5]Ibid.

[6]Ibid. 175.

[7]Quine, W. V., *Word and Object*, (Cambridge, Mass., 1960) 1.

[8]Quine, W. V., *The Roots of Reference* (La Salle, Illinois, 1974) 2.

empirical content, and the representational content involved in our knowledge claims. For the moment, though, it is enough to notice that (1) both Lewis and Quine are Foundationalists -- that is, they take justified empirical beliefs to ultimately derive their justification from perceptual experience[9] -- and (2) they both take unconceptual sense data -- that is, sense data with no propositional content -- to be the source of that justification of all empirical beliefs.

Davidson argues that Foundationalism is mistaken, because sense data with no propositional content could not possibly do the work that Quine and Lewis believe it can. It does not really deserve to be called "data" at all. Davidson writes that when it comes to justification of belief

> "The idea of a confrontation between what we believe and reality ... is absurd."[10]

He holds that something without propositional content could not count as a reason for anything. An example of the contrast Davidson draws on is that between, on the one hand, the belief that you have an itch, and, on the other, an itch. You can infer something from your belief that you have an itch, but you cannot infer anything from the itch itself. The key difference between the two is that only the belief is conceptual -- only it has propositional content. For example, say you believe that most itches come from mosquito bites. Then, given a new belief that you have an itch, you could rationally conclude that you had most likely been bitten by a mosquito. In contrast, the itch itself lacks propositional content, and therefore lacks the capacity to enter into any logical relation. Beliefs can only be justified by things that can enter into logical relations with them. So an itch can't justify a belief -- even a belief that one has been bitten by a mosquito, or, indeed, a belief that one has an itch.

A sense "datum," according to Davidson, is like an itch or a pain. Itches, pains, and sense "data" all lack the capacity to enter into logical relations, so they cannot serve as justifiers for beliefs. Nothing follows from a sense "datum," and thus, a sense "datum" cannot justify a belief. Whatever justifies a belief, according to Davidson, must be logically related to it.

In "A Coherence Theory," Davidson further explains his view as follows: By definition, a Foundationalist seeks a justifier that is not a belief. "Sensations are what connect the world and our beliefs, and they are candidates for justifiers because we are often

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[9]Quine combines his foundationalism with a form of semantic holism.
[10]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 307.

aware of them."[11] A Foundationalist has two principal options in making sensations out to be the ultimate justifiers of our beliefs.

A first option would be for the Foundationalist to claim that the justification of our beliefs on the basis of some particular sensations is really justification on the basis of our *awareness* that we have those sensations. But awareness of a sensation, Davidson claims, is just a *belief* that we have a sensation, and therefore this account does not provide a non-propositional justifier. "The trouble we seem to have been running into is that the justification seems to depend on the awareness, which is just another belief."[12] So this account is just a form of Coherentism.[13]

On the second option, the Foundationalist would say that unconceptual sensations *themselves* can justify beliefs.

> "So, under certain conditions, the sensation of seeing a green light flashing [is held by the Foundationalist to] justify the belief that a green light is flashing. The problem is to see how the sensation justifies the belief."[14]

It is the sensation itself that has to justify the belief. But crucially, Davidson holds that "the relation between a sensation and a belief cannot be logical, since sensations are not beliefs or other propositional attitudes."[15] And, for Davidson, justifying relations have to be logical relations.

Davidson thinks that there is a relation between sensation and belief, but it is causal, not justificatory. Sense "data" *causes* beliefs; it doesn't justify them. "[A] causal explanation of a belief does not show how or why the belief is justified."[16] Justifiers must have propositional content. A rational relation for Davidson is a truth preserving relation. If "p" and "if p then q" are both true, then it is rational to conclude that "q" is true as well, because "q" must be true if "p" and "if p then q" are true. An itch, a piece of paper, or a sensation, in contrast with a proposition, cannot be true or false. So they cannot have a part in a truth-preserving logical relation, since there is no sense to notion that such a "logical

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[11]Ibid. 311.
[12]Ibid. 307.
[13]The Foundationalist might be tempted by the rather desperate claim that if one believes that one has a certain sensation then one does in fact have one. But even if this were true, the sensation itself would not have been shown to be playing a justificatory role, so no non-propositional justifier would have been identified.
[14]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 311.
[15]Ibid.
[16]Ibid.

relation" could be "truth preserving." So this second option for the Foundationalist also is a failure. So, Davidson concludes, Foundationalism is wrong. And if Foundationalism is wrong, then Coherentism must be right.

This is Davidson's argument for Coherentism -- the view that beliefs are justified only by their coherence with other beliefs. Davidson argues that Coherentism is a reasonable view because if non-propositional things like perceptual experiences cannot justify beliefs, then the only things *left* to justify beliefs are propositional things -- more specifically, beliefs. So beliefs are only justified by their coherence with other beliefs.

**Non-Conceptual Content and "A Coherence Theory"**

In the rest of this chapter, I shall argue for three theses concerning the views expressed by Davidson in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge." First, I shall argue that Davidson's argument that sense experience cannot justify empirical belief would be sound if it was aimed only at non-intentional sense "data" rather than at any non-propositional sense data. Second, I shall argue that his argument doesn't address the possibility of non-conceptual, intentional perceptual content. Third, I shall argue that Davidson is overly enthusiastic about Coherentism, which is an ultimately inadequate view of empirical justification.

The main point I would like to make about "A Coherence Theory" is that all that follows from Davidson's argument is that non-*intentional* sense "data" could not serve to justify our perceptual beliefs. It does not follow that non-*propositional* sense "data" could not serve as such a justifier. In my opinion, the latter conclusion is importantly stronger. Davidson thinks that anything intentional must be propositional, so he would disagree. This view of Davidson's may explain why he addresses his arguments in "A Coherence Theory" only against non-intentional sense "data."[17]

I agree with Davidson that sense "data" conceived non-intentionally is the wrong sort of thing to serve as a justifier. Non-intentional sense "data" would not be understandable as about anything. But if it is not *about* anything, it does not represent the world as being one way rather than another, and thus could not by itself give us reason to take the world to be one way rather than another.

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[17]In Chapter 5 I shall evaluate and reject the arguments Davidson provides in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual

A distinction between two ways of "bearing information" might be helpful in understanding this point. The traces that an object leaves behind could be understood as bearing information about that object in the first sense. The light reflected by an object, or the tracks left by an animal contain information about the location and nature of that object or animal. But one could encounter such informative "traces" of an object without awareness that they offered information about that thing. The traces themselves make no reference to the object, and could be readily considered by someone completely unaware of the object's existence. Such traces are just things or states of affairs that co-vary with some degree of lawlikeness with the object or state of affairs about which one could take them to bear information. But without some other means of reference to the sort of object about which the traces bear information, there would be no way to take them to be about some object or other at all.

Intentional experiences "bear information" about an object in a distinct sense. Experiences have representational content in a stronger sense. One could not perspicuously consider an experience of some object or state of affairs without awareness that it was an experience as *of* something else. When one has a visual experience of a cat in front of them, the experience essentially makes reference to and informs one about that cat. Information bearers in this sense notoriously sometimes bear misinformation about things, or appear to bear information about things which actually do not exist. In contrast, information bearers in the *first* sense could be mistaken for something they were not, but they couldn't incorrectly represent an object.

Non-intentional sense "data" would not bear information about the world in this second sense. So if such "data" exhausted a subject's information about the world, she would be incapable of thought about the world, since she would have no way to take her sense "data" to be informative *about* the world. She would lack the requisite means of reference to the sort of object about which such "traces" bear information. Such considerations show just how implausible it is to hold that non-intentional sense "data" are our best or only means of epistemic access to the world. I shall return to these issues in Chapter 6, but for now, it suffices to conclude that Davidson is right to reject the view of Lewis and Quine that knowledge can be founded solely on non-intentional sense "data."

Although Davidson is right about the prospects for sense "data" like Quine's or

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Scheme" for holding that anything intentional must be propositional.

Lewis's serving as justifiers of our beliefs about the world, he doesn't seem to consider non-conceptual intentional experience as a candidate for a perceptual ground of empirical beliefs. On the sort of account of perceptual justification of belief that I have in mind, our non-conceptual experience would justify our beliefs about the world if experience and belief represented the world to be the way our beliefs represented it to be. That is, a non-conceptual perceptual experience would have a justificatory relation to a belief if the content of that experience included at least some of the content of a belief and did not contradict the content of that belief -- i.e., if they "cohered." Thus, if my non-conceptual experience represented an emerald to be a certain way that we would capture linguistically by describing it as "being green," or "having a certain shape, size or color X," then that experience would justify my conceptual belief that that emerald was green, or had that shape, size or color. Thus, as I have mentioned, the non-conceptual content that I contend has a role in our perceptual experience is the same content we exploit when we use concepts in thinking or speaking about shapes, sizes, colors and the like. That is to say, non-conceptual perceptual information about objects is not somehow a different sort of information than that which we communicate to each other when we talk about the empirical world -- although it is often more particularized and fine grained.

It would be a mistake to say that that a non-conceptual experience was "true" or "false"; only something with propositional content could properly be so called. But nonetheless a non-conceptual intentional experience could represent the world in a veridical or non-veridical manner. This capacity to be veridical comes with and is inseparable from the intentionality of perceptual experience; only something which can represent the world has the capacity to be veridical, and something that was removed from questions of veridicality could not be said to represent a state of affairs at all.

I shall discuss these issues further over the next three chapters. But for our present purpose of evaluating Davidsonian considerations in favor of SCV, it suffices to notice that Davidson's arguments in "A Coherence Theory" would have no force against an account of perceptual justification based on non-conceptual perceptual content, because justifying relations on such an account would not have to be logical relations just like those between beliefs and propositional attitudes, and because all that was intentional would not have to be propositional. If this is correct, then it is also the case that Davidson has not in that paper offered a conclusive case for his Coherentism.

In essence, Davidson's argument for Coherentism holds that something non-propositional can't justify a belief, and any reasonable candidate for a justifier that is propositional just is a belief. It is my view that a perceptual experience with non-conceptual intentional content is capable of justifying a belief without being a belief itself. A key example for my purposes is any perceptual experience the content of which goes beyond telling us *that* certain particulars fall under a concept (i.e., 'green') by telling us *why* they fall under that concept (i.e., because they are a certain way, such that they are similar to all other green particulars, and so on).[18] It is this same perceptual content which tells us *how* things are, which was crucial to defending SRN in Chapter 1. It is our perception of *how* things are that tells us *why* they fall under a concept or why they fail to do so. When we see *how* things are, we can see that several green objects some first observed before *t* and some first observed after *t* are all similar to one another in a way that several analogous grue objects are not. It is this non-conceptual content of experience which allows us to determine that "grue" is not a predicate fit for warranted inductive inferences -- and it *justifies our belief* that it is not. We can enjoy the exact same content of experience whether we speak English; Grubleen; a language like Khoisan which does not distinguish green from blue; or, indeed, no language at all.

Because non-conceptual experience cannot properly be said to be "true" or "false," such experience cannot enter into "truth-preserving" logical relations. However, such an experience does have what one might call "veridicality conditions"; it represents the world to be a certain way. So it *can* enter into the sort of justifying relations like those into which Davidson argues that things like itches or flashing lights cannot enter. Whether or not we call such relations "logical" is irrelevant, so long as we recognize that they are justificatory relations.

The fact that non-conceptual perceptual experience is not true or false is one thing that makes it clear that such experience is not just a belief about the world. Another is the often noticed fact that, although prior beliefs can affect how one perceives things to be, the content of perceptual experience need not be dependent upon how one believes things to be. Experiences of Muller-Lyer illusions or of seemingly bent sticks half submerged in water are cases where perceptual content is independent of empirical belief. The very existence of a perceptual experience, unlike the very existence of a belief, need not depend on that

[18]Just about *every* perceptual experience falls into this category.

experience's "surviving" a rational evaluation of it -- though we must rationally evaluate our experiences if we are to be epistemically responsible. So although non-conceptual, intentional perceptual experiences can enter into justificatory relations, they are not beliefs.[19]

If this conclusion is correct, then Davidson's argument for Coherentism is not sound, since it denies that there could be a justifier which wasn't a belief. At one point Davidson invites us to imagine someone who has a sensation of a flashing green light but believes that he doesn't have it. He asks rhetorically "Would the sensation still justify him in the belief in an objective flashing green light?,"[20] the implication being that it would not. But I don't see the force in this argument as applied to perceptual experience of the sort I have been discussing, which is *intentional* perceptual experience. It seems clear that the content of a person's intentional experience of a flashing green light in some determinate spatial location relative to him *would* lend rational support for a judgement that there was such a light there. At the same time, his belief that he had no such experience would give him reason *not* to judge that there was such a light there (though, of course, that belief would not render impossible his having that experience). His ultimate judgment as to whether a light was there would also depend upon a host of further beliefs, and upon the relative weight he attributed to all the above factors. He might rationally decide to disregard the evidence provided by his perceptual experience, and arrive at the erroneous judgment that there was no light there. But his disregarding this evidence would not alter the fact that his experience did offer rational support for the judgment that there was a light there; analogously, when we disregard the evidence provided by some prior belief for a judgment that we decline to make, it does not alter the fact that our prior belief offered rational support for that judgment. Disregard of the rational support provided by some part of the content of our perceptual experience is no more paradoxical than this latter case of rational support provided by a prior belief; we disregard some rational support for a judgment provided by perception every time we are confronted by a stick half submerged in water but do not judge that the stick is bent.

## Davidson's Positive Account of an Interpretivist Coherentism

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[19]Davidson often writes as if all belief were propositional, but he notoriously lacks a good account of the content of demonstrative sentences. He acknowledges that fact in "Truth and Meaning" (at p. 33) and "Semantics for Natural Languages" (at p. 58). Both essays are included in Davidson, Donald, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation,* (Oxford, 1984).

[20]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 311.

There are some fairly well-rehearsed grounds for rejecting Coherentist accounts of justification which go beyond the mere fact that Davidson's arguments for it are not sound. It will help to distinguish what might be called "Naive Coherentism" with "Davidsonian Coherentism." Naive Coherentism is the view that all and only coherent set of beliefs -- that is, large, mostly consistent, logically interrelated sets of beliefs -- are justified. How Davidsonian Coherentism differs from Naive Coherentism will become clear in the course of this discussion.

An initial intuitive objection to Naive Coherentism is that fails to explain what justification of a belief has to do with the truth of a belief. There is a virtually unlimited number of large, extremely logically interrelated sets of beliefs. Only some of these sets, it would seem, comprise largely true beliefs: false beliefs can as readily belong to such sets as true beliefs.[21] Naive Coherentism is committed to the view that the beliefs in all such sets are justified. But that seems wrong. Justification must be truth-conducive, and on the Naive Coherentist account, the aptness for justification of a belief is unrelated to its truth or falsity. So Naive Coherentism is not a good account of justification. We might call this obvious, intuitive objection "the Irrelevance to Truth Argument."

The Irrelevance to Truth Argument is raised by C. I. Lewis, among many others. He argues that

> "no logical relationship, by itself, can ever be sufficient to establish the truth, or the credibility even, of any synthetic judgment."[22]

Lewis notes that Naive Coherentism rules out justificatory relations between beliefs and non-beliefs. This creates a problem for Coherentist accounts of justification, because there is no evident reason to think beliefs that belong to coherent sets are any more likely to be true than ones that do not. Someone pushing the Irrelevance to Truth Argument might claim that to see that Coherentists are mistaken, one merely has to notice that almost any belief can be a member of a large, coherent set of beliefs.

A second argument against Naive Coherentism might be called the "Circularity Argument." Say some subject has empirical belief A. According to Naive Coherentism, belief A could be justified only by other beliefs. So say it is justified by belief B. But belief B could only justify belief A if it itself was justified. So say belief B is justified in turn by

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[21]This would not be true of self-contradictory beliefs, or of some beliefs about belief sets. But cases like these are beside the point here.

[22]Lewis, "The Given Element in Empirical Knowledge," 169.

belief C (which might or might not independently justify belief A). But belief C could only justify beliefs A and B if it itself was justified. What justifies belief C? Because a Naive Coherentist has ruled out our eventually arriving at a belief that enjoys some form of extra-doxastic justification (like perceptual justification), this process seems destined to end with a viciously circular justification of belief A -- which would be no justification. The series of beliefs must either have only viciously circular "justification," end with an unjustified belief, or go on without end. None of these options can provide a satisfactory account of the justification of belief A. So it appears that Naive Coherentism is false.

Davidson acknowledges the Irrelevance to Truth objection.

> "It is obvious that not every consistent set of interpreted sentences contains only true sentences, since one such set might contain just the consistent sentence S and another just the negation of S. ... We can imagine endless state-descriptions -- maximal consistent descriptions -- which do not describe our world."[23]

His first move in response to this argument is to narrow the scope of sets of beliefs to which his theory applies.

> "My coherence theory concerns beliefs, or sentences held true by someone who understands them. ... Beliefs for me are states of people with intentions, desires, sense organs ... For all such cases, the coherence theory applies."[24]

So Davidson is only concerned with belief sets that might be held by a normal person. This is an initial difference between Davidsonian Coherentism and Naive Coherentism. It is quite reasonable for an epistemologist to limit his theory to the sorts of beliefs with which we human beings are concerned, and this appears to be all that Davidson has done.[25] This limitation in itself, however, doesn't make Davidson's account of justification much more plausible than Naive Coherentism. Davidson limits his account to just a portion of all possible belief sets. But no matter how a Coherentist limits the belief sets to which his account is alleged to apply, unless he does so in a way that explains why this limitation is relevant to the truth of the beliefs in that smaller set and how the justification enjoyed in that smaller set could be other than circular he will have made no improvement to his account of

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[23]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 307-08.
[24]Ibid. 308.
[25]We shall come to see, however, that in fact a Davidsonian epistemology that begins with a subject who

justification.

Davidson is aware of these issues, and he offers an explanation of why his limited portion of all possible belief sets is epistemically better off than the rest.

> "... a correct understanding of the speech, beliefs, desires, intentions and other propositional attitudes of a person leads to the conclusion that most of a person's beliefs must be true, and so there is a legitimate presumption that any one of them, if it coheres with most of the rest, is true."[26]

According to Davidson, once we fully understand how interpretation determines the content of subjects' mental states we will see that particular beliefs comprised by subjects' belief sets cannot but be mostly true, and that this fact leads to subjects' being justified believers. There are two parts to his argument for this view.

He first argues that because of the nature of error and the role interpretation plays in determining the meanings of beliefs, "beliefs are by nature generally true."[27] An interpreter could never correctly attribute what he took to be a massively erroneous belief set to a speaker, because "... too great deviations from consistency and correctness leave no common ground on which to judge either conformity or difference."[28] So the warranted attribution to a speaker of a belief held by the interpreter to be false requires the attribution of a background of belief held true by both parties. Because of this fact, "... the principle [of Charity] directs the interpreter to ... interpret so as to read some of his own standards of truth into the pattern of sentences held true by the speaker."[29] "To make the speaker intelligible [in this way is] ... the only, and therefore unimpeachable, method available to the interpreter."[30] That is to say, any objection to the interpreter's attributing a large body of what he takes to be true belief to the speaker would be misguided, since there is no other option available to an interpreter. Once we understand these facts about the nature of interpretation we can see that

> "It is an artefact of the interpreter's correct interpretation of a person's speech and attitudes that there is a large degree of truth and consistency in the thought and speech of an agent ... by the

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understands her beliefs misses much of the point of epistemology.

[26]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 314.

[27]Ibid. 319.

[28]Ibid. 316.

[29]Ibid.

[30]Ibid.

> interpreter's standards" ... "[F]rom the interpreter's point of view ... there [is no] way he can discover the speaker to be largely wrong about the world."[31]

Now, for all Davidson has said up to this point, the interpreter and the speaker could be in agreement, yet nonetheless both be massively mistaken about the empirical world. So Davidson continues

> "[An] omniscient interpreter, using the same method as the fallible interpreter, [would find] the fallible speaker largely consistent and correct. By his own standards, of course, but since these are objectively correct, the fallible speaker is seen to be largely correct and consistent by objective standards."[32]

That is why

> "Once we agree to the general method of interpretation I have sketched, it becomes impossible correctly to hold that anyone could be mostly wrong about how things are."[33]

So "beliefs are by nature generally true."[34] Thus concludes the first part of Davidson's argument.

As Davidson recognizes, however, just establishing that subjects' beliefs are generally true does not establish that those subjects are justified in holding their beliefs. A subject's having a justified belief requires not that that belief be true, but rather that the subject have reason to think that that belief is true. Davidson owes us an account of a subject's reason for thinking that his beliefs are true. As he puts the question,

> "Suppose I am right that an interpreter must so interpret as to make a speaker or agent largely correct about the world. How does this help the person himself who wonders what reason he has to think his beliefs are mostly true?"[35]

The second part of Davidson's argument addresses this. His answer to the question is that

> "In order to doubt or wonder about the provenance of his beliefs an agent must know what a belief is. ... The agent has only to reflect on

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[31]Ibid. 317 (in the original, the second sentence quoted precedes the first one, but their sense is preserved here).
[32]Ibid.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Ibid. 319.
[35]Ibid. 318.

> what a belief is to appreciate that most of his basic beliefs are true, and among his beliefs, those most securely held and that cohere with the main body of his beliefs are the most apt to be true. The question, how do I know my beliefs are generally true? thus answers itself, simply because beliefs are by nature generally true."[36]

Subjects necessarily understand the nature of belief, so they need only reflect to see that beliefs are by nature generally true. So "from each person's vantage point, there must be a graded presumption in favor of each of his own beliefs" and "all of a believer's beliefs are to some extent justified to him."[37] A Coherentist, according to Davidson, can thus enjoy justified beliefs.

**Interpreting Natives' Utterances as "True"**

My main concern in the rest of this chapter will be to question the value of Davidson's second conclusion, namely, that the fact that beliefs are by nature generally true can "help the person himself who wonders what reason he has to think his beliefs are mostly true."[38] I shall argue that what help it offers is not the sort needed by a human being evaluating her mental states, and that Davidson therefore does not provide a satisfactory Coherentist account of empirical justification. But first I shall consider some doubts about Davidson's first conclusion that beliefs are by nature generally true.

Many commentators have questioned Davidson's first conclusion. Jonathan Bennett argues that while it is a fruitful interpretive technique to attribute to the speaker a large background of the interpreter's beliefs, it is not, as Davidson holds, "the only, and therefore unimpeachable, method available to the interpreter."[39] For Bennett

> "the error ignoring device is merely the simplest of many possible ways of getting the theory started. ... [Davidson thinks] that in the absence of massive agreement the notion of (dis)agreement is not 'intelligible' [but this] goes far beyond merely advising theory builders to start with a working assumption of massive agreement."[40]

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[36]Ibid. 318-19.
[37]Ibid. 319.
[38]Ibid. 318.
[39]Ibid. 316.
[40]Bennett, Jonathan, "Critical Notice of *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*," *Mind* 94 (1985), 609.

In this passage Bennett is criticizing Davidson's "Belief and the Basis of Meaning," but the could have made the same point with respect to "A Coherence Theory." For Bennett, our understanding a speaker depends on our taking him to be *reasonable* in his beliefs, but it would be possible to understand him without assuming that he is *correct* in his beliefs by the interpreter's lights.[41]

I do not think that this is a good objection. Davidson could reply that Bennett underestimates the scope of background beliefs that must be attributed if any one belief is to be attributed -- whether that one belief be true or false -- and, as a result, he misunderstands why it is inevitable that the interpreter take the speaker to share the large majority of his own beliefs. A philosopher who, like Davidson, embraces holism about meaning will argue that the attribution of one belief -- whether that belief be true or false -- requires the attribution of an enormous background of beliefs. John Searle expresses this sort of holistic view of content in a discussion of desire -- in this instance, Jimmy Carter's desire to run for the Presidency of the United States.

> "In order that his desire be a desire to run for the Presidency he must have a whole lot of beliefs such as: the belief that the United States is a Republic, that it has a presidential system of government, that it has periodic elections, that these involve principally a contest between the candidates of two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, that these candidates are chosen at nominating conventions, and so on indefinitely. ... Intentional states ... only have their conditions of satisfaction relative to their position in the Network [of Intentional states]."[42]

Searle could have said much the same thing about Jimmy Carter's *belief* that he would run for the Presidency. Though he would not use Searle's terminology, Davidson is sympathetic with the idea that the content of one belief depends on the content of many others. To attribute one belief, like the belief that the speaker will run for president, Davidson would say, the interpreter must attribute an indefinitely large number of other beliefs.

If it were agreed that the attribution of some huge background belief set or other is required for the attribution of any one belief, then, Davidson could forcefully reply to Bennett's objection by asking: How could an interpreter attribute a huge background of

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[41]Ibid.

belief other than his own? It seems that it would be impossible. First, the interpreter would face the impossible task of specifying what would at best be an enormous number of beliefs this background set comprised. Davidson, Searle, and many others have expressed plausible doubts that there even is a specific number of beliefs in a person's background "belief set."[43] But what is worse, even if we allow for the moment that he could perform this miracle, it would not help him interpret the speaker. The goal of an interpreter whose native language is English is to arrive at a theory of meaning in English for the speaker's language. If the content of one belief depends on its place in a huge set of beliefs, then the content of the beliefs in the miraculously specified set would depend on their place in *that* set. So the interpreter would as yet have provided no account of the content of how the attributed belief set could be understood in English. An account of *that*, it would seem, would require an interpretation of the *attributed* belief set. And in performing that interpretation, the interpreter would encounter the same problem over and over again -- unless he gave up and interpreted the attributed belief set as largely like his own. So an interpreter's attributing a large, foreign belief set would be of no help in providing an account in English of a foreign speaker's actual beliefs. The interpreter would not even understand the very beliefs he was supposed to have attributed, since their content would depend on a belief set fundamentally different from his own. It seems that if his holistic view of content is correct, then Davidson has fairly good grounds for the claim that

> "It is an artifact of the interpreter's correct interpretation of a person's speech and attitudes that there is a large degree of truth and consistency in the thought and speech of an agent ... by the interpreter's standards."[44]

In spite of our supposition to the contrary, at best the interpreter would have merely attributed to the speaker a set of sentences held true in an unknown language. But attributing sentences held true in a foreign language is useless to an interpreter. He needs to attribute a set of beliefs the content of which he understands. But that could only be a set of beliefs largely shared by him. So an interpreter indeed must take a speaker's utterances to be mostly *true* by the interpreter's lights, not just to be *reasonable* by them.

Bennett also protests that Davidson illicitly moves from the thesis that a speaker

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[42]Searle, John, *Intentionality* (Cambridge, 1983), 20.
[43]Ibid. 19-20; Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 308.
[44]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 317.

cannot be understood by an interpreter unless most of her beliefs are *judged true* by the interpreter, to the thesis that a speaker cannot be understood unless most of his beliefs *are true*.

> "It seems *prima facie* that [the former thesis] can be true and [the latter thesis] false: a mostly false corpus of beliefs might be understood, on the basis of complete agreement, by an interpreter whose own beliefs were mostly false."[45]

But Davidson could reasonably counter that a "mostly false corpus of beliefs" is an incoherent notion. Large sets of beliefs -- or of empirical beliefs, at any rate -- only have content if they successfully refer to things in the world. Reference is only possible, Davidson could plausibly claim, against a background of largely true beliefs. Again, Davidson could suggest that Bennett underestimates the scope of beliefs involved in holding even a single false belief. If Jimmy Carter didn't believe *any* of the following:

> "that the United States is a Republic, that it has a presidential system of government, that it has periodic elections, that these involve principally a contest between the candidates of two major parties, the Republicans and the Democrats, that these candidates are chosen at nominating conventions, and so on indefinitely."[46]

then it he could not even have the false empirical belief that he did not run for the Presidency. Similar considerations would apply for any empirical belief. Two human beings who lacked a mostly true corpus of beliefs might seem to understand one another, but they would not actually understand one another, since their mental states would lack content. Their utterances could make no claims about the world. I shall return to a case like this one presently.

Though she is somewhat more sanguine than Bennett about the interpreter's need to find the speaker correct by the interpreter's own lights, Susan Haack offers a similar objection to the idea that an interpreter must attribute *true* beliefs to a speaker, as opposed to beliefs the interpreter *judges* to be true. She puts her objection somewhat differently, though.

> "A modest principle of charity, in the form of a defeasible presumption of agreement between translator and respondent, has some claim to plausibility as a maxim of translational practice. But

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[45]Bennett, "Critical Notice of *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*," 610.

> whatever claim to plausibility such a modest principle has, obviously, does not extend to the much more ambitious principle that an interpreter must attribute mostly true beliefs to his respondents."[47]

Minimally, Haack would say, a maxim of translational practice should be a guideline to which an interpreter can adhere. In attempting to attribute true belief to the speaker, the only useful belief set available to a fallible interpreter will be his own belief set, since his own beliefs are, of course, the beliefs that he takes to be true. So Haack argues that to direct the interpreter to attribute largely true beliefs to the speaker as distinct from directing him to attribute what he takes to be true beliefs is to ask for the impossible. A Principle of Charity directing the interpreter "translate the speaker as having only true beliefs as distinct from what you take to be true belief" is in this light an unreasonable translational maxim.

I think Davidson would agree with Haack that a maxim like the one Haack takes him to suggest, which directs the interpreter to do what is manifestly not in his power, is absurd. He might also concede that he sometimes writes as if he were recommending a translational maxim according to which translators should maximize the truth [full stop] of a speaker's utterances.[48] He would not agree, however, that he is directing the interpreter to do what is not in his power. As we have seen, Davidson holds that beliefs are by nature generally true, so an interpreter's attributing his own beliefs to a speaker just will be attributing mostly true beliefs. This, of course, is his conclusion not his argument -- although it may explain Davidson's sometimes misleading way of writing. His argument in "A Coherence Theory" is that our beliefs must be true because if we were interpreted by an interpreter who enjoyed true empirical beliefs only, that interpreter would find us to be largely in agreement with him. The omniscient interpreter (or any interpreter, for that matter) only has to "adhere" to the weaker maxim of maximizing agreement. That alone is enough, because in the possible case where the omniscient interpreter is doing the interpreting, the speaker's agreement means that his beliefs are mostly true. Even to speak of "adherence to a maxim" at all is misleading. As I hope my discussion of Bennett's first objection has made clear, the translator has no choice but to "adhere" to it. If he didn't take the speaker to be largely in agreement with him, he would fail to translate. So according to Davidson, our beliefs' justifiedness does not depend

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[46]Searle, *Intentionality*, 20.

[47]Haack, Susan, *Evidence and Inquiry: Towards Reconstruction in Epistemology*, (Oxford, 1993), 67.

[48]As when he writes, "Here I would extend the principle of charity to favor interpretations that as far as possible preserve truth: I think it makes for mutual understanding, and hence for better interpretation to interpret what the speaker accepts as true when we can." Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 316.

on adhering to an unreasonable maxim. Davidson's conclusions are based on what the translator could not help but do, not on an optional method of translation.

**What are Davidsonian "Beliefs"?**

Before continuing to address Davidson's view that interpretivistic considerations can make a Coherentist epistemology plausible, I need to clarify what can and cannot correctly be called a "belief" in the context of the present discussion. This is merely a terminological issue, but a potentially confusing one. As Davidson acknowledges that there are different ways of "conceiving what it is possible to believe."[49] We could talk as if "the range of possible maximal sets of beliefs is as wide as the range of possible maximal sets of sentences."[50] That is how I have been talking until now; for example, I claimed above that

> "There is a virtually unlimited number of large, extremely logically interrelated sets of beliefs. Only some of these sets, it would seem, comprise largely true beliefs: false beliefs can as readily belong to such sets as true beliefs."

But as we have seen, Davidson's theory

> "concerns beliefs, or sentences held true by someone who understands them. ... 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."[51]

So on this more restricted understanding of "belief" it is an open question whether there is a virtually unlimited number of large, extremely logically interrelated sets of beliefs only some of which are largely true. In fact, as we have seen, Davidson argues that all such sets held by actual humans are largely true. For the rest of this chapter, I shall concede for the sake of argument Davidson's first conclusion that belief is by nature veridical. What I shall not concede is that the fact that we seem to ourselves to be believers warrants our taking ourselves to have mostly true beliefs. If our seeming to ourselves to be believers doesn't warrant our taking ourselves to have mostly true beliefs, then Davidson's second conclusion that the fact that beliefs are by nature generally true can "help the person himself who

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[49]Ibid. 308.
[50]Ibid.
[51]Ibid.

wonders what reason he has to think his beliefs are mostly true" will be shown to be false.[52] From this point on I shall use the term "putative beliefs" for mental states which, if it weren't for Davidson's requirement that "genuine beliefs" be part of a large body of mostly true beliefs, we would simply call "beliefs."

I also concede for the moment that interpretability of a putative belief is a necessary condition for that mental state's bearing content. This further complicates the matter of putative beliefs, since if interpretability is a condition for bearing content, then putative beliefs which are not part of a large body of mostly true beliefs fail to bear content. If a human being's mental states are not massively correct, then there is no content in (what passes for) that human's mental life. So among other things, that human could not properly be said to wonder whether its putative beliefs were largely true, or to go about evaluating them. But as I shall explain, I don't think this warrants Davidson's argument that anyone who seems to himself to have epistemological worries can *ipso facto* justifiably take himself to have largely true beliefs.

Davidson provides us with no reason to think that to enjoy a mental state with content is subjectively any different from enjoying one that has merely putative content. Gareth Evans describes a situation somewhat like the following: A person seems to have a thought about the tiger he is perceiving. Unbeknownst to that person, he is in fact perceiving bits of several different tigers. Evans would hold that, irrespective of what the person takes himself to be thinking, he has in fact failed to have a thought at all.[53] To have merely putative mental states would be something like being in a more extreme circumstance of this sort. Significantly, being in such a situation would be subjectively like being a believer. There is nothing subjective about the mental state itself which is enjoyed by the person in this example by which he can judge that it fails to have content. Similarly, there needn't be anything subjective about the mental states themselves which are enjoyed by the merely putative believer by which he can judge that they fail to have content.

Any further details of such cases will not bear on the present argument. But it is important to be clear about the expository difficulties raised by talk of putative beliefs. Such a merely putative believer couldn't properly be said to wonder about his mental states, to take himself to be a believer, or even to be a subject or a person. In what follows, I shall generally write of the merely putative believer "seeming to himself to believe" something. But in cases

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[52]Ibid. 318.

where, for the sake of simplicity, I write of his "rationally assessing" his mental states (and the like), this should be understood as his seeming to himself to do so, but not in fact doing so for lack of mental content. In other places, where I write of *our* rationally assessing our beliefs I dispense with this talk of "seeming to assess," since, after all, we are believers who enjoy contentful mental lives.

**Davidson's Coherentism Rejected**

For several related reasons, I think that Davidson's version of Coherentism is unsatisfying. Davidson merely puts off the question of the epistemological evaluation of our mental states, rather than providing any answer to it. He can be understood as having put a requirement on any mental state's counting as a belief, namely, that that mental state be rationally related to a large body of mostly true beliefs held by the subject who is enjoying that mental state. But this just raises the question of why we are justified in taking ourselves to be believers at all, given that a requirement on our having *any* belief is that we have a large body of mostly true beliefs. To answer this question would require answering something very close to the traditional epistemological question of how our empirical beliefs are justified. For Davidson, to take ourselves to be believers is to take ourselves to have largely true beliefs. So to rationally take our putative beliefs to *be* beliefs, we must have some reason to think that these putative beliefs are true. That is, to rationally take our putative beliefs to be beliefs at all, we must have some justification for these putative beliefs. But according to Coherentism, we can only rationally assess these putative beliefs according to how well they cohere with one another, and the Circularity Argument seems to show that coherence could only offer viciously circular "justification" for our putative beliefs. Furthermore, the Irrelevance to Truth Argument seems to show that coherence of mental states alone need not be truth conducive, and a property of our putative belief set that need not be truth conducive cannot be sufficient to justify our putative belief set. So the Davidsonian Coherentist cannot warrantedly claim to be a "believer," given how strong this claim becomes in his mouth.

We can now see that according to even *Davidsonian* Coherentism, a subject ultimately relies on mere coherence for the justification of his mental states. Yet just as

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[53] For a similar example, see Evans, Gareth, *The Varieties of Reference*, (Oxford, 1982), 7.6.

Circularity and Irrelevance to Truth Arguments make clear the shortcomings of Naive Coherentism, they make clear the failure of Davidsonian Coherentism as well. Davidson's raising the interpreter's role in determining the content of belief doesn't successfully remedy the problems faced by Coherentism.

Because the two arguments against Naive Coherentism have not been addressed successfully, the problem of epistemically evaluating our mental states has been put off rather than answered. It is fine to use "belief" as a success term -- that is, to use it only for sets of largely true beliefs. But if we use the term in that way, our criteria for counting a mental state as a belief must then be appropriately stern; we must attribute "beliefs" only to those whom we have reason to think have large sets of mostly correct beliefs. So the original problems of epistemic justification will arise for a consistent Davidsonian Coherentist at the level of ascribing to oneself a belief. In spite of all that we have conceded to him about the nature of belief, the Davidsonian Coherentist has failed to provide an explanation of why we are warranted in taking ourselves to be correct about the state of the world.

Davidson writes "Suppose I am right that an interpreter must so interpret to make a speaker or agent largely correct about the world. How does this help the person himself who wonders what reason he has to think his beliefs are mostly true?",[54] and answers the question by saying that "The agent only has to reflect on what a belief is to appreciate that most of his basic beliefs are true."[55] But Davidson's answer wouldn't really satisfy the person who asked the question. What that person really wanted to know wasn't that on the assumption that he indeed had some beliefs B1, B2 and B3, he could justifiably take them to be true. What he wanted to know was whether he could justifiably take the mental states he took to be beliefs B1, B2 and B3 to be true. And Davidson leaves him without an answer to this latter question. Davidson's Coherentism would be of no help to a subject pursuing true beliefs, since that subject's merely ensuring that what he takes to be his beliefs are mutually consistent will not provide him with reason to take them to be even credible.

In most contexts our seeming to take ourselves to be believers is sufficient grounds for concluding that we *are* believers. But that is because in most contexts concluding that we are believers does not lead directly to the subsequent conclusion that most of our beliefs are true. Considering Davidson's "omniscient interpreter" helps to bring out the strength of the conclusions Davidson draws from the premise that we are believers. He writes

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[54]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 318.

> "... imagine for a moment an interpreter who is omniscient about the world, and about what does and would cause a speaker to assent to any sentence in his (potentially unlimited) repertoire. The omniscient interpreter ... finds the fallible speaker largely consistent and correct. By his own standards, of course, but since these are objectively correct, the fallible speaker is seen to be largely correct and consistent by objective standards."[56]

Davidson's claim that an omniscient interpreter would find us largely consistent and correct is unargued for and unwarranted. Even if we allow that Davidson is right that having largely true beliefs about the world is a precondition for meaningful belief and speech, he owes us a Coherentist reason for supposing that the omniscient interpreter would not take us to be uttering gibberish at random. Although we have conceded that an interpreter has no option but to proceed on the assumption that natives' beliefs are mostly true, it doesn't follow that human beings' beliefs are mostly true.

In "Thought and Talk," Davidson offers an argument for the veridicality of belief that makes no mention of an omniscient interpreter.

> "We can ... take it as given that *most* beliefs are correct. The reason for this is that a belief is identified by its location in a pattern of beliefs; it is this pattern that determines the subject matter of the belief, what the belief is about. Before some object in, or aspect of, the world can become part of the subject matter of a belief (true or false) there must be endless true beliefs about the subject matter. False beliefs tend to undermine the identification of the subject matter."[57]

We can accept everything Davidson says in this argument without accepting that subjects are warranted in taking their mental states to be largely correct. The problem in "Thought and Talk" is much the same as it is in "A Coherence Theory": how are we justified in taking ourselves to be believers, given that "before some object in, or aspect of, the world can become part of the subject matter of a belief (true or false) there must be endless true beliefs about the subject matter"? To take ourselves to have even a single true empirical belief we

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[55]Ibid. 319.
[56]Ibid. 317.
[57]Davidson, Donald, "Thought and Talk," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*, 168.

would then need reason to take ourselves to have "endless" true beliefs, and have only our mental states' coherence on which to base this judgment. The Irrelevance to Truth and Circularity Arguments loom once again.

Davidson describes the putative believer's encounter with the omniscient interpreter as one involving that interpreter and "a speaker." But this description is unwarranted. By Davidson's lights, to count as a "speaker," one by definition already has largely true beliefs. Davidson should have written of the interpreter considering the *utterances* of a *human being*. But then it wouldn't follow that the omniscient interpreter would judge the human to be a believer. In this light, we can see that Davidson's very characterization of his epistemology suffers from the same defect. He writes

> "My coherence theory concerns beliefs, or sentences held true by someone who understands them."[58]

But as Davidson understands this, it ends up restricting the coherence theory as applying only to the mental states of knowers. If true, the theory would only allow one to say "If I am largely epistemologically successful, then I have knowledge of the empirical world." But surely much of the point of an epistemological theory is to explain how we could be epistemologically successful.

It is natural and acceptable to take ourselves to be believers. After all, just about everyone thinks that he or she is a believer, and just about everyone is right to do so. However, most of us do not limit ourselves to merely Coherentist grounds when we assess our doxastic achievements. In the present discussion, we must keep in mind that Davidson is restricted to the epistemic resources of the *Coherentist* when he suggests that the subject can be justified in thinking that he is a believer.[59] The relevant question is only whether there are good merely Coherentist reasons available for a subject to take himself to be a believer. And it seems that there are not.

To justify her belief that she is a believer, a Foundationalist could consistently appeal to her perceptual knowledge that other human beings were nearby, were uttering sounds and were moving about in a predictable, regular manner. Such knowledge could provide the basis for something akin to Davidsonian interpretation. The Foundationalist could exploit her knowledge of the environment she shared with her fellow humans and of the utterances made

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[58]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 308.

[59]Or when he claims that the omniscient interpreter would find a person to be largely correct in his beliefs. This amounts to the same thing for Davidson.

by them to create a theory of meaning and belief for the humans around her. From this she could reasonably conclude that she was a believer.

But the resource of perceptual knowledge is unavailable to the Coherentist -- *not* because of the possibility of some far fetched sceptical scenario's obtaining, but rather because the Coherentist has ruled out perception as a possible source of empirical justification. The Coherentist's subject might find himself with the (putative) beliefs that human beings were nearby, that they were uttering sounds, and that they were moving about in a regular manner. And these putative beliefs might seem to cohere nicely with the subject's other putative beliefs. However, as we have seen, the coherence of his mental states would not justify his concluding that those mental states were true, since coherence needn't be truth-conducive. Coherence can only be taken as truth-conducive if it is coherence with something that is mostly true; coherence with a large body of Davidsonian beliefs would be truth-conducive, but whether the mental states in question are beliefs is the matter under consideration, and can't be presumed. By itself, the Coherentist's subject's perceptual experience of the humans and their utterances would offer no epistemic support for his believing that any such humans or utterances existed. So the Coherentist's subject would have no non-circular grounds for taking himself to be a believer. So the intuition that we are obviously believers is of no help to the Davidsonian Coherentist.

## Some Other Objections to Davidsonian Coherentism

A plausible construal of the task of an account of justification is that it should present an explanation of why we are justified in holding the beliefs (or putative beliefs) that we do. We think that we have empirical knowledge and justified beliefs; on this construal, the epistemologist's task is to explain how that could be possible. This is of course a different task from that of explaining how we would be justified if we knew a complex philosophical theory. A second objection to the account of justification offered in "A Coherence Theory" is that even if it successfully completed the latter task (which I have argued that it hasn't), it nonetheless certainly fails at the former task.

Davidson asks "how does [Davidson's theory] help the person himself who wonders what reason he has to think his beliefs are mostly true?"[60] But he eventually answers the

[60]Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," 318.

different question "how do I know my beliefs are generally true?"[61] I imagine that Davidson intended these as two ways of asking the same question. But the difference in phrasing here is quite important. If his theory were true Davidson would not have shown what reason "the person himself [has] ... to think his beliefs are mostly true"; it is overly optimistic by a long way to think that "[t]he agent has only to reflect on what a belief is to appreciate that most of his basic beliefs are true" as if Davidsonian Coherentism were fairly self-evident to any interested party.[62] If his theory were right, then, to be sure, Davidson could say "I know my beliefs are generally true." But if it were to provide a coherentist explanation of why subjects' beliefs in general are justified, the second part of Davidson's argument would have to give an explanation of justification of which subjects in general were in some sense at least partially aware. An explanation that requires justified believers to have read Davidson does not fulfill this requirement.

This, of course, is a somewhat touchy issue. If subjects already explicitly knew why their beliefs were warranted, then a lot more people would want to be epistemologists, because epistemology would be really easy. Nonetheless, I think it is reasonable to hope for an epistemology that explains not only how humans *could* have justified empirical beliefs, but how humans *do* have them. For one thing, to give up on the latter sort of account would be, at least in the minds of the many philosophers who hold that a knower that p must know how he knows that p, to give up on the idea that we *do* have empirical knowledge. Of course if Davidson's account were the best that we had, then there might be good reason to give this up, and settle for the not-inconsequential consolation that he claims to offer. I am arguing, however, that Davidson's lacks good grounds for eschewing perceptual justification of empirical beliefs, and that the prospects for an account of empirical justification based in part on perceptual justification are more promising than he takes it to be. Among the merits of such an account is that it coheres well with our pre-philosophical reasons for thinking that we are right to believe what we do. Our pre-philosophical reasons for thinking that we know how things are in the world around us depend fairly heavily on the idea that if one sees how things are, then one has good reason to believe that things are that way.[63] An account of empirical justification based on justification provided in part by perception has an advantage over any Coherentist account in that it can more plausibly claim to explain how we *are*

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[61]Ibid. 319.
[62]Ibid.
[63]I base this claim in part on my struggles to make "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" convincing

knowers, as opposed to how we *would be* knowers if we just understood Coherentism.

Davidson's account is awkward because it is committed to all subjects' not being rational, because they believe things without having any warrant to do so. Take the case where John hears a noise, wonders whether someone is in the kitchen, and goes into the kitchen to find out. According to Davidson, before John can determine whether to believe that someone is in the kitchen, he will have to obtain some new, merely caused beliefs that may or may not conflict with his antecedent beliefs. So in the process of investigating the population of the kitchen, he will have to hold a belief independently of whether he has a reason to hold it -- a merely caused belief. But it is not rational to hold beliefs irrespective of whether they are justified, even if just for a moment. So Davidson is committed to our not being rational.

That Davidson is committed to our not being rational is in itself an unappealing aspect of his view, though Davidson might reasonably argue that it is not a fatal flaw in his epistemology. But even if he's right on this narrow point, noticing Coherentism's commitment to our having non-rational beliefs can help us understand how that theory is wrong about what happens in cases where we do not take things as they appear. When I knowingly perceive a Muller-Lyer illusion, I at no point believe that the two relevant lines are of unequal length. I do not momentarily believe that there are unequally long lines, and only then realize that this belief doesn't cohere with my previously held beliefs that this is a Muller-Lyer illusion and that in Muller-Lyer illusions the relevant lines are of the same length. But how can Davidson account for this? Davidson holds that rational relations do not hold between experiences and beliefs. For Davidson it is only when a belief comes about that the not-coherent, rational relations come about. So in cases like this one, Davidson seems committed to our having a non-rational belief that we don't in fact have.

A merit of Foundationalism is that it captures our pre-philosophical intuitions about how we are knowers, and thus preserves the possibility that these intuitions are correct. A simpler but obviously related point is that the idea that perceptual experience has no justificatory role is simply dubious. Coherentism is implausible not only because coherence ultimately offers only a viciously circular justification of our empirical beliefs, but also because we think that perceptual experience *does* provide warrant for those beliefs.

When a self-aware Foundationalist hears a noise and wonders whether someone is in

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to undergraduates!

the kitchen, she goes to the kitchen in the hope that she will have a perceptual experience of the kitchen and its contents. She also hopes that this experience will cause and justify a new belief as to whether someone is in the kitchen.

But in the case of a self-aware Coherentist things are different. For him, perceptual experiences of individuals in kitchens themselves provide no reason to believe anything about the world. So if John is consistent, he goes to the kitchen merely hoping that a belief will be caused as to whether someone is in the kitchen. He also hopes that this belief will cohere with his existing beliefs, only then gaining some warrant. But John's account of what is going on is counter-intuitive; our intuition is that John's perceptual experience itself justifies his belief that someone is in the kitchen.

One way to see this is to recognize that perceptual experience can justify a new belief independently of whether or not that new belief coheres with antecedent beliefs. Our intuition is that a perceiver could be justified in believing that someone is in the kitchen because they see someone there regardless of what antecedent beliefs they had. Someone might enter the kitchen with strong beliefs that no one could be there. If she has a normal perceptual experience of someone in the kitchen in front of her which, in spite of her antecedent beliefs to the contrary, leads her to believe that someone is in the kitchen in front of her, her belief is nonetheless perfectly warranted. But this is just to say that a new belief can be justified by perceptual experience in spite of its simply not cohering with antecedent beliefs.[64]

Davidson's offering no account of how we in fact *do* have justification for our empirical beliefs, his making out subjects not to be rational in their belief formation, and the patent implausibility of the claim that perceptual experience has no justificatory role are all further reasons to reject Davidsonian Coherentism.

## Conclusion

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[64]This conclusion is in fact stronger than what my argument against Davidson requires. It would be enough to refute Davidson's view of empirical justification to show that perceptual experiences have justificatory force. I needn't show that they have justificatory force *sufficient to warrant belief independently of antecedent belief.* Michael Ayers has persuasively argued that perceptual experience has an independently authoritative role. He argues that cases similar to the one discussed in the text demonstrate that it can be proper to attribute knowledge to someone who "plumps for 'sense' in preference to 'reason'" and "when it comes to the question of whether someone's belief is well grounded ... their response to the deliverances of their senses is not just one item to be weighed in the scale together with their response to all the other considerations on one side or the other." Ayers, Michael, *Locke, Vol. I, Epistemology* (London, 1992), 171. For the moment, however, it is enough to see that their response to sensory experience is the right sort of

My aim in this chapter has been to assess whether Davidson's arguments against the perceptual justification of beliefs in "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" provide compelling considerations in favor of SCV, or against the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that concept-independent ways in which things are similar obtain. I have argued that Davidson's arguments are persuasive as against a justificatory role for non-intentional sense data, but not as against such a role for intentional, non-conceptual perceptual experience. I have further argued that while Davidsonian Coherentism is perhaps stronger than some critics have suggested, it suffers from a number of weaknesses, most fundamentally, its failure to provide an account of how humans can come to any justified positive assessment of their own mental states' epistemic merit. I therefore conclude that "A Coherence Theory of Truth an Knowledge offers no telling considerations in favor of SCV or against the sort of intentional, non-conceptual perceptual content which I am arguing we require to answer the Goodmanian Sceptic properly.

In Chapter 5 I shall assess the bearing of Davidson's "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" on sort of account of perceptual content that I favor.

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thing to have any weight at all.

## Chapter 5: Davidson and Non-Conceptual Content

In Chapter 2 I characterized and argued against the Shared Concept View of similarity. Chapters 3 and 4 took Davidson as an important example of a philosopher who espouses SCV and traced its effects on his philosophy. Chapter 4 specifically examined Davidson's "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," and concluded that the arguments therein against Foundationalism and in favor of Coherentism were not good grounds to accept Coherentism, nor were they grounds for rejecting the view of perceptual justification which I have been proposing, whereby the non-conceptual, intentional content of our experiences has a role in justifying our beliefs. Davidson's paper, I argued, offered no support for SCV.

Davidson rejects the idea of concept-independent similarity. Along with this, he rejects the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that concept-independent similarities obtain. The notions of non-conceptual content and concept-independent similarity are of a piece with the idea of the "dualism of total scheme (or language) and uninterpreted content," the latter being something "neutral and common which lies outside all schemes" rejected by Davidson in "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."[1] It will be my main contention in this chapter, however, that Davidson's arguments in that paper provide no good reason to reject (1) the idea of concept-independent similarity, or (2) the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that such similarities obtain. Indeed, it is the contention of this chapter along with Chapter 4 that because Davidson lacks good reason to reject (1) and (2), he should accept these notions or pay the unaffordable price described in Chapter 3 of being committed to an untenable account of inductive justification.

The conclusion of Chapters 3-5 together, then, will be that Davidson provides us with no good reason to eschew non-conceptual content as playing an important role in perceptual justification, and that we ought to embrace non-conceptual content. It will become clear in this chapter that to embrace non-conceptual content involves rejecting what I call "the

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[1]Davidson, Donald, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation*

Deductive Model of Empirical Justification" which maintains that (1) only something conceptually articulated can serve as a justifier, (2) the concepts involved in perceptual justification must have a relation like that between elements in a formally valid inference, and (3) empirical justificatory inference must be truth-preserving. To reject the "Deductive Model" is to reject Davidson's constraints on what could count as a good account of perceptual justification, and also, as I hope will become clear in this and my final chapter, to reject the idea that concepts and language are preconditions for all intentionality.

I shall argue in this chapter that although Davidson's arguments against the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes do not give us reason to reject non-conceptual content, he is correct to reject the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes employed by human beings. I shall suggest that the fact that there can be no alternative, incommensurable conceptual schemes springs from the fact that any conceptual scheme must serve to capture the same non-conceptual content, and thus could not be incommensurable to our own scheme.

**Some Context for "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme"**

"On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" contains arguments affecting quite a wide range of philosophical views. Our interest in the paper is limited to whether it provides reason to reject the notion of non-conceptual content. So my strategy will be to give a brief account of the main ideas behind the paper, then examine how some arguments from the paper tell specifically against the notion of non-conceptual content, and then assess these arguments. I shall argue that none of Davidson's arguments are persuasive against the sort of non-conceptual content that I think has an important role in perceptual justification.

Davidson describes his opposition as the view that there could be different groups of people who operate with conceptual repertoires which are incommensurable with our own conceptual repertoires. The general idea he opposes is that such a group would have a body of concepts the content of which could not be captured by or expressed by our concepts, but which would *be* a body of concepts nonetheless -- that is, it would be a body which somehow "organized" or "fit" either the world or experience. The details of such views will become clearer in the course of the chapter, although Davidson and I agree that they are ultimately

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(Oxford, 1984), 187.

incoherent.

Davidson's first step in sharpening our idea of the view he attacks is to point out the close connection between these bodies of concepts, or "conceptual schemes," and languages. He suggests

> "We may accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme ... where conceptual schemes differ, so do languages. But speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into the other."[2]

Davidson needs a criterion for identity of conceptual schemes, since he is arguing that there could not be alternative conceptual schemes (and ultimately that because the notion of *alternative* ones does not make sense, the idea that we have a conceptual scheme at all is not coherent). By associating conceptual schemes with sets of intertranslatable languages, Davidson provides himself with such a criterion. He argues that this association is reasonable because

> "If conceptual schemes aren't associated with languages in this way, the original problem is needlessly doubled, for then we would have to imagine the mind with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with *its* organizing structure. Under the circumstances we would certainly want to ask who is to be master."[3]

So, Davidson concludes, if the idea of incommensurable conceptual schemes makes sense, then the idea of languages that fail of intertranslatability must make sense also. Davidson attempts to show that because the latter idea is incoherent, the former idea is also incoherent.

We can become clearer about the task Davidson sets himself by examining a view of the sort he opposes. Notable among the positions he attacks is the conceptual relativism of Quine. Among the many consequences of Quine's rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction is a radical difference between his and his predecessors' views of the relation between sentences, language and meaning. For Quine, the meaning of any one sentence in a language depends on the meaning of many other sentences in a language. One way he expresses this fact is his claim that numerous, alternative, incompatible translation manuals for a native's language could make equally good sense of a native's utterances. When

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[2]Ibid. 184.

different translation manuals offer different accounts of what a particular sentence means, Quine argues, it is not that one just can not *discern* the real meaning, but rather that in such cases "there is no objective matter to be wrong about."[4] According to Quine's picture of language, the correct translation of any one sentence depends on how all the other sentences were translated. The connection between the indeterminacy of meaning and the rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction is evident in that if the meaning of a given sentence depends on the context of an entire language, then any one sentence couldn't correctly be said to be true or false in isolation from many other sentences.

For philosophers who accept the analytic/synthetic distinction, synthetic sentences are true or false by virtue of their meaning and their empirical content, while analytic sentences are true or false only by virtue of their meaning, as they are held to have no empirical content. For Quine, who rejects the distinction, *all* sentences have empirical content (or "empirical significance," as he would put it). Quine thinks of the empirical knowledge of a human subject as the product of something like a scientific theory applied to what he calls "the meager input" (or "evidence") of the senses.[5] Another way of putting this is that knowledge is the product of the way a conceptual scheme organizes empirical significance.

> "[W]e know external things only mediately through our senses ... physical things generally, however remote, become known to us only through the effects which they help to induce at our sensory surfaces."[6]

The "effects induced at our sensory surfaces" are the common "data" on the basis of which theories enable subjects to draw conclusions about the external world, while the "theories" are conceptual schemes.[7] These "meager" effects are the common element between translations of a native's language which differ only because of the indeterminacy of translation. They are the shared "data" upon which these conflicting theories are based. These sensory stimulations are "empirical significance."

It is now evident that "empirical significance" for Quine is different from the "representational content" that is given by a "that" clause for at least two reasons which we have discussed. First, the representational content of a native's utterance of "There's a

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[3]Ibid.
[4]Quine, W. V., *Word and Object* (Cambridge, Mass., 1960), 73.
[5]Ibid. 1.
[6]Ibid.
[7]For Quine, science, after all, "is self-conscious common sense." *Ibid.* 3.

rabbit" would differ when translation manuals used to understand the utterance differed. Empirical content, in contrast, is constant independently of what translation manual is used to understand an utterance. Second, the empirical content germane to an utterance of "There's a rabbit" would not consist merely of some local state of affairs that may have immediately led to his utterance (i.e., a rabbit's being there). Empirical significance cannot be allocated sentence by sentence. Rather, it is languages as wholes that have empirical significance. So the body of empirical significance germane to the understanding of the utterance would be the same body germane to the understanding of any of the speaker's utterances. The "content" of what I have been calling "non-conceptual, intentional content," then, is much more akin to "representational content" than to Quine's "empirical significance."

Quine is concerned to rid his philosophy of notions he considers dubious and unscientific, like meanings of words or sentences, analyticity, and the non-extensional in general. The idea of taking empirical significance to be the totality of a person's sensory stimuli thus appeals to him because he thinks they can be understood physically -- in terms of patterns on retinas, and the like. These stimuli consist of

> "... two dimensional optical projections and various impacts of air waves on the eardrums and some gaseous reactions in the nasal passages and a few kindred odds and ends."[8]

As this passage suggests, Quine's physicalistic leanings lead him to think of empirical significance as non-intentional. But his thinking of it in this way leads to a deep tension in his account of empirical knowledge. For Quine,

> "...physical things generally come known to us only through the effects which they help to induce at our sensory surfaces."[9]

But as I agreed with Davidson in Chapter 4, for the state of the empirical world to become known to us exclusively though our senses, our senses would have to represent it intentionally. So Quine must choose between thinking of sensory experience as intentional, and thus genuinely "data," or taking a Davidsonian line whereby the best experience could do would be to cause beliefs without justifying them. Non-intentional "data" isn't the right sort of thing to be "recalcitrant," "meager," or be our unique mode of access to the external world. Quine never seems to make that choice, and for this Davidson takes him to task.

Quine's "empirical significance," then, occupies a very awkward position. It is the

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[8]Quine, W. V., *The Roots of Reference* (La Salle, Illinois, 1974), 2.

neutral, common element lying outside and providing all the evidence for any theory about the empirical world. But it is not intentional, and thus doesn't itself represent the world as being any particular way, so it cannot be the basis for such theories. This results in confusions like that exemplified in the following passage:

> "The stimulation of his sensory receptors is all the evidence anybody has to go on, ultimately, in arriving at his picture of the world."[10]

There is a play on the word "evidence" here; in one sense it simply refers to the set of patterns on retinas and the like, but in another sense it is something that essentially represents the world to be a certain way. McDowell insightfully points out that in this passage Quine

> "impossibly tries to have it both ways -- to exploit the idea of experience as a tribunal that stands in judgment over beliefs, while conceiving experience so that it has to stand outside the order of justification."[11]

This is McDowell's way of saying that to conceive of experience merely physicalistically (as stimulations of sensory receptors understood just in terms of the laws of physics) is to conceive of it in a way that precludes its entering into rational relations or serving as evidence.

In a discussion of a passage written by B. L. Whorf, Davidson characterizes the idea of the conceptual scheme/empirical content dualism as having three required elements:

> "Here we have all the required elements: [1] language as the organizing force not to be clearly distinguished from science; [2] [something which is] organized referred to variously as 'experience,' 'the stream of sensory experience,' and 'physical evidence'; and finally [3] the failure of intertranslatability."[12]

All of these elements are present in Quine's work as well. Quine explains that

> "As an empiricist I ... think of the conceptual scheme of science as a tool for predicting future experience in the light of past experience."[13]

So our conceptual scheme allows us to make sense of our experience -- our empirical content

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[9]Quine, *Word and Object*, 1.
[10]Quine, W. V., "Epistemology Naturalized," *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays,* (New York, 1969), 75.
[11]McDowell, John, *Mind and World: with a New Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996), 137.
[12]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 190.
[13]Quine, W. V., "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, Mass., 1961), 44.

-- which enables us to predict future experience. The idea that there are external, physical objects is just a theory which aids prediction. What is most fundamentally predicted is the future course of sensory experience, or empirical significance. So here we have the first two elements, language as an organizing force, and experience which is organized by it.

We've seen that for philosophers inclined toward holism like Quine and Davidson, the meaning of any one concept in a scheme depends on its relations to a great many other concepts in the scheme. Given this view, when a new range of statements is accepted (or if a previously accepted range is rejected), this change will affect the relations between the concepts in the scheme, so the meanings of the concepts in the scheme will be altered. According to the kinds of views targeted by Davidson, this change of meaning renders the old statements held true incommensurable with the new statements held true. Kuhn is explicit about this, and it is also a feature of Quine's position.

> "In the transition from one theory to the next words change their meanings or conditions of applicability in subtle ways. Though most of the same signs are used before and after a revolution ... the way they attach to nature has somehow changed. Successive theories are thus, we say, incommensurable."[14]

Statements like, "An object's mass is independent of its speed" uttered by a Newtonian, and "An object's mass increases as it approaches the speed of light" uttered by an Einsteinian, do not contradict one another.[15] Indeed, they are "incommensurable," because although the statements share signs like "object," "mass," and "speed," those signs do not have meanings that remain constant in the two statements. This sort of view is evident in Quine's work when he writes things like

> "... to speak of that remote medium as radically different from ours is to say no more than that translations do not come smoothly."[16]

So the third of Davidson's "required elements," the failure of intertranslatability, is present Quine's philosophy as well.

Davidson summarizes the view he opposes as follows:

> "The idea is then that something is a language, and associated with a

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[14]Kuhn, T. S., "Reflections on My Critics," *Criticism and the Growth of Knowledge* (I. Lakatos and A. Musgrave (eds.), Cambridge, 1975), 266-67.

[15]This makes it difficult for Kuhn to explain how one theory displaces another, but such issues are beyond the scope of our inquiry.

[16]Quine, W. V., "Speaking of Objects," *Ontological Relativity and Other Essays* (New York, 1969), 25.

conceptual

> scheme, whether we can translate it or not, if it stands in a certain relation (predicting, organizing, facing, or fitting) experience (nature, reality, sensory promptings)."[17]

**Davidson on Conceptual Schemes**

As the title of his paper suggests, Davidson thinks that the very idea of a conceptual scheme is incoherent. He offers an array of arguments against various versions of the view that conceptual schemes play a role in our interface with the world. An initial strand of his case against conceptual schemes is his contention that holistic meaning change doesn't lead to incommensurability. He accepts that

> "Sometimes revisions in the list of sentences held true in a discipline are so central that we may feel that the terms involved have changed their meanings."[18]

But it simply doesn't follow that the new terms are incommensurable with the old ones.

> "... examples like these, impressive as they occasionally are, are not so extreme but that the changes and the contrasts can be explained and described using the equipment of a single language. ... Kuhn is brilliant at saying what things were like before the revolution using -- what else? -- our post-revolutionary idiom. Quine gives us a feel for the 'pre-individuative phase in the evolution of our conceptual scheme.'"[19]

The mere fact that the use of certain terms has changed is not a good basis on which to judge that there has been a change in conceptual scheme. For Davidson, when a large amount of background belief changes, terms' meanings will change holistically. But this is no reason to think that translatability will fail, and hence no reason to think that there will be a change in conceptual scheme.

> "So what sounded at first like a thrilling discovery -- that truth is relative to a conceptual scheme -- has not so far been shown to be

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[17]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 191.
[18]Ibid. 184.
[19]Ibid.

> anything more than the pedestrian and familiar fact that the truth of a sentence is relative to (among other things) the language to which it belongs. Instead of living in different worlds, Kuhn's scientists may, like those who need Webster's dictionary, be only words apart."[20]

Quine and Kuhn, then, have thus far failed to provide reason to think that there are alternative schemes. We are able to understand their proposed examples of alternative schemes, and that in itself is reason to think that they aren't alternative schemes at all. Furthermore, once we understand that holistic meaning change can be captured in ordinary translation, we can see that the prospects of such examples' supporting the conclusion that there could be Quine and Kuhn languages that fail of intertranslatability are dim. As yet we have no reason to accept that Davidson's third criterion for an alternative scheme can be satisfied.

An advocate of conceptual schemes might counter as follows: Although we as yet have been given no reason to accept the idea of alternative conceptual schemes, that is simply the fault of the examples provided. The cases described do not involve truly different schemes. However, we can see that the idea of alternative schemes makes sense because we can clearly imagine that there could be languages very different from our own, the content of which could not be capturable by our own. Although we could not translate such languages, we could understand that they are languages nonetheless because they would play the same role that is played by our own language in our interface with the world.

Davidson addresses this sort of view by examining various possible explanations of what "the role that is played by our own language in our interface with the world" is. He distinguishes two groups of the sorts of view he is attacking.

> "... conceptual schemes (languages) either *organize* something, or they *fit* it."[21]

He confronts these groups of views individually. He further subdivides them according to whether what is said to be either "organized" or "fit" is reality, on the one hand, or experience, on the other.

> "As for the entities that get organized, or which the scheme must fit, I think again we may detect two main ideas: either it is reality (the universe, the world, nature), or it is experience (the passing show,

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[20]Ibid. 189.

surface irritations, sensory promptings, sense data, the given)."[22]

The first subset of views in question, then, would hold that a conceptual scheme organizes the world. Davidson protests that this sort of view is incoherent.

> "We cannot attach a clear meaning to the notion of organizing a single object ... unless that object is understood to contain or consist in other objects."[23]

Davidson compares the notion of organizing the world with that of organizing a closet. He points out that while we understand what it is to organize the *contents* of a closet, it makes no sense to talk of organizing a single object, the closet itself. But for the analogy with organizing the world to be helpful, the latter would have to make sense. Davidson concludes that

> "the image of organizing the closet of nature will not supply ... a criterion of languagehood that [does] not depend on, or entail, translatability into a familiar idiom."[24]

Because for Davidson individuation requires prior conceptualization, the notion of the world being organized by a conceptual scheme involves the organization of a single object, and thus is unhelpful in telling us what a conceptual scheme is.

It might be suggested that at least part of the function of a conceptual scheme is to individuate, and that an incommensurable scheme would be one which individuates in a radically different manner from how our own scheme individuates. Davidson writes that

> "A language may contain simple predicates whose extensions are matched by no simple predicates, or even by any predicates at all, in some other language. What enables us to make this point in particular cases is an ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects. We can be clear about breakdowns in translation when they are local enough, for a background of generally successful translation provides what is needed to make failures intelligible. But we were after larger game: we wanted to make sense of there being a language we could not translate at all."[25]

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[21]Ibid. 191.
[22]Ibid. 191-92.
[23]Ibid. 192.
[24]Ibid.
[25]Ibid.

The idea is that we could make sense of a native's having a conceptual scheme which individuated in a manner different from ours only if his mode of individuation was on the whole the same as our own. But the less "local" sort of individuative differences we were looking for would not be "intelligible." So the notion of a radically different kind of individuation cannot provide us with what we were looking for: a criterion for languagehood independent of translatability into our own language.

Davidson finds the idea of conceptual schemes' "organizing experience" incoherent for the same reasons.

> "The notion of organization applies only to pluralities. But whatever pluralities we take experience to consist in ... we will have to individuate according to familiar principles. A language that organizes *such* entities must be a language very like our own."[26]

The matter is worse for organizing experience than for organizing the world, since something that organized only experiences would evidently fail to organize "forks, railroads, and mountains," which "surely" would need organizing as well on the proposed view.[27]

So Davidson moves on to considering the idea of a scheme's *fitting* the world or experience. He begins with the claim that

> "When we turn from talk of organization to talk of fitting we turn our attention from the referential apparatus of language ... to whole sentences. It is sentences that predict (or are used to predict), sentences that cope or deal with things, that fit our sensory promptings."[28]

He goes on to explain that "the general position we are considering ... is that sensory experience provides all the evidence for the acceptance of sentences."[29] So in considering views according to which conceptual schemes "fit" experience or the world, he is considering views according to which experience can justify empirical belief. Davidson argues that

> "A sentence or theory fits our sensory promptings ... [or] successfully faces the tribunal of experience ... provided it is borne out by the evidence."[30]

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[26]Ibid.
[27]Ibid.
[28]Ibid. 193.
[29]Ibid.
[30]Ibid.

Davidson explains that by "evidence' here, what is meant is "the totality of possible sensory evidence, past, present, and future."[31] so for a theory to fit the totality of possible evidence is just for it to be true. The idea of "fitting," then, ultimately adds nothing to the notion of being true. So on the account being considered, "the criterion of a conceptual scheme different from our own now becomes: largely true but not translatable."[32] The problem for the advocate of conceptual schemes, Davidson explains, is that we have no understanding "at all" of the notion of truth independent of the notion of translation into a language we know.[33]

For Davidson, our best understanding of truth is provided by Tarski's Convention T, according to which,

> "a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence S of L, a theorem of the form 'S is true if and only if p' where 'S' is replaced by a description of S and 'p' by S itself if L is in English, and by a translation of S in English if L is not in English."[34]

Convention T's explanation of truth depends on its use of the notion of "a translation of S into English."[35] So according to Davidson our best understanding of the notion of truth depends on our understanding of the notion of translation. If so, then we are unable to understand what it would be for a sentence to be true, but not translatable into a language we know.

> "Since Convention T embodies our best intuition as to how the concept of truth is used, there does not seem to be much hope for a test that a conceptual scheme is radically different from ours if that test depends on the assumption that we can divorce the notion of truth from that of translation."[36]

So the idea of "fitting" the world or experience does not provide us with a useful criterion for something's being a conceptual scheme. We still have no idea of how to recognize something as a conceptual scheme if it is not translatable into our own scheme.

Davidson's arguments together lead him to conclude that the very idea of a conceptual scheme is incoherent. Something incommensurable with our own language could

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[31]Ibid.
[32]Ibid. 194.
[33]Ibid.
[34]Tarski, Alfred, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," *Logic, Semantics, Metamathematics* (Oxford, 1956) 187-88.
[35]Of course a translation into any language we know would do.

not organize or predict the world or experience. We should not conclude from this that there is but one conceptual scheme, for

> "if we cannot intelligibly say that schemes are different, neither can we intelligibly say that they are one."[37]

So the very *idea* of a conceptual scheme is incoherent. We must abandon the idea of a distinction between empirical content (or "empirical significance") and conceptual scheme; there is no distinction to be made between an organizing system and something waiting to be organized. Davidson calls this "dualism" "the third dogma of empiricism."[38]

**On Davidson on the Idea of a Conceptual Scheme**

Our main interest in Davidson's arguments here is their applicability to the idea of non-conceptual intentional experiential content. I shall briefly assess Davidson's arguments, and then move on to reconstruct them as against this notion.

In spite of the *prima facie* tension between Davidson's paper and my view of empirical justification, I agree with much of what Davidson says. It will become clear in the course of this chapter that I think that human beings could not have radically different conceptual schemes. Davidson is right that the phenomenon of holistic meaning change does not give us good reason to conclude that the "new" language after such a change will be incommensurable with the "old" language that was its predecessor. As he points out, the conclusion just does not follow, and there are cases in which it seems possible to express what sentences mean in an "old" language by using sentences in a "new" one.

I also agree with Davidson that it makes no sense to talk of "organizing" a single, unified thing. I do not agree, however, that the world (or our experience of it) is such a thing. We perceive some aspects of it to be similar and others to be different independently of its being "organized" by a Quinean conceptual scheme or an individuating Davidsonian language, and, as Ayers has argued, we perceive it to be populated by individuals like grizzly bears and human beings.[39] This seems *prima facie* obvious, and a philosopher who denied it would have to the formidable task of explaining how a pre-linguistic child could come to

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[36]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 195.
[37]Ibid. 198.
[38]Ibid. 189.
[39]Ayers, Michael, "What is Realism?" unpublished manuscript (1996).

have a conceptual scheme or language if all he had to go on was a single, undifferentiated world. Surely such a single, undifferentiated object -- however it was ultimately characterized -- could not provide sufficient basis for learning a language.

Davidson follows Quine in holding that conceptualization must precede individuation. In Chapter 3 I noted my agreement with Ayers's rejection of this view. The idea of a logically monolithic world only brings into focus the incoherence of such a view. If, lacking a language or a conceptual scheme, all a human being perceived or had to go on in coping with the world was a single, undifferentiated thing, then there would be no basis on which to apply concepts or terms to that thing or to "aspects" of it. The view that conceptualization (or language learning) precedes any individuation is incoherent.

It may seem that Davidson actually agrees with me, and is in fact accusing Quine of the very error of which I am accusing him. This account of Davidson would have him saying that Quinean "organization" of a unity is impossible, and therefore the world as we encounter it must be a plurality. But that is not Davidson's point. His view is that the world is not a plurality until the elements it comprises are individuated by language. So in spite of his objection about "organization," Davidson nonetheless holds that our language plays a key role in our *individuation* of things in the world (though not in any *organization* of the world). Among other places, Davidson's conception of the individuative role of language is exhibited in the following passage:

> "[Isolated differences in the extensions of predicates in different languages make sense only on the background of] an ontology common to the two languages, with concepts that individuate the same objects. ... The notion of organization applies only to pluralities. But whatever plurality we take experience to consist in ... we will have to individuate according to familiar principles."[40]

So ontologies belong to languages -- they can be "common" between languages. Concepts individuate objects. Whatever plurality we take experience (or the world) to consist in must be individuated by such concepts. I think that a proponent of this sort of view faces a daunting question: On what basis could concepts individuate if any plurality in the world depends on prior individuation? It seems to me that if there is no plurality, then there is no basis for the application of concepts. If there *is* plurality, then all plurality does not depend

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[40]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 192.

on prior conceptual individuation. I shall return to this point presently.

I do not think that Davidson is sufficiently clear about why the limited sort of individuative differences that he countenances between languages do not provide us with some understanding of what a language with massive individuative differences would be like. There seems at least *prima facie* to be a distinction between what is understandable by some being, and what is expressible in English. Davidson, of course, is concerned to argue that such a distinction is ultimately unintelligible. He argues that

> "We can be clear about breakdowns in translation when they are local enough, for a background of generally successful translation provides what is needed to make the failures intelligible."[41]

The implication is that putative, less "local" differences in meaning are not intelligible, because there is no shared background of belief upon which to make them intelligible. But how "intelligible" should non-local differences in meaning have to be made before we can reasonably take them to provide us with some understanding of the idea of an alternative conceptual scheme? What sort of intelligibility must such putative differences in meaning have if we are to consider them possible? A background of beliefs shared by a speaker and an interpreter makes differences in utterances' meaning "intelligible" in the sense that we can express those differences in English. If there are any utterances of someone with an alternative conceptual scheme, they lack that sort of intelligibility. But clearly *that* kind of "intelligibility" is not to be expected or required of such utterances. Philosophers sometimes offer sound arguments of the form "The idea of an x is unintelligible, therefore there are no x's." But such arguments can be sound only because they are using "intelligible" in a sense different from the sense in which Davidson uses it. The idea of an x would be unintelligible in this distinct sense if its existence required a logical contradiction -- if it required that p and not-p. If something is "unintelligible" in this sense it could not exist. But being "unintelligible" in the sense that Davidson has argued that they are "unintelligible" is not reason to doubt their existence. Davidson provides no reason for thinking that such utterances are "unintelligible" in the stronger sense that they are logically incoherent and could not be understood by anyone.

We can allow Davidson's point that a putative statement made by someone said to have a different conceptual scheme should not be said to contradict any of our statements,

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[41]Ibid.

since disagreement depends on massive agreement. But surely a proponent of alternative schemes can agree with Davidson here. He would only need the claim that the person with an alternative scheme had made some statement. Davidson makes the strong claim that even this possibility is incoherent, but he only argues for the weaker conclusion that a person with an alternative scheme could not have made a statement expressible in English. So for all Davidson has said, his opponent can still point to the limited individuative differences (as distinct from *disagreements*) that Davidson countenances, and argue that if such differences were widespread, then translation would be impossible. The opponent's view could allow that we might not have grounds to *judge* that we were in the presence of someone with an alternative conceptual scheme: if we had no idea what they were saying, it is plausible that we could have no idea that they were saying anything. But that doesn't make the very *idea* of an alternative scheme incoherent.

This is fairly speculative. As I have mentioned, ultimately, I don't think that human beings could have incommensurably different conceptual schemes. But given Davidson's rejection of non-conceptual content, I don't see how he can answer the above objector's argument. So my point is not that I think there could be alternative schemes, but merely that Davidson seems to appeal to his conclusion here. Davidson's argument that radically different individuation could not lead to alternative conceptual schemes only follows if what is not expressible in English could not possibly be meaningful. But that is the matter in question: it is true if and only if the idea of an alternative conceptual scheme makes sense. At the end of this chapter I shall argue that humans could not have alternative conceptual schemes because empirical sentences must capture the content of experience, so "conceptual schemes" all must be able to capture at least a large range of the same content. But none of this can help Davidson in the present instance.

The second part of Davidson's argument against conceptual schemes concerns the idea that conceptual schemes "fit" experience or the world. He claims that

> "the problem with the notion of fitting the totality of experience ... is that it adds nothing to the simple concept of being true."[42]

It is only on the basis of this premise that he can go on to argue that our best understanding of "fitting" depends on the notion of translation into a language we know. Davidson does not

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[42]Ibid. 193-94.

linger on the claim cited above, but it is quite significant for our purposes. It entails that all content is linguistic, and hence that there is no non-conceptual content. Yet Davidson provides little argument for it.

I think there is an intuitive sense in which the content of our perceptual experience can be said to "fit" the world, or fail to do so. If things are as they are presented to us -- if there are things with certain colors, shapes and sizes configured in particular ways, at particular distances from us (and so on) -- then our perceptual experience is satisfied. This is not simply another way of saying that our perceptual experience is "true." Linguistic items like propositions, sentences, and statements are said to be "true" or "false," but experiences are not. If we can understand the content of perceptual experience to be the sort of thing that can "fit" the world without being the sort of thing that can be true or false, then Davidson has not provided sufficient grounds for his views that our only real understanding of "fitting" depends on the notion of translation into a language we know, and that the idea of "fitting" cannot form the basis of the idea of an alternative conceptual scheme.

We could, of course, use the term "truth" broadly to include the sense in which the content of perceptual experience might be said to be "true," but in *this* sense Convention T would not "embody our best intuition of how the concept of truth is used."[43] Convention T cannot help us understand experiences' satisfaction. According to Convention T,

> "a satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence S of L, a theorem of the form 'S is true if and only if p' where 'S' is replaced by a description of S and 'p' by S itself if L is in English, and by a translation of S into English if L is not in English."[44]

Convention T aids our understanding of the concept of truth in a particular language L by providing a test for theories of truth for that language. Such truth theories yield T-sentences, which mention particular sentences and then use sentences which give the truth-conditions of the mentioned sentences. But an experience is not a sentence, and is not in any "language L" -- or at the very least, it is not in a language L the sentences of which can be "mentioned" (or otherwise extensionally described) in T-sentences that satisfied Convention T. You can't "mention" an experience disquotationally as you can a sentence. So Convention T does not aid our understanding of the notion of "a true experience," and it does not provide our best understanding of what it would be for an experience to "fit" the world.

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[43]Ibid. 195.

There could not be a "Tarskian theory of satisfaction" which yielded T-sentences that mentioned experiences and then somehow gave the satisfaction conditions of those experiences. Because of this, Convention T could not be modified to apply to T-sentences providing the content of particular experiences, and thus "embody our best intuition" as to how the concept of satisfaction is used, since there could be no theory to which it applied.

Such a "Tarskian theory of satisfaction" would have to yield T-sentences that provided (1) extensional descriptions of sets of experiences which shared experiential content and (2) sentences (or something else) for each set which gave "truth"-conditions of those experiences. ((1) and (2) would go on the left and right sides of the biconditional respectively.) The prospects for providing either (1) or (2) are dim.

Because a traditional Tarskian truth theory aims to provide the truth-conditions of the sentences of L, the sentence-types of L which go on the left side of the biconditional must be designated extensionally. This can easily be accomplished by replacing "S" with a disquotational description of S. This designates all token sentences of the type that comprises the words mentioned in the order they are mentioned. A *sentence*-type can easily be designated so. But a set of experiences that share content cannot be given an extensional designation so easily: an "experience-type" cannot be referred to extensionally simply by putting quotation marks around some particular experience. If the set of experiences were designated *intensionally*, the "T-sentences" of the resulting "Tarskian theory of satisfaction" would of course be uninformative, as is "Experiences as of cats on mats are satisfied if and only if cats are on mats."

On the other side of the biconditional, a Tarskian truth theory for a language provides for "p" to be replaced by the mentioned sentence "S itself if L is in English, and by a translation of S into English if L is not in English."[45] This provides the content of the mentioned sentence. But again matters would not be so simple for a Tarskian satisfaction theory for experience. For one thing it would not make sense to talk of "a translation of E." Although some of the content of experience can be captured in English, it would be wrong to say that experiences can be *in* English, or any other language. So what would go on the right side of a "Tarskian theory of satisfaction"?

In a sense, then, the most literal analogue for satisfaction of a Tarskian theory of truth would have "p" replaced by "E itself." On such a theory of satisfaction of experience, I

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[44]Tarski, "The Concept of Truth in Formalized Languages," 187-88.

suppose, the content of T-sentences would be given by somehow providing the interested party with an experience with perceptual content that gave the satisfaction conditions of the experience extensionally specified to the left of the biconditional. If we put aside the bewildering question of how this theory might be presented, we can see that even if such presentation were accomplished, it would not follow from this theory that the concept of satisfaction is best understood in terms of translation into a language we know: the content, in this case, would be given by providing an experience, not by providing something translatable into a language we know.

A different, more feasible, analogue for satisfaction of a Tarskian theory of truth might yield T-sentences that replaced "p" with a sentence or proposition. Such T-sentences would give the content of experiences in a conceptually articulated form. But there are serious problems for this approach as well. Most obviously, if the meta-language (i.e., the language in which the theory is stated) were English or translatable into English, then this approach would assume that satisfaction conditions can always be captured in terms of propositions in English being true. But that is just to assume that all "fitting" or "satisfaction" is analyzable in terms of truth in a language we know. Alternatively, a theory might make only the weaker claim that the content of experience can be given by a proposition in some conceptual scheme or other. But even this weaker theory just assumes that "fitting" or "satisfaction" is always best understood in terms of truth in some language. This weaker claim may be true, but as yet we have no argument for it. And even if the weaker claim were shown to be true, it would remain for Davidson to argue that the concepts of any language are translatable into English. Failing this, he would not have shown that satisfaction can be understood in terms of translation into a language we know.

Tarski's original insight was the obvious fact that the totality of true T-sentences in a language captures the extension of the concept of truth for that language. But as applied to satisfaction, Convention T no longer captures an obvious fact. It is not obvious that the totality of T-sentences about what propositionally described states of the world satisfy various experiences would capture the extension of the concept of satisfaction. So Convention T will not serve as a test for theories of satisfaction in the way that it does for theories of truth.

A final problem for the proposed sort of "Tarskian theory of satisfaction" and the

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[45]Ibid.

prospects for an understanding of satisfaction based on a modified Convention T is that no description picking out a set of experiences could form the left side of a T-sentence the right side of which was informative. It is straightforwardly possible to wonder what the content of some well-specified sentence-type is. Often when I encounter a sentence in Japanese, I wonder what it means. A person can hear or see a sentence perspicuously without knowing what it means. Such a person can be informed by a T-sentence that mentions the sentence he wonders about. But matters are different for perceptual experiences. One cannot in the same way have a perceptual experience and wonder what the non-conceptual content of that experience is.[46] Part of what it is to have a perceptual experience is to know what the content of that experience is.[47] Interpreters of sentences, then, bear very different relations to the representations and content with which they deal than enjoyers of experiences do. With this in mind, we can see that "a Tarskian theory of satisfaction" applied to experiences could not possibly be informative. If you are enjoying a token experience, you *ipso facto* do not need a theory of satisfaction for that experience. Similarly, once an experience has been sufficiently picked out by the left side of a T-sentence, there is nothing informative for the right side to say that we do not already know.

A "T-sentence" for a set of experiences would either fail to pick out a set of experiences that shared content, or would fail to be informative. In either case, it would not be helpful to our understanding of satisfaction. Any specification of the set of experiences the satisfaction conditions of which were given by the T-sentence would have *itself* to provide those conditions of satisfaction, or it would fail to specify the relevant set.[48]

The idea of "a Tarskian theory of satisfaction" is not coherent. It follows that a test for such a theory in the form of a "modified Convention T" is useless in the understanding of the concept of satisfaction. So *contra* Davidson, cases of perceptual experience's being

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[46]Though of course one can have a perceptual experience of an object and wonder what that object is.

[47]Though of course that need not entail that one has any concept of "content."

[48] One might think that a set of experiences could be specified as "the set of experiences which one has while facing scene x from location L." But there are any number of different experiences with contradictory satisfaction conditions that one could have while facing scene x from location L. Much of the point of the concept of satisfaction is the possibility that when one is facing scene x from location L, one can have a misleading experience with conditions of satisfaction different from those an observer might have expected. If a theory of satisfaction made use of a *ceteris paribus* clause, any understanding of the extension of the concept of satisfaction would be lost -- just as any understanding of the extension of the concept of truth would be lost if one's theory of truth entailed T-sentences like "'Snow is white' is normally true if snow is white." In such a case, the totality of true T-sentences would not uniquely determine the extension of the concept of truth for English. Equally, the totality of true T-sentences in a "Tarskian theory of satisfaction" would not determine the extension of the concept of satisfaction. As I have mentioned, the set of experiences could be picked out intensionally, but that would rob the theory of any informative power.

satisfied are cases where something "fits" the world which cannot be best understood in terms of the notions of truth or translation.[49] If we can understand satisfaction independently of truth in our language, then there is no reason to think that we could not understand at least "the very idea" of creatures, perhaps with sensory mechanisms very different from our own, whose experiences the satisfaction conditions of which could not be expressed in English, but which could obtain nonetheless. From there it would seem a short step to conceiving the possibility that such creatures could make utterances the truth-conditions of which selected aspects of the conditions of satisfaction of their experiences.

**Non-conceptual Content and "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme"**

It is not crucial to this dissertation whether or not the very idea of a conceptual scheme is coherent. What *is* crucial is whether or not Davidson has provided good grounds for rejecting of the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content. The preceding discussion has suggested some reasons for thinking that Davidson has not. In the following sections, I shall reconstruct three arguments based on "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" that are aimed specifically against the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content, and argue that none of the three can be made sound.

We've seen that Davidson holds that having a conceptual scheme should be associated with speaking one of a set of intertranslatable languages. He argues that

> "If conceptual schemes aren't associated with languages in this way the original problem is needlessly doubled, for then we would have to imagine the mind, with its ordinary categories, operating with a language with *its* organizing structure. Under the circumstances we would certainly want to ask who is to be master."[50]

Davidson's reasonable thought is that it is more explanatorily economical (and simply more plausible) to suppose that the mind does not operate with two quite different structures for dealing with content -- one that of language, and, an opposing one, that of concepts. This reasonable thought suggests an argument against non-conceptual content: It is most plausible

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[49]The implications for Davidson's philosophy are that he has failed to use a Tarskian truth theory to explain all intentionality. His striving for that goal appears to be what pushed him toward an untenable view of perceptual justification. None of my objections, so far as I can see, have negative implications for his related but independent goal of providing a theory of meaning for natural languages based on Convention T.

[50]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 184.

to think that there are not multiple "organizing structures" which underlie linguistic content, on the one hand, and perceptual content, on the other. Therefore, according to the argument, we should take it that there is only one organizing structure, that of our concepts, which makes possible both perceptual and linguistic content. So we should reject the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content.

I think Davidson is right that it is sensible to hold that concepts and language should be closely associated with one another. A philosopher who held that the categories of concepts and language somehow "cross-cut" would have to explain how the organizing systems of concepts and language were related, and why language expresses thought so well. But reasons for holding this sensible view should not be mistaken for a reason to reject non-conceptual perceptual content. On the view of non-conceptual content I recommend, non-conceptual content does not depend on an "organizing structure" that somehow competes with that of our concepts or language. It offers no competing system of classification. Perceptual content offers information about particular ways that particular things are. No generalizing system which groups things into classes is involved. In offering information about ways things are, there is, in a sense, a substance/attribute "structure" to non-conceptual content. Non-conceptual content in this sense mirrors the fact that the world is populated by things with properties. But that "structure" is in no way in competition with the structure of language or concepts -- language also mirrors the same fact about the world.

Non-conceptual content depends on no structure that competes with the structure of concepts or conceptual content. One way to see this is to notice that sentences or thoughts about the world organized by the structure of language or our concepts can express some of the non-conceptual content of our perceptual experience. Similarly, an assertion or a thought can be warranted by an experience with relevant non-conceptual content. The truth conditions of the sentence "There is a shiny blue sphere just in front of me" can also be among the satisfaction conditions of my perceptual experience. If I have an experience the satisfaction conditions of which include that there is such an object there, then this experience could justify my belief that there is a shiny blue sphere just in front of me, or my assertion to that effect. If the content of perception depended on an organizing structure that was in competition with that of language these facts would be difficult to explain. There is no need here to ask of perceptual and linguistic content "who is to be master," so the present distinction does not face the difficulty Davidson had in mind in his discussion of a putative

distinction between conceptual and linguistic "organizing structures."

On my view, the "content" in conceptual and non-conceptual content can be the same, at least in part. Non-conceptual content is very particular and fine-grained -- perception conveys the particular state of particular things -- whereas conceptual content generally involves the classification of particular things -- saying that there is a shiny, blue sphere just in front of me exploits the classes shiny, blue, and spherical. But these facts do not prevent the latter conceptual statement being warranted by the former perceptual state. I do not consider it implausible to countenance two distinct vehicles of content, i.e., perceptual experience on the one hand, and language on the other. For one thing, it is plainly evident that when we obtain information about the state of the world through perceptual experience, we obtain it in a different manner than we would if we obtained similar information through testimony, not because of the irrelevant fact that the latter requires an utterance by someone, but for the same reason that a picture (or a tactile sensation) is worth one thousand words: the content is presented differently.

Allowing that concepts are not a precondition for content-bearing perceptual experiences helps explain our phylogenetic and ontogenetic development, and in particular, individual human beings' ability to learn language. It is simply implausible that one could learn language (or, "acquire" it) before one obtained the capacity to be aware of anything in the world. But anyone who holds that concepts and language are a precondition for content-bearing perceptual experiences is committed to just that view. If one can have intentional states without having learned language, then there must be non-conceptual content. I shall say more about this in my final chapter, in which I shall argue that rejecting non-conceptual content either commits one to a form of idealism or renders impossible an account of perceptual justification. For now it is enough to see that countenancing non-conceptual content does not commit one to an "organizing structure" that is in competition with the structure of language. Although to hold that there is a single organizing structure that makes possible all intentional content might make for a simpler theory, such theoretical considerations are not telling in cases where it is not at all clear how such a simpler theory could be true.

A second argument against non-conceptual content could be constructed from considerations from "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme." Davidson argues that the idea of a conceptual scheme "fitting" the world "adds nothing intelligible to the simple

concept of being true,"[51] and that "our best intuition as to how the concept of truth is used" makes "essential use of the notion of translation into a language we know."[52] In a Davidsonian spirit, then, one might argue as follows: Content by nature must be in the line of "fitting" the world (though it may fail to do so). We can only understand "fitting" in terms of being true, and truth is best understood in terms of translation into a language we know. Truth and translation are linguistic notions. Content, then, must also be a linguistic notion. The idea of non-conceptual content, then, is not coherent, since on the one hand it tries to be a linguistic notion which "fits" the world, but on the other opposed to linguistic notions by being non-conceptual.

I discussed these issues at some length in my assessment of Davidson's overall argument in his paper. It will be clear in the light of that discussion that I do not think Davidson has provided grounds for ruling out a notion of veridicality conditions distinct from the notions of truth and translation. If this is correct, then the argument fails because "fitting" is revealed not to be exclusively a linguistic notion. It is not the case that something in the business of "fitting" *ipso facto* must be conceptually articulated.

A final argument against non-conceptual content follows more obviously from Davidson's discussion of what he takes to be concepts' essential role in the mind's "grapple" with reality. He raises "the idea that *any* language distorts reality," and argues that on such a view

> "[I]f the mind can grapple without distortion with the real, the mind itself must be without categories and concepts. This featureless self is familiar from theories in quite different parts of the philosophical landscape. There are, for example, theories that make freedom consist in decisions taken apart from all desires, habits, and dispositions of the agent; and theories of knowledge that suggest that the mind can observe the totality of its own perceptions and ideas. In each case, the mind is divorced from the traits that constitute it; an inescapable conclusion from certain lines of reasoning ... but one that should always persuade us to reject the premises."[53]

A defender of non-conceptual content, of course, need not hold the unattractive view that

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[51]Ibid. 194.
[52]Ibid. 195.
[53]Ibid. 185.

"any language distorts reality." Among other things, such a view would render mysterious any justifying relation between non-conceptual experiential content and sentences or conceptual thoughts. But even in the absence of that unattractive view we could imagine an argument against non-conceptual content in the spirit of the above passage: If there can be non-conceptual content then the mind can grapple with the real without categories and concepts. This implies that the mind can be divorced from the traits that constitute it, and this is absurd. So there can be no non-conceptual content.

The first question to ask about this argument is how much of the mind's activity counts as "grappling with the real." It would be possible to construe this phrase as only applying to specifically conceptual activities. In that case the mind's being able to grapple with reality without categories and concepts has no bearing on the existence of non-conceptual content. So the argument understood in this way provides no reason for rejecting non-conceptual content. Davidson, on the other hand, seems to take "grappling with the real" to include all of the mind's interactions with and representations of the world. Only on this understanding would he be correct to claim that if any language distorts reality and the mind grapples with the world without distortion then the mind itself is without categories and concepts. But on this understanding of "grappling with the real," the argument against non-conceptual content would only follow on the additional premise that the idea of divorcing categories and concepts from even a single operation of the mind is absurd. But without further argument, we have no reason to accept this premise -- such a premise, after all, would *by itself* entail that there is no non-conceptual content, or at least would do most of the work in an argument against non-conceptual content. So the argument at hand, understood in this second way, provides no grounds for rejecting non-conceptual content either.

Davidson seems to think the view that there could be intentional mental states without concepts or language must be committed to the mind's being "divorced from the traits that constitute it."[54] How best to understand this depends on whether he takes concepts to *exhaustively* constitute the mind. If he holds that concepts are not exhaustively constitutive of the mind, then it does not follow that the mind's operating independently of them is "absurd." If he holds that concepts *are* exhaustively constitutive of the mind, then the mind's operating independently of them would indeed be absurd. But why should we think that concepts are exhaustively constitutive of the mind? Davidson has given no reason for us to

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[54]Ibid.

think so. In the above passage he associates a languageless mind with a featureless self. Barry Stroud, among others, has pointed out a problem for philosophers who take minds to be exhaustively constituted by concepts or mental representations.[55] A full account of the mind, if there can be such a thing, would have to explain not only our concepts or representations, but also how we grasp or understand those concepts or representations. If one tries to explain our grasp of concepts or representations by simply attributing more concepts or representations, this will lead to regress. My suggestion here is not, of course, that non-conceptual content somehow explains how we grasp concepts. Rather, it is that Davidson is mistaken if he indeed believes that a conceptless mind is a featureless mind.

It would be open to Davidson to hold that concepts are essential to all operations of the mind, but not exhaustive of the mind itself. But the merits of such a view would depend on as-yet-unprovided reasons for holding it. For all that has been said so far, Davidson's discussion of "the featureless self" provides no reason to reject non-conceptual content.

Shortly after the above passage, Davidson claims that

> "Languages we will not think of as separable from souls; speaking a language is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought."[56]

This is phrased as a pronouncement rather than an argument. The latter clause is surely insufficient reason to endorse the former. Claims like these make one wonder about Davidson's view of pre-linguistic children. Perhaps he takes his pronouncement to be justified by his preceding discussion of "the featureless self." In any case, the passage provides no good reason to reject the idea of non-conceptual content.

The idea that a conceptless self is a featureless self does not seem to allow properly for the contribution to our perceptual experience made by the world. How things are -- what we are "grappling with" -- makes an important contribution to those grapples. In veridical, non-conceptual experience we are open to how particular things are. There is, then, an enabling condition on "both sides," so to speak: there is a conscious perceiver with her point of view, and a world that has a certain nature. This scenario involves neither a featureless self nor a featureless world -- though there is no reason to think that it could not involve a *conceptless* self. The perceiver must have the sensory capacities to take in the aspects of how

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[55]Stroud, Barry, "The Background of Thought," *John Searle and his Critics* (E. LePore & R. van Gulick (eds.) Oxford, 1991).

[56]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 185.

things are that she does take in. But what she takes in perceptually -- which includes *that* things are similar, *degrees* to which things are similar, and *how* things are similar -- at least often is not dependent on prior concept possession.

Someone who holds that a conceptless self is a featureless self will have a difficult time explaining how language could possibly be learned. Such a philosopher would be committed to the view that one can learn a language without a mind or, perhaps more sympathetically, that an animal without a mind could acquire language. On such a view, I suppose, an infant would suffer merely causal impacts (on his brain, presumably) for a few years, until it was caused to have a mind and understand language, which, of course, would be said to amount to the same thing. Remember that because of his holism, a Davidsonian could not hold that an infant came to understand words and acquire concepts one-by-one; it is only in the context of a whole language that a particular word has meaning or concept has content. So, as I believe Davidson himself has put it, the infant does not "learn language gradually," but rather "gradually learns language." Of course even this clever formulation is not quite right, because "learning" implies that there is a mind doing the learning (could a merely causal process be considered "learning"?), whereas on the present view, there would be no such mind until the "learning" was finished. Before that time the infant would have no desires, fears, curiosities, or intentional perceptual experiences, and what seem like the speech acts of an infant with a very small vocabulary would only properly be understood causally.

It seems far more plausible to me to think that there is a larger degree of continuity between the mental activity of animals, infants and adults. On this alternative view, at least some higher mammals would enjoy non-conceptual intentional perceptual experience. Language would be learned by infants on the basis of such experiences. Higher mammals would be held to have the ability to individuate "middle-sized" objects, including, in particular, other animals, independently of learning language. Infants, then, who uttered "mama" could plausibly be held to be referring to a human being they recognized, and, thus, could be said to learn at least parts of language gradually. An infant could desire a particular thing (her bottle, or a brightly coloured object) without knowing a word for it, or indeed without having any idea what it was.

Patently, what "seems plausible to me" may be wrong. The preceding two paragraphs may be more of an appeal to intuition than an argument. But we should remember where we

are with respect to Davidson's account of the mind. It is not as though the implausibility of the Davidsonian picture of language learning, phylogenic and ontogenetic mental continuity sketched above is the price we must pay for a satisfying Davidsonian account of empirical knowledge. I have argued in Chapters 3 and 4 that Davidson's account of concepts, content and perception leaves him with untenable accounts of induction and empirical knowledge. The proposed alternative promises better accounts of induction and empirical knowledge in addition to the benefits alluded to just above.

## The Deductive Model of Empirical Justification

In this chapter I have been concerned to defend the claim that non-conceptual perceptual content plays an important role in justifying our empirical beliefs. That claim, of course, is in conflict with Davidson's coherentism about the justification of empirical beliefs. But more interestingly, it is in conflict with Davidson's view of what an account of perceptual justification would have to be like. This underlying model of what perceptual justification would have to be like, which is adhered to by a number of philosophers including Davidson and McDowell, leads Davidson to the coherentist account of empirical justification which I addressed in Chapter 4. One might call this underlying model the "Deductive Model of Empirical Justification" (or simply, "the Deductive Model"). In this section I shall describe the Deductive Model, and outline an alternative possible understanding of perceptual justification that becomes possible when the assumptions underlying the Deductive Model are rejected.

The Deductive Model is characterized by three related views which are often implicitly assumed. The first is that all justifiers must be conceptually articulated -- that is, all of their content must be propositional. This is taken to hold whether the justifiers are experiences, beliefs, sentences, memories, or anything else. A philosopher who espouses the Deductive Model might think that experiences cannot serve as justifiers, and might explain that view by saying that it is experiences' failure to be conceptually articulated that renders them unacceptable as putative justifiers.

The second view characteristic of the Deductive Model is that in justificatory relations, like those between experiences and beliefs, concepts in the justifiers must be related to concepts in the justified beliefs in the same manner that elements are related in formally

valid inferences. For example, a "conceptually articulated experience" that there is a cat on a mat in front of me might justify my belief that there is a cat on a mat in front of me.[57] Some such relation between the concepts of conceptually articulated entities is taken to be essential to all justification.

A third view characteristic of the Deductive Model is that empirical justificatory inferences must be truth-preserving. This view is akin to its partners. Someone who holds that justificatory relations must be truth-preserving will think that justifiers must be propositional and therefore comprised of concepts, since only propositional or linguistic things can be true or false. Concepts used by both the premises and conclusion of a formally valid inference often enable a logician to determine that it is valid, or truth preserving. Similarly, concepts that are part of both propositional experiences and the beliefs they justify could be said to enable such experiences and beliefs to have truth-preserving relationships.

I do not intend the Deductive Model to be contrasted with any "inductive model" of perceptual justification. The Deductive Model is "deductive" because it holds that in justificatory relationships, conceptually articulated premises must be related as they are in a deductive inference. It would be possible for a Deductive Model theorist to give an account of induction in the spirit of his assumptions (though I do not think that such an account could ultimately be plausible). On such an account, a subject's inductive inferences might be based on conceptually articulated perceptual experiences (or, in Davidson's case, on beliefs merely caused by perception and then justified by their coherence with other beliefs). Repeated experiences (or merely caused beliefs) that there is a green emerald here, and a lack of experiences (or merely caused beliefs) that there was a non-green emerald here would lead the subject to conclude that all emeralds are green. This would be an account of induction in that it would explain generalizations on the basis of multiple particular observations. But it would be within the Deductive Model because the only justificatory relations it countenanced would be made possible by the concepts shared by its premises and conclusion. Justification, here, remains an exclusively conceptual matter. Predictably, this account of induction would founder on the New Riddle, but that is not the present point.

Davidson's position that "fitting" must be understood in terms of being true leads to the Deductive Model because it rules out the possibility of our beliefs' "fitting" our non-

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[57]Or, say I had the prior, justified belief that if I could feel my blindfold then there was a cat on a mat in front of me. In that case, my experience that I could feel my blindfold would justify my belief that there was a cat on a mat in front of me.

conceptual perceptual experiences of how things are. If all "fitting" must be understood in terms of truth, then our beliefs could only "fit" conceptual, propositional entities. Justifying relationships, then, must be between conceptually articulated entities. At this point, Davidson's view that sense data are not conceptually articulated leads him to coherentism, since they could not enter into justifying relationships as the Deductive Model understands such relationships. Unconceptualized sense data could cause beliefs, but not justify them.

John McDowell, following Davidson to an extent, similarly subscribes to the Deductive Model. He argues that

> "We cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgment is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities. The attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do."[58]

But McDowell is understandably unhappy with Davidson's eschewing perceptual justification altogether. So he holds that perceptual experience *is* conceptually articulated, and thus gives an account of perceptual justification compatible with the Deductive Model. In my final chapter I shall criticize this account.

To embrace non-conceptual perceptual content as having a role in the justification of our empirical beliefs is to reject the Deductive Model. If non-conceptual perceptual content has a justificatory role, then not all justifiers must be conceptually articulated. There will be cases in which the relation between justifier and justified do not depend on concepts they share (in the sense that the premises and conclusion of a formally valid inference do share concepts). And, as non-conceptual content is not the sort of thing to be true or false, justificatory inferences need not be truth-preserving.

On my account, some justificatory relations, prominent among them relations between judgments or beliefs and the perceptual experiences and memories which justify them, have non-conceptual "premises." To put things in this way is awkward, however, because something's being a "premise" suggests that it is conceptually articulated. We might say instead that some judgments have a rational, non-conceptual *basis*. In such judgments, the

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[58]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 7.

basis for judgment is not "true," so the relation between the judgment and its basis cannot be "truth-preserving." But because the basis is *intentional,* that basis does represent the world as being a certain way. So the relation *can* be what we might call "veridicality preserving" -- that is, a judgment part of the basis of which is non-conceptual can be such that if the basis is veridical, then the conclusion will also be veridical. A veridical conclusion, if it is conceptually articulated, will simply be true.

The idea of a distinction between veridical conclusions and true ones raises another issue: If "premises," or bases for judgment, can be non-conceptual, then can conclusions be non-conceptual as well? There are several views opposed to the Deductive Model, and which kind of view one holds will depend on how one answers this question. The weakest view, I suppose, would be silent on the issue, and simply hold that there must be non-conceptual "premises" in order for an account of perception to avoid eventually leading to problems with the New Riddle of Induction. An alternative view that departs only to an extent from the spirit of the Deductive Model is that judgments themselves are always conceptually articulated, although they can have non-conceptual bases.

But a third view which I find attractive would take it as reasonable that if one can have veridical, non-conceptual experience, then, equally, one can "judge" that things just are as they appear. On this view, then, "conclusions" that we reach about the state of the world need not be conceptually articulated either. So long as we accept an intentional representation as veridical, we have in a sense "taken a stand" about the state of the world, and reached a conclusion about how the world is. If one rejects the Deductive Model by countenancing non-conceptual intentional content, then there seems to me to be no good reason to hold back from countenancing the possibility of non-conceptual "judgments" as well.

In the above paragraph I have put "judge," "conclusions," and "take a stand" in quotes because I think they suggest a more active mental process than what occurs at least in many cases. Sometimes, humans deliberate carefully before judging that the world is as their experience presents it. But much more often we simply accept that the world is as we experience it to be. In such cases, we do in a sense "take a stand" about how the world is, inasmuch as we believe that it is a certain way -- the way it has been presented. But to speak of our "judging" or "inferring" these beliefs is to go too far; in many cases, we just accept

that things are as they appear.[59]

Although the issue of non-conceptual conclusions or beliefs is interesting and germane to the present discussion, I would like to return to and give proper emphasis to the previous point. A central concern of this thesis has been to refute the view that all content must be conceptual content. The idea that warranted beliefs and judgments must enjoy justification and such justification must be a relation between conceptually articulated things helps motivate this rejected view. In the last three chapters I have tried to emphasize that it is experience's being *intentional* that is essential to its having a justificatory role, not its being *conceptually articulated.* This point is of course interesting of its own accord. But once we accept it, we have the option of holding that non-conceptual experiences representing the world to be a certain way can enter into justificatory relations with conceptually articulated beliefs (or *not*-conceptually-articulated beliefs). If it is a thing's being intentional rather than its being conceptually articulated that makes that thing a potential justifier, then one of the main motivations for holding that perceptual content must be conceptually articulated can be set aside harmlessly -- indeed, helpfully.

We should not think that for a conceptually articulated belief to be perceptually justified it must be grounded by truth-preserving inferences. Rather, for such a belief to be perceptually justified it must be grounded by a "veridicality-preserving" account of how the world is -- where this "veridicality" includes both "linguistic veridicality," i.e., truth of conceptually articulated beliefs or judgments, and the non-linguistic veridicality of non-conceptual perceptual states. To take a particular case, a conceptually articulated belief or judgment might be grounded by non-conceptual intentional experience in something like the following manner:

> (1) My non-conceptual, intentional perceptual experience is that things are a certain way. (Among many other things), this perceptual experience represents there to be an object with a particular size, shape, color, weight, luminescence, (etc.) just in front of me.
> (2) I know that these characteristics are characteristics of lamps, and that none of them are incompatible with that object's being a lamp.

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[59]Michael Ayers argues convincingly that our non-deliberative acceptance of the deliverances of our senses is nonetheless "epistemologically respectable." Ayers, Michael, "Does Perceptual Knowledge have Independent Authority?" *Locke Vol. 1, Epistemology* (London, 1992). See in particular p. 169.

(3) I have no reason to take this experience to be misleading.

(C) So I justifiably believe that there's a lamp in front of me.

My inference from (1), (2) and (3) to (C) "preserves veridicality." This is because given my circumstances I can maintain that (1) - (3) are veridical most simply by believing (C) -- though this inference is of course not strictly valid in the sense that (C) *must* be true if (1) - (3) are veridical.

From a 3rd person perspective matters are only slightly more complicated. If John has an experience like that involved in (1) which is veridical, and (2) and (3) are true of him then (C) will generally be true of him. A sceptically-minded philosopher, however, will at this point be itching to interject that (1) through (3) could be veridical if the object being perceived were a "lamp-like non-lamp" rather than a true lamp, and in such a case (C) might be false. This objection is reasonable enough, so we can add:

(4) There are no lamp-like non-lamps in the vicinity.

That way, if (1) through (4) are veridical, then (C) will be true of necessity. An inference from (1) through (4) to (C) will "preserve veridicality" in the sense I have in mind.

The addition of (4) complicates matters somewhat. In the first person case, without a reason to believe (4), I will not be fully justified in believing that there is a lamp in front of me. But, it seems, my having a reason to believe (4) would at some point require my having perceptual justification for (4), and such justification would depend on more premises like (4). Circularity looms. Does this present a problem for an account of perceptual justification based in part on non-conceptual content?

For several reasons, I do not think so. For one thing, any account of perceptual justification (and, more generally, any account of perceptual belief formation) should accept and account for the fact that for human perceivers there is a possibility that a perceived object which we take to be a lamp, a cat, or most anything else could be merely a lamp-like or cat-like, or anything else-like object. The more experiential interaction we have with a thing, the smaller the chance that the thing will be other than what we take it to be.[60] Our perceptual apparatus is good enough, and the variety of kinds and of our concepts is small enough that the problem does not normally arise.

Someone overly worried about this aspect of our perceptual predicament strikes me as akin to the Humean Sceptic I considered in Chapter 2, who pointed out that we have no non-

[60]And perhaps in the case of things we take to be artifacts like lamps, if those objects are used as lamps then

circular grounds upon which to conclude that the world is uniform. The new concern of the "Premise 4 Sceptic" is similar, because both sceptics worry that newly encountered things or events could be erratically unlike the ones that preceded them. There are two ways I could imagine this scepticism being put forward.

A weak version of Premise 4 Scepticism would hold that although most newly encountered objects will be of previously encountered types, in many given cases the perceived object could merely "seem like but not be" an object of that type. I am happy to accept that this is true, but would point out that it does nothing to refute the claim that in the above situation I can justifiably believe (C) on the basis of (1), (2) and (3), since by his admission I would be right most of the time -- that is to say, this weaker scepticism admits that most of the time a subject is correct to assume that premise (4) is true. The mere possibility that a perceived object could appear misleadingly like objects of a certain known kind but not in fact be that kind of thing is not sufficient grounds to reasonably dissuade one from concluding (C).

A stronger version of Premise 4 Scepticism would hold that because there is no reason to think the future will be uniform with the past, there is no reason to think that new objects will be of kinds previously encountered, and so there will be no reason to think that they can be reasonably classified in a system based on past objects. This stronger scepticism would indeed show that a subject would have no reason to believe that moving from (1) through (3) to (C) would be "veridicality preserving." The problem with this objection to the idea of the justification of conceptually articulated beliefs on the basis of non-conceptual perceptual content is that it is too strong. It is precisely the same as Humean Scepticism about the uniformity of future events with past events discussed in Chapter 2. If we truly have no reason to expect to encounter lamps or cats rather than merely lamp-like or cat-like things, then non-conceptual perceptual experiences could not ground our conceptually articulated beliefs. But -- and this amounts to the same hypothetical -- if we have no reason to believe that in the future the world will be uniform with how it has been in the past, then on any account we will have no grounds -- conceptual or otherwise -- for almost *any* of our empirical beliefs. So no one but an extreme Humean Sceptic could make this objection to my account of the justificatory role of non-conceptual perceptual content. In Chapter 2 I self-awarely set aside Humean Sceptical concerns, not, of course, because I had answered them, but rather

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they will simply *count* as lamps.

because there are interesting philosophical issues to be examined which are independent of such scepticism. This dramatic objection to Premise 4 on the basis of yielding to Humean Scepticism can only be made by someone willing to sacrifice any account of inductive reasoning, and hence any account of the justification of the vast majority of our empirical beliefs. Although, as I have all along, I accept that Humean Scepticism presents a forceful, troubling objection to any account of inductive reasoning, someone who objects to Premise 4 on the above basis should be aware of the extremes to which they have gone to oppose that premise. For a philosopher like Davidson or McDowell who hopes to present a competing account of the justification of empirical belief, embracing such scepticism clearly would be a mistake.[61] Therefore this stronger Premise 4 Scepticism provides us with no interesting basis for rejecting the view that non-conceptual perceptual content can contribute to the justification of conceptually articulated beliefs.

In the case of non-conceptual beliefs occurring when believers take things to be as they appear, the matter of Premise (4) does not even arise. If one experiences things to be a certain way, and one has no reason to doubt the veridicality of one's experience, then one is justified in holding such beliefs.

The content of both conceptually articulated and non-conceptual intentional representations can be given by providing veridicality conditions. That is to say that the content of a representation of whatever sort can be given by providing an account of how the world must be for that representation to be veridical (or, in other words, by giving an account of the possible worlds in which that representation would be veridical). This is fairly mundane. But with this in mind, one can begin to see why conceptualized content need not differ from non-conceptual content to such a degree that rational relations between them should be thought to break down. If the possible worlds in which a conceptually articulated belief is true are identical to or are include all the possible worlds in which a non-conceptual experience would be veridical, then an enjoyer of that experience will likely have grounds for

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[61]Furthermore, it's just phenomenologically implausible to hold, as would the position a strong Premise 4 Sceptic defends, that in perception we somehow receive conceptualized empirical information about the world such that there is no possibility of a sceptical scenario in which, after a certain time t, we only encountered misleadingly lamp-like, cat-like, and everything else-like objects. It seems a clear, if familiarly far fetched, possibility that we could one day suddenly be confronted by a world of merely lamp-like, cat-like, etc., objects without immediately knowing of the change because of inevitable differences in our perceptual experiences in that situation. The crucial claim here is that our experiences in that situation would not necessarily differ from those we enjoy in reality. That claim just seems obviously true, and seems to be at least in tension with the idea that our perception always yields already-conceptualized information. Though the proponent of that idea may have a story to tell about the possibility of error, on the present

holding the conceptually articulated belief. In this sense, conceptual and non-conceptual content can "overlap" -- though as I have said, non-conceptual content tends to be more particularized than conceptual content.

If this view of content is correct, it has implications for the prospects for alternative conceptual schemes. If a conceptually articulated belief is perceptually justified, then content captured in conceptualizations is very closely related to not-yet-conceptualized content. To the extent that the latter can ground the former, they must represent the world to be the same way. On the plausible assumption that the perceptual mechanisms of humans naturally yield the same perceptual content, then, alternative, incommensurable human schemes are impossible. The same non-conceptual experiential content must be captured by any human conceptual scheme the claims of which enjoy perceptual justification. If so, then the expressive capacity of any human conceptual schemes will be largely the same. If this is correct, then human conceptual schemes will be largely translatable and, therefore, commensurable.

Although I recommend a somewhat Davidsonian view of the possibility of alternative conceptual schemes, my position is less Davidsonian than it may seem at first glance. It holds that there *is* "something neutral and common which lies outside all schemes."[62] Indeed, my position depends on that claim. Because I think we can understand the idea of veridicality independently of the idea of truth (and hence independently of "truth in our language"), on my position it remains a theoretical possibility that there could be a radically different conceptual scheme enjoyed by *non*-humans the concepts of which "fit" the world -- for example, one enjoyed by aliens with sensory organs very different from our own. So on my view, the "very idea" of a conceptual scheme is not incoherent.

Nonetheless, on this view, to a degree, we are *given* our conceptual scheme by the world -- or at least the world imposes rather strict limitations on much of the content expressible by it. The form of our conceptual scheme is provided by our experiences of objects and the ways they are similar.

I propose that we reject the Deductive Model of Empirical Justification: that is that we reject the claims that all justifiers must be conceptually articulated; that in justificatory relations like those between experiences and beliefs, concepts in the justifiers must be related to concepts in the justified beliefs in the same manner that elements are related in a formally

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account the possibility of error doesn't even raise an interesting issue.

valid inference; and that empirical justificatory inference must be truth-preserving. By doing so, we make possible an account of perceptual justification that avoids Coherentism about empirical justification, and leaves us with the resources to avoid the New Riddle of Induction. To reject the Deductive Model is to reject Davidson's constraints on an acceptable account of perceptual justification, and to reject the claims that language must have an indispensable role in all intentional states.

In this chapter I have argued that Davidson fails to provide grounds for SCV: the view that similarities between objects are most fundamentally explained by those objects' sharing properties or satisfying a common concept. I have also argued that Davidson does not provide grounds for rejecting (1) the idea of concept-independent similarity, (2) the idea of non-conceptual perceptual content among the satisfaction conditions of which is that such similarities obtain, or (3) the idea that such non-conceptual content has a role in the justification of our empirical beliefs.

Over the course of Chapters 3, 4 and 5, I have argued that in the absence of convincing independent grounds for SCV and the Deductive Model, we must reject SCV and the Deductive Model and in their place embrace (1), (2) and (3). If we do not, we will be left without an account of perceptual justification, and without the resources to solve the New Riddle of Induction.

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[62]Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," 190.

## Chapter 6: McDowell, the Deductive Model, and Grue

In the previous four chapters I have sought to illustrate the difficulties that result from acceptance of the Shared Concept View of Similarity and what I have called "The Deductive Model of Empirical Justification." Thus far I have used the important examples of Goodman and Davidson to trace the damage caused by these views. But SCV and the Deductive Model are widespread in contemporary philosophy. For example, as I point out below, any account of perception which holds that all perceptual content is conceptual content is committed to SCV. In this final chapter I turn to another important philosopher to further elucidate the problems caused by SCV and the Deductive Model.

In *Mind and World*,[1] John McDowell explicitly follows Davidson in adhering to the Deductive Model by claiming that

> (a) Anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated

-- or, in McDowell's terminology, any justifier of empirical beliefs or judgments must be "in the space of concepts."[2] Because he wants to avoid Davidsonian Coherentism, which would make it mysterious how our beliefs and judgments could have content at all, McDowell also reasonably claims that

> (b) Receptivity must play a role in the justification of our empirical beliefs and judgments.

I shall argue that on a few other very plausible assumptions, claims (a) and (b) would push McDowell toward an unattractive sort of idealism in which the world, though in one sense "mind-independent," is nonetheless "thought-shaped." That is, (a) and (b) would commit McDowell to the view that the world is composed of concepts in a manner not unlike the manner in which beliefs and judgments are composed of concepts. McDowell attempts to stop short of this unattractive conclusion, but the result is that he falls into the Myth of the Given.

My principal objection to McDowell's account of empirical justification is that he cannot

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[1] McDowell, John, *Mind and World: with a New Introduction* (Cambridge, Mass., 1996).
[2] Ibid. 5.

account for the rational application of concepts to particulars in perceptual experience. It is as though McDowell rejects the very plausible claim that

(c) Applications of concepts to particulars must be rationally constrained.

McDowell should want to be able to say that there is a *reason* why in a particular perceptual experience Concept A (e.g., 'Pencil') rather than Concept B (e.g., 'Automobile') is applied to what we perceive in the world -- if there were no reason to apply A rather than B, then there would be no grounds for believing something about an A rather than something about a B on the basis of that experience. That would be disastrous for any theory of empirical justification. But because of his commitment to (a) McDowell is unable to make out the application of a concept in a particular situation as rationally constrained.

In his own terminology, this argument is a criticism of McDowell's account of the relationship between receptivity and spontaneity in perception. McDowell embraces the view of Sellars and Davidson that unconceptualized "Given" cannot have a role in justifying our empirical beliefs because he holds that there can be no justifying, logical relation between a bit of unconceptualized Given and a conceptualization of that Given. McDowell seeks to avoid the problem presented by the Given by claiming that in perceptual experience the contributions of receptivity and spontaneity are always already combined and therefore can ground empirical beliefs without falling into the Myth of the Given. I argue that McDowell's claim that the contributions of receptivity and spontaneity are always already combined in perceptual experience does nothing to strengthen his account of the justification of empirical belief. This is so because whatever justifying logical relation fails to hold on an account of perceptual justification whereby we are aware of the combination of spontaneity and receptivity[3] will equally fail to hold on McDowell's account whereby we are in principle unaware of that combination. So, I shall argue, McDowell's account of the combination of receptivity and spontaneity is inadequate. On his account, concepts are applied in perceptual experience without rational constraint, and thus, in effect, he is wrongly rejecting (c). Because of this, I argue, McDowell falls into the Myth of the Given: On his account, perceivers unwarrantedly draw a conclusion about the state of the empirical world (e.g., that Concept A applies here while Concept B does not) on the basis of the Given.

Anyone who accepts McDowell's premises (a) and (b) could be described as facing a dilemma. If they hold with McDowell that the product of receptivity by itself is mere

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[3] E.g., an account like that of C. I. Lewis, which is criticized by McDowell as falling into the Myth of the Given.

unconceptualized Given, then they fall into the Myth of the Given -- the first horn of the dilemma. But there is an alternative: To consistently hold that (a) only something conceptually articulated can justify a conclusion based on it, and (b) receptivity has a role in the justification of empirical belief, one *could* hold that we simply "receive" from the world already-conceptualized information -- that the product of receptivity by itself *is* conceptualized, and isn't "the Given" at all. *That* sort of product of receptivity *could* provide rational grounds for further conceptualizations of it by spontaneity consistently with both (a) and (b). So McDowell's premises push him toward this view, though he never accepts it. He wants to avoid it, of course, because to take this view is to embrace an unattractive idealism whereby the world we can think about is entirely composed of items that are not just harmlessly *conceptualizable* (as is *any* object about which we think), but actually *conceptually articulated* in the sense of (a) -- conceptually articulated in the same way that beliefs or propositions are conceptually articulated.4 This sort of idealism is the second horn of the dilemma.

This dilemma is easily avoided on the account I favor, which rejects his Deductive Model's premise that (a) anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated. Once we accept that non-conceptual, intentional, perceptual content can serve as a justifier,[5] we can hold that the rational application of concepts to particulars on the basis of that perceptual content is unproblematical, and that (c) can be obviously and uncontroversially true. If (a) is false, as I argue it is, it follows that concepts (and/or language) are not a precondition for all intentionality.

At the end of this chapter I go on to argue that McDowell's Deductive Model premise (a) also forces him into a second difficulty independent of the dilemma he faces between the Myth of the Given and a kind of idealism. In Chapter 2 I argued that any view requiring similarity to be explicable by shared concepts or properties -- that is, any variant of what I have been calling the "Shared Concept View of Similarity" (or "SCV") -- would *ipso facto* fall foul of Goodman's Riddle. McDowell's view of content and concepts is a perfect example. He holds that all of the content of perceptual experience is conceptually articulated. Because of this, he is not able to

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[4] I use the terms "conceptualizable" and "conceptually articulated" in these senses throughout this chapter. I also follow McDowell in using the term "conceptualized" sensory input to refer to non-conceptual sensory input to which a subject has applied concepts (i.e., drawn conclusions with propositional content on the basis of it), and call this the process of "conceptualizing" sensory input. (McDowell, of course, does not think that there could be such a thing as justified conceptualizing of non-conceptual sensory input.) As I hope is clear from the preceding chapters, it is my position that this process is philosophically defensible if only if the non-conceptual sense data in question has intentional content.

[5] I have argued in favor of this view in Chapter 5.

exploit the notion of concept-independent ways in which things are similar and therefore lacks the resources to explain why inductive inferences using "grue" are unwarranted. His renunciation of our ability to perceive concept-independent ways in which things are similar amounts to a renunciation of the way we discern natural properties from bent ones. McDowell's difficulties could be alleviated by his giving up the Deductive Model and SCV.

## McDowell on How Perceptual Experience Could Possibly Justify Empirical Beliefs

McDowell lays the groundwork for *Mind and World* by diagnosing contemporary views of the justification of empirical belief as an unsatisfactory "oscillation" between, on the one hand, a Foundationalism which falls victim to the Myth of the Given and, on the other hand, a Coherentism which fails to permit any rational constraint on our beliefs from the world and thus results in a depiction of thought as a mere "frictionless spinning in a void."6

I discussed Foundationalism and Coherentism in Chapter 4, and I shall not discuss them again in detail. Foundationalism holds that justified empirical beliefs ultimately derive their justification from perceptual experience. In McDowell's phrase, if we "trace" back the ground of a belief or judgment Foundationalism holds that we reach "an ultimate foundation in impingements" from the world.7

Much like Davidson, McDowell critiques Foundationalism on the grounds that it relies for justification of empirical belief on unconceptualized sensory intake, which is not up to the task Foundationalists set out for it. In his (and Wilfred Sellars's) terminology, Foundationalists therefore fall into the "Myth of the Given." The "Given" is the unconceptualized sensory intake; examples are the sense data of C. I. Lewis or Quine. For McDowell, just as we have seen for Davidson, the key features of the Given element are, first, that it is held to be the ultimate justifier of empirical beliefs, and, second, it is not conceptually articulated. The problem with the idea of the Given, McDowell argues, is that nothing could have both of those features.8

McDowell often discusses the Given in terms of what "logical space" it belongs to. "Logical spaces" are contexts in which certain kinds of explanations are appropriate. There's a sense in which the function of an explanation is to place phenomena in a pattern of some kind. An explanatory pattern is "constituted by the regularities according to which phenomena of the

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[6] McDowell, *Mind and World*, 11.
[7] Ibid. 6.
[8] Ibid. 7-9.

relevant kind unfold."9 In seeking to understand things, we seek to subsume things under patterns. In scientific explanations, phenomena are subsumed under the patterns of regularities given by laws of nature. For example, we can explain why a particular falling object accelerates at 9.9 meters per second per second by subsuming that event under the pattern given by a law of nature saying that all objects on earth fall at that rate. The kind of intelligibility given by this sort of explanation is what McDowell calls "the distinctive kind of intelligibility that the natural sciences allow us to find in things" -- the intelligibility of the space of natural science.10 A contrasting pattern of intelligibility is that exploited by explanations falling in what McDowell calls "the space of reasons."11 Explanations we give every day of belief and action exploit the patterns that the space of reasons comprises. For example, we can explain why S brings an umbrella with her on a cloudy day by subsuming that event under "the pattern of life led by an agent who can shape her action and thought in the light of an ideal of rationality."12 S believes it may rain, and she desires to stay dry. An ideally rational person in this situation would bring an umbrella. S's bringing her umbrella allows her to fall into the pattern given by what an ideally rational person would do in her situation. The intelligibility this explanation provides is that of the space of reasons because it explains her actions in terms of her reasons for them. McDowell points out that these two types of pattern are strikingly different: seeing phenomena as agents' attempts to live up to the ideal of rationality is quite unlike seeing phenomena as governed by laws of nature. Yet, of course, both of these sorts of explanation are useful and predictive. McDowell also writes about "the space of concepts,"13 into which fall beliefs, desires, fears, hopes, and, of course, concepts.

McDowell sets up his discussion of the Myth of the Given in terms of a comparison between the space of reasons and the space of concepts. First, he points out that the space of concepts and the space of reasons overlap. This is easily seen in cases where one or more of a subject's beliefs serve as reasons for another of her beliefs, as, for example, when a subject reaches a new, rational conclusion (or simply rationally continues to holds a certain belief) for the reason that that conclusion (or retained belief) is highly logically coherent with her other beliefs. Because beliefs, for McDowell, fall into the space of concepts, the space of concepts

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[9]McDowell, John, et al., "*Précis* of *Mind and World*," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, 58 (1998), 423.
[10]McDowell, *Mind and World*, xix.
[11]Ibid. 5.
[12]McDowell, "Précis of *Mind and World*," 423.
[13]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 5.

and the space of reasons clearly overlap.14

A traditional Foundationalist is committed to the claim that in addition to conceptually articulated reasons like beliefs, a subject also has some reasons for belief that are *not* conceptually articulated. Because a bit of Given is thought of as an unconceptualized item that serves as one of the foundational justifiers of our empirical beliefs, it is, in McDowell's terminology, a reason that is "outside of the space of concepts":

> "The point of the [Given] is that it allows us to acknowledge an external constraint on our freedom to deploy our empirical concepts. Empirical justifications depend on rational relations, relations within the space of reasons. The putatively reassuring idea [offered by the Given] is that empirical justifications have an ultimate foundation in impingements on the conceptual realm from outside. So the space of reasons is made out to be more extensive than the space of concepts."15

The idea of the Given is "reassuring" to the Foundationalist because it is what allows him to claim that a subject can have justification from the world about the state of his beliefs. If our only reason for any one of our beliefs were another belief, it would be unclear how the state of the world rationally constrained what we believed. So the Given is what allows the Foundationalist to be a Foundationalist.

The Given is merely *putatively* reassuring for McDowell, however. McDowell, like Davidson, adheres to what I have called the "Deductive Model of Empirical Justification," according to which

> (a) Anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated.

He holds that "we can coherently credit experiences with rational relations to judgment and belief ... only if we take it that experiences have conceptual content."16 So for McDowell, the idea that "the space of reasons [could] extend more widely than the space of concepts"17 is an impossibility -- a "myth." McDowell's view is like that of Davidson which I discussed in

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[14]In a different sort of situation, of course, a belief can be merely caused, as when a subject believes p solely because she has taken a "belief pill" that causes her to believe p. Such a belief would nevertheless be "in the space of concepts," as, among other things, it would have propositional content. Nevertheless, at least a large proportion of a subject's beliefs must be rationally determined, or they would lack empirical content and therefore cease to be beliefs at all. These matters are discussed below.

[15]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 6.

[16]Ibid. 162.

[17]Ibid. 5 n.4.

Chapter 4; he holds that unconceptualized sensory input (or anything else outside "the space of concepts") is like an itch -- the wrong kind of thing to enter into any justificatory logical relation, and thus is the wrong kind of thing to justify a belief.

Though McDowell agrees with Davidson's rejection of traditional Foundationalism, he is not content with Davidson's Coherentist alternative. McDowell argues that Coherentism leaves no room for a "rational constraint" on belief from the world.18 His objection to Coherentism is essentially the intuitive Circularity Argument which I found compelling in Chapter 4. As McDowell puts it, "Suiting empirical beliefs to the reasons for them is not a self-contained game."19 He later writes, "We need to conceive [of thought] as subject to control from outside our thinking, on pain of representing the operations of thought as a frictionless spinning in a void." "Friction" in McDowell's lexicon, is rational constraint on belief from the world.

Without either a solution to Foundationalism's problem of the Myth of the Given or an acceptable Coherentist alternative that somehow allows for rational constraint from the world, philosophers are left in what McDowell describes as a kind of "oscillation."20 Say that we start by looking to Foundationalism for an answer to our question about empirical justification. We might then become impressed by arguments against the possibility of justification by Given, unconceptualized input. We would be pushed back to the apparent alternative, Coherentism. But we then might become dissatisfied with the lack of rational constraint on our beliefs offered by that account, and be pushed back for another look at Foundationalism. And so on. McDowell takes this quandary to be the point of the quotation from Kant around which he builds *Mind and World*: "Thoughts without content are empty; intuitions without concepts are blind."[21] For Coherentists, thoughts could only be empty because they would lack rational constraint from the world, whereas for Foundationalists, intuitions (i.e., sense data) without concepts could only be blind. McDowell's project is in a large part an attempt to show us the way out of this oscillation -- thereby showing us how perceptual experience *could possibly* justify empirical beliefs.

A final, important aspect of McDowell's account of the problem is his explanation that without any justification of our empirical beliefs, we would lose not only empirical *knowledge,* but also empirical *content* itself. It is essential to a belief -- or anything else whose content is

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[18]A merely *causal*, arational constraint would not be enough, since one cannot appeal to a mere cause as justification of one's beliefs. Ibid. 8.
[19]Ibid. 5.
[20]Ibid. 9.
[21]Kant, Immanuel, *Critique of Pure Reason*, tr. N. K. Smith (London, 1929), A51/B75.

that things are thus and so -- that it be arrived at correctly or incorrectly according to whether or not things are indeed thus and so. The relation between mind and world is normative in the sense that "thinking that aims at ... the fixation of belief is answerable to the world ... for whether or not it is correctly executed."22 Thinking couldn't be answerable to the world by any means other than via sensory experience. So "experience must constitute a tribunal, mediating the way our thinking is answerable to how things are ... if we are to make sense of [thinking] as thinking at all."23 If there were no empirical justification, then believers would have no way of aiming at a correct account of the world, since then there would be no grounds whatsoever on which to aim one way rather than another. And if believers couldn't aim at a correct account of the world, then their beliefs couldn't represent the world as being some particular way. To say that beliefs couldn't represent the world as being some particular way is just to say that beliefs could not have content. So, in a slogan, if empirical justification goes, content goes with it, and believers would cease to be "believers" at all. What had seemed only to be an epistemological problem is in fact a problem of the possibility of belief. If our theory of knowledge leaves us without empirical justification, it doesn't *just* leave us without a way of attaining the high epistemic standard required for *knowledge* of the world; it additionally leaves us without a way of attaining a much lower epistemic standard: the requirement of any content-bearing state that it be in some way rationally answerable to how things are.

**McDowell's Account of Perceptually Justified Empirical Belief**

As we've seen, McDowell takes the Deductive Model view that

> (a) anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated,

that is, that the "space of reasons" doesn't extend beyond the "space of concepts." He also accepts the argument against Coherentism that whatever ultimately justifies empirical beliefs must allow beliefs to be answerable to the world. For McDowell, another way of saying this is that

> (b) receptivity must play a role in the justification of our empirical beliefs and judgments.

(a) and (b) serve as McDowell's criteria for a possible account of empirical justification. We

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[22]Ibid. xii.

need some kind of input from the world, and that input must be conceptually articulated. In light of these constraints, McDowell writes:

> "We should understand ... empirical intake ... not as a bare getting of an extra-conceptual Given, but as a kind of ... state that already has conceptual content. In experience one takes in *that things are thus and so.* That is the sort of thing one can also, for instance [believe]."24

We don't first receive Given, unconceptualized sense data, then conceptualize it, and then justify our beliefs.

> "In the view that I am urging, the conceptual contents that sit closest to the impact of external reality on one's sensibility are not already, *qua* conceptual some distance away from that impact ... the conceptual contents that are most basic in this sense are already possessed by impressions themselves, impingements by the world on our sensibility."25

So "conceptual contents are ... *already* possessed by ... impingements by the world on our sensibility." *Prima facie*, this seems to be a simple solution to our problem, given the context. Experiential intake is conceptually articulated, and therefore can justify our empirical beliefs.

This simple-seeming option had not been in play as a serious philosophical possibility before *Mind and World.* McDowell explains its absence as the product of the scientism of our age. We have noted that there are at least two different kinds of logical space which explanations can inhabit. There is the nomic space of natural-scientific intelligibility, and the normative space of reasons. McDowell hypothesizes that we have become overly impressed by the remarkable insights with which science and its kind of intelligibility have provided us over the past 300 years or so. The success of scientific explanation has misled us into thinking that the space of natural-scientific explanation exclusively occupies the space of *nature* -- that natural-scientific intelligibility is the only means of understanding the world.

> "We need not equate the very idea of *nature* with the idea of instantiations of concepts that belong in the logical space -- admittedly separate, on this view, from the logical space of reasons --

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[23]Ibid.
[24]Ibid. 9.
[25]Ibid. 9-10.

> in which the natural-scientific kind of intelligibility is brought to light."26

It is this mistaken, scientistic identification of the sphere of the natural with the sphere of natural-scientific intelligibility that prevents our seeing the possibility that "conceptual contents ... are already possessed by impressions themselves, impingements by the world on our sensibility."27

This account of nature may recall the account of the mind given by Davidson in "Mental Events." According to Davidson, the mind should be explained roughly like this: There are goings on in the mind. We can describe them in at least two interesting ways. We can describe them nomically as neuronal firings over synapses. Alternatively, we can describe them normatively as beliefs and desires. Both descriptions are useful. Both place events into an explanatory pattern. Both are predictive -- though one or the other may predict certain sorts of occurrences better than the other, given the evidence with which we find ourselves. So, importantly for us, both are ways of understanding the mind. Neither is a "better" way of understanding the mind -- that is, neither obviates the other. They are simply two approaches.28 There's a sense, then, in which *Mind and World* is a kind of "'Mental Events' for nature."

Human experiences, on McDowell's account, "are states ... that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity."29 This means that in experience there is a contribution from the world -- what receptivity receives -- and a contribution from our concepts and beliefs. But we don't first receive an impression from the world, and then conceptualize it. To give *that* sort of account would be to fall into the Myth of the Given, because, according to McDowell, unconceptualized experience cannot supply the rational constraint required of the decision to conceptualize it one way or another. As McDowell puts it,

> "The relevant conceptual capacities are drawn on *in* receptivity ... It is not that they are exercised *on* an extra-conceptual deliverance of receptivity."30

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[26]Ibid. xix.
[27]Ibid. 10.
[28]One might argue that in some circumstances mechanistic explanations of a mental state supersede purposive ones, but McDowell, Davidson and I all agree on the widely held view that this superseding can only go so far. We could agree to that limitation on the basis of interpretivistic considerations of the sort discussed in Chapter 3. Alternatively, one could argue that if taken too far, such entirely mechanistic explanations would threaten the very idea of ourselves as agents, and that this would be to sacrifice a form of intelligibility which we are unwilling to give up -- because, among other things, it would do great harm to moral philosophy.
[29]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 24.
[30]Ibid. 9.

According to McDowell's account of perceptual experience,

> "conceptual capacities ... are already at work in experiences themselves, not just judgments based on them; so experiences can intelligibly stand in rational relations to our [beliefs]."31

So McDowell thinks the content of experience is conceptually articulated content. His argument is that it *has* to be conceptually articulated because if any aspect of experience is to justify, it must be conceptually articulated on penalty of its not having the form required of a justifying thing. We don't somehow "survey the scene" and organize what we see through the application of concepts. Rather, "that the cat is on the mat," say, is part of experience and is already articulated in that manner -- experience presents that fact to us already in that form. So for McDowell, it is possible for our empirical beliefs to be justified because in experience we are presented with an external constraint that is of the correct form to provide justification for our beliefs. Empirical beliefs can be justified by perceptual experience because experience comes already in conceptually articulated form.

**McDowell and the Myth of the Given**

As we've seen, one of the major innovations that McDowell offers is his view that experience is conceptually articulated. It *has to* be, he believes, if it is to serve the function that experience must serve.

> "We cannot really understand the relations in virtue of which a judgment is warranted except as relations within the space of concepts: relations such as implication or probabilification, which hold between potential exercises of conceptual capacities. The attempt to extend the scope of justificatory relations outside the conceptual sphere cannot do what it is supposed to do."32

Only its being conceptually articulated, then, enables experience to provide a rational constraint on our beliefs. We've seen that experience enjoys a contribution from the world -- what receptivity receives -- and a contribution from spontaneity -- that is, a contribution from our beliefs and conceptual capacities. What is more, he says these elements are "inextricably"

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[31]Ibid. 24. The "so" in this quote makes clear that McDowell considers the conceptually articulated nature of experience to be a prerequisite for their entering into rational relations with beliefs and judgments.
[32]Ibid. 7.

combined: Experiences "are states ... that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity."[33] Elsewhere, McDowell makes this same point by saying "receptivity does not make an even notionally separable contribution to the co-operation" between receptivity and spontaneity.[34]

McDowell's idea that these elements are always already combined is a large part of what differentiates his account from one according to which the perceiver conceptualizes Given sense data. We as subjects don't combine these elements, according to McDowell; we're not ever even aware of unconceptualized sensory intake. Indeed, for McDowell there's no such thing of which we could be aware: "Conceptual contents are ... *already* possessed by ... impingements by the world on our sensibility."[35] One *could* take this quote to be a claim that the world is conceptually articulated in itself, and *that* is how its impingements on our sensibility already possess conceptual content. I shall discuss that thought below. But in reality McDowell is making the not-idealistic claim that although the world itself is not conceptually articulated, by the time a perceiver becomes aware of the world's impingements -- by the time they "impinge" on us -- they are conceptually articulated.

We can accept for the sake of argument what we are told by McDowell, that "experiences ... are states ... that inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity," and allow that while a perceiver enjoys a perceptual experience she cannot distinguish the contribution to that experience made by receptivity from that made by spontaneity. Even if all of this is true, McDowell faces a problem of justification analogous to the problem of the Myth of the Given. Granting McDowell's claim that the contributions of receptivity and spontaneity are inextricably combined in experience does not alter the fact that on his account, experience comprises contributions from receptivity and spontaneity. Although we can't "separate" their contributions, we know that they make distinct contributions, and we know the form of the two sorts of contribution. McDowell *has* to accept this much, since throughout *Mind and World,* he himself distinguishes and discusses the nature of these contributions in detail. It's just that we can't separate these contributions in any particular case. So the process by which they are combined is obviously not conscious, and, what is more, it is not "bringable to consciousness" in the way that, say, my reason for stepping on the clutch while shifting gears in my car is "bringable to consciousness."

My question for McDowell at this point is this: What difference does it make for the

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[33]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 24.
[34]Ibid. 9.
[35]Ibid. 9-10.

purposes of justification if the two elements combined in experience are combined by our perceptual system before we ever have a chance to become aware of them individually? Why should we think just because the process is in principle not bringable to consciousness that any philosophical problems are solved? Whatever justifying logical relation fails to hold between a bit of Given and a conceptualization of it will *still* fail to hold if we're not aware of the process of conceptualization. Whatever McDowell agreed that Davidson shouldn't allow *consciously* McDowell shouldn't allow *un*consciously or automatically. Our unawareness of the organization of input from the world doesn't make that organization more warranted.

Davidson's criticism of the Given was that there is no logical relation between an unconceptualized bit of sensory intake and an empirical belief. An itch doesn't justify a belief that one has a mosquito bite; only the *belief* that one has an itch can enter into such a logical relation, according to Davidson, because only a belief has the appropriate logical form. On McDowell's account, the identical process of conceptualization of intake from the world must take place. McDowell holds that "experiences inextricably combine receptivity and spontaneity," and the contribution of receptivity is -- assuming that McDowell is not claiming that the world itself is conceptually articulated -- unconceptualized bits of Given. The only difference between it and traditional bits of Given is that it is not "sense data," because we are not aware of it. But surely our unawareness of it does not augment its logical properties. So the contribution of receptivity to experience cannot facilitate any rational constraint on our beliefs from the world. Because it cannot provide such a constraint, we are left applying concepts to the world without a rational basis for doing so -- in other words, we are left with the Myth of the Given.

A defender of McDowell might correctly point out here that McDowell wholeheartedly agrees that receptivity alone can provide no rational constraint on belief. His claim is that it is receptivity and spontaneity *as combined* by experience which provides that constraint. But as a response to my argument this rejoinder misses the point. If it were the case that one could simply combine the contribution of receptivity with that of spontaneity to obtain a rational constraint, then C. I. Lewis could have taken his sense data (the product of receptivity, for him), conceptualized it (thereby adding to it an element of spontaneity) and thus obtained a rational constraint. But as we've seen, Davidson and McDowell have convincingly argued against this possibility. My argument is that McDowell, like Lewis, has not adequately explained how we could ever *get to* the point where receptivity and spontaneity have been combined appropriately

such that they are therefore able to rationally constrain belief. When all one has done is to combine receptivity and spontaneity one has already made an empirical claim, namely, that some particular is such that some concept applies to it. This claim requires justification.

Given McDowell's premise that (a) anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated, something not thought-shaped cannot justify a belief. Receptivity's contribution to perceptual experience is not thought-shaped. It might *cause* us to have beliefs, but it cannot *justify* them; in McDowell's phrase, "the idea of the Given offers exculpations where we wanted justifications."[36] It is not clear how spontaneity's automatic, or unconscious conceptualizing of this unconceptualized Given can help matters any more than someone like Lewis' conscious conceptualizing of the Given. For philosophers holding premises (a) and (b), the tripwire of the Myth of the Given is the first horn of the dilemma I outlined in the introduction to this chapter.

**McDowell and a Conceptually Articulated World?**

McDowell persuasively argues that our beliefs about anything must be rationally constrained by what they're about, if they are to be about that thing at all. Because of McDowell's premise (a), for him a world that is not *conceptually articulated* -- that is, conceptually articulated in the same way that beliefs and propositions are -- can't seem to constrain our beliefs about it: if the world is not conceptually articulated already, it is mysterious how it can rationally constrain the application to it of further concepts. (That was the force of the argument in the previous section.) This situation suggests an alternative approach to our problem. We seem compelled by McDowell's premises to conclude that *the world itself is conceptually articulated. That* would seem to satisfy the constraints that (a) anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated, and (b) receptivity must play a role in the justification of our empirical beliefs and judgments. If the world were conceptual, we could receive a wholly external, conceptually articulated constraint.

Thus, McDowell's two criteria for an account of empirical knowledge, (a) and (b), would lead to a type of idealism if strictly carried to their logical conclusion.[37] McDowell argues that

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[36]McDowell, *Mind and World*, 8.

[37]Anything short of this sort of idealism would require, at some stage, the application of a concept to something non-conceptual (whether it be a sense datum, an unconsciously received input from receptivity, or a not-conceptually-articulated particular in the world). At that stage, the Myth of the Given would loom. To deny this would be to deny (c), that applications of concepts to particulars must be rationally constrained.

"the space of reasons" does not extend beyond the conceptual sphere, but that our beliefs must enjoy rational constraint from the world itself.38 These views entail that the world itself falls into the space of concepts -- where this doesn't merely mean that the world can be *conceptualized* but rather that the world is *conceptually articulated* in the same way that beliefs and desires are conceptually articulated.

This conclusion is also strongly suggested by McDowell's view that "we need not equate the very idea of nature with the idea of instantiations of concepts that belong in the logical space in which the natural-scientific kind of intelligibility is brought to light,"39 but can equally associate it with instantiations of concepts belonging to the space of reasons. In a similar mood, he writes

> "From the thesis that receiving an impression is a transaction in nature, there is no good inference to the conclusion ... that the idea of receiving an impression must be foreign to the logical space in which concepts such as that of answerability function."40

One might take the second half of this quote to be making his central point that experience is conceptually articulated. But the first part of it is a reference to his error theory according to which our scientism leads us to misplace nature outside of the space of reasons. His point is that once we discard this scientism "there will be no good inference to the conclusion...that the idea of receiving an impression must be foreign to the logical space in which concepts such as that of answerability function." So the quote implies not just that experience is conceptually articulated, but that "transactions in nature" generally can be conceptually articulated. This strand in *Mind and World* reveals the pressure McDowell feels toward the sort of idealism I have been discussing: "conceptual contents are...*already* possessed by ... impingements by the world on our sensibility." If beliefs require a conceptual constraint, and that constraint must be from the world, then the world must be conceptually articulated. For philosophers holding premises (a) and (b), this idealism is the second horn of the dilemma I outlined in the introduction to this chapter.

Ultimately, McDowell does not endorse this idealism. Rather, as I have argued above, he opts for the first horn of the dilemma, and falls into the Myth of the Given. One reason is that the notion of a "conceptually articulated world" would be inconsistent with McDowell's idea of

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[38]Ibid. 8.
[39]Ibid. xix.
[40]Ibid. xx.

what a concept must be. He writes

> "we could not recognize capacities operative in experience as conceptual at all were it not for the way they are integrated into a rationally organized network of capacities for active adjustment of one's thinking to the deliverances of experience. That is what a repertoire of empirical concepts is."[41]

In other words, a concept for McDowell gets its content from its holistic, rational relations with other concepts. The idea of a conceptually articulated particular in the world giving us conceptual information about itself is fundamentally inconsistent with this holism. McDowell's actual view is of course that spontaneity makes a contribution to experience too: we receive unconceptualized input which is somehow automatically mixed with the contribution of spontaneity, and only *then* are we presented with conceptually articulated experience. This is McDowell's way of allowing his holism to coexist with his idea of that perceptual experience provides us with conceptually articulated content.

My point in discussing this idealism is merely to note that McDowell's premises push him in that direction -- in particular, his premise (a) that anything that can serve as a justifier of our empirical beliefs and judgments must be conceptually articulated. If we are convinced that Coherentism is wrong, then we will want a rational, external constraint on our beliefs -- i.e., we will hold premise (b) to be true. If we are convinced that only something conceptually articulated could count as a justifier, then we will look for something conceptually articulated that is not a belief, namely, experience. But something that is a conceptually articulated experience *ipso facto* makes an empirical claim, namely, that some concept applies to some particular. If our beliefs are to be grounded by such conceptually articulated experience, then *that* empirical claim requires justification as well. And if only something conceptually articulated could provide that justification, it seems as though *the world itself* would have to be conceptually articulated. The solution to this problem is, of course, to reject one of the premises, specifically, premise (a), and the Deductive Model that comes with it. The rejection of premise (a) will open the possibility of non-conceptual perceptual content which serves as the rational constraint on belief and concept application that McDowell needs.

**How Could the Application of Concepts to the World be Rational?**

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[41]Ibid. p. 29.

It is possible to examine McDowell's being pushed by his premises toward idealism from the vantage point of the way he might explain how concepts get appropriately applied to particulars. Applying concepts to particulars is, of course, the same thing as "combining receptivity with spontaneity," but considering the matter at hand from a slightly different vantage point may make it clearer.

One might begin with the question of whether or not the application of a concept, say 'spherical,' or 'dog,' to an aspect of the world makes a claim about the world. This question certainly must be answered in the affirmative: to say that a thing in the world is such that it satisfies the concept 'spherical' is undoubtedly to make an empirical claim about that thing. If so, then "experience" as it is conceived by McDowell has *already made* substantive empirical claims at the time we enjoy those experiences. If experience is making substantive claims about the world, then how could those claims possibly be justified in accordance with McDowell's constraints on what counts as "justification" -- namely, that justification must involve rational relations *between concepts*? It appears that such justification is impossible, since the thing in the world is not a conceptually articulated entity. So McDowell's "experience" could only ever offer us exculpations for our beliefs, not justifications for them.

The situation is different and better on the kind of account that I recommend, which eschews the Deductive Model of Empirical Justification; that is, it eschews all of the following:

(1) only something conceptually articulated can serve as a justifier,

(2) the concepts involved in perceptual justification must have a relation like that between terms in a formally valid inference, and

(3) empirical justificatory inferences must be truth-preserving.42

Instead, we should understand experience as providing us with non-conceptual content, and accept that in spite of its lack of conceptual content, experience nevertheless provides us with information about how things are in the world in a form which can rationally constrain our beliefs. A crucial difference between McDowell's view and mine is that on my view it is the *intentionality* of experience that enables it to provide rational constraint.43 If it weren't for the intentional, non-conceptual content of experience, my account, like Lewis's and ultimately McDowell's, would founder on the Myth of the Given. I would be unable to claim that non-conceptual content is what rationally constrains our application of concepts to aspects of the world. But as Chapter 4 argued, the non-conceptual intentional content of experience is capable

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[42]I discuss the "Deductive Model" at length in Chapter 5.

of providing us with the grounds for our empirical claims.

Although I have argued that McDowell faces the problem of explaining how the application of concepts to particulars in the world could be justified on his account, there is no analogous problem for my view. The thought behind an objection along these lines would be that the non-conceptual content provided by experience on my view consists of empirical information about how things are and therefore also in some sense "makes empirical claims about how things are," and therefore is likewise in need of justification. But this objection is confused. As a general matter in our perceptual experience, as McDowell does well to emphasize, we directly observe the state of things in the world; there is not an intermediary "experience" that is somehow separate from but corresponding to how things are. For both McDowell and me, when we perceive things in the world, we are open to how they are. The reason that on McDowell's view experience seems to be "making an unwarranted empirical claim" is *not* that it is telling us how the world is, but rather that it is telling us how *our concepts* apply to the world. That's a different matter from what experience tells us on my account. On my account, the information we gain from the world is limited strictly to how things are with the world -- a matter which, on my account, is at this stage entirely removed from concepts and language. So this objection fails.

Furthermore, it would be misguided to object that I am unfairly having it both ways in claiming on the one hand that perceivers are warranted in applying concepts to things perceived, but on the other hand that "experience" as conceived by McDowell has already covertly made unwarranted substantive claims about the applicability of concepts to things in the world by the time we enjoy those experiences. These two accounts of how concepts are applied are fundamentally different, because on mine, there is intentional content to guide and justify those applications of concepts. According to McDowell and the Deductive Model, *concepts* are a prerequisite to guidance for and justification of empirical claims on pain of falling into the Myth of the Given. Without *concepts*, on that view, we have only the inadequate resources of Lewis's sense data on the basis of which to make our empirical claims -- recall that to apply a concept to an aspect of the world is to make an empirical claim. So it would be mistaken to object that I am criticizing McDowell for allowing experience to "make empirical claims" about what concepts apply to things in the world whilst allowing my own perceivers to do so, since my perceivers have richer resources on the basis of which to do so.

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[43]I discuss this in my critique of Davidson's Coherentism in Chapter 4.

McDowell's premises push him toward the view that the world itself provides us with the information that certain concepts apply to certain particulars.44 If that view were accepted, then the premise that there must be a conceptually articulated constraint on our beliefs from the world would be satisfied. But the obvious problem with such a view would be that it holds that concepts themselves are part of the world independently of our interactions with it. Such an idealistic view would be fundamentally inconsistent with many of McDowell's plausible positions in *Mind and World*, for example, that meaning is holistic, that concepts are subject to review and revision, that objective purport itself depends on concepts' being subject to rational review, and so on. What's worse, McDowell's premises entail that any non-conceptual aspect of the world would *not* provide rational constraint on our thought. So our thoughts could not be about *those* aspects of the world (if there were any); thoughts "about" those particulars would be merely caused and not justified, and therefore would lack content. So the *entire* world about which we can think would have to be thought-shaped. That is a deeply idealistic view.

On the idealism in question, the world would not merely be "conceptualizable" in the weak, pre-philosophical sense of "thinkable about." Just about anything is "conceptualizable" in this weak sense. Rather, the idealism toward which McDowell is pushed holds that the world is conceptually articulated in the sense that the constituents of beliefs, judgments, and propositions are conceptually articulated. It would be conceptually articulated in the sense that it was capable of deductively implying a conclusion when considered in combination with other premises. The world would be composed exclusively of semantic items of the sort that affect the truth-values of what comprises them. By rejecting the Deductive Model, we can avoid both this idealism and the Myth of the Given.

**McDowell, SCV and Grue**

A distinct but related problem for McDowell is that his account of perceptual justification leaves him without the resources to answer Goodman's Sceptic, and thus leaves him unable to give a good account of inductive warrant. Throughout this thesis I have argued that it is impossible to retain a tenable account of inductive reasoning once one has accepted the Shared Concept View of Similarity (SCV) -- the view that two objects' similarities can be fundamentally understood in terms of one or more concepts under which they both fall, or in

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[44]As distinguished from the entirely different and obviously correct view that the world provides us with the

terms of properties they share. McDowell's philosophy provides a classic case in point.

As we have seen, McDowell holds that all of the information we receive from the world is already conceptually articulated; he admits no non-conceptual perceptual content. Any account of perception which holds that all perceptual content is conceptual content is committed to SCV: If the empirical information a perceiver enjoys is exhausted by information to the effect that particulars fall or do not fall under certain concepts, then she could not perceive *how things are* such that they do or do not fall under those concepts. Any similarities such a perceiver perceived would be limited to "similarities in that particulars A and B both fall under concept X." A perceiver could not perceive *how* two things each are such that they are similar, in the sense that that explains *why* the both fall under concept X. Thus, McDowell is committed to the Shared Concept View. This prevents him from exploiting the notion of perceptions of concept-independent ways in which things are similar; for McDowell, our perception offers us no such information. Again, for McDowell the content of our perception tells us only *that* certain concepts and not others apply to some particular, and not *why* they do. But it is precisely the information which he rules out that is necessary for us to win an argument with a Grubleen speaker who insists that in the past all emeralds have been observed to be "grue" and that therefore we should expect the next one to be so too. It will be useful to return to our hypothetical from Chapter 3 about the emerald miners.

We are mining for emeralds with Mr. Grue just after time *t*, and one of us discovers a new, green gem. Mr. Grue is puzzled to find what he takes to be a sapphire in this emerald mine; "Emeralds are grue," he says, "and this is a bleen stone." We, of course, argue that the stone is an emerald, because it is green, like all emeralds we have previously observed (and unlike all sapphires we have previously observed). Mr. Grue predictably makes the parallel argument that the stone must be a sapphire, because it is bleen, like all sapphires we have previously observed (and unlike all emeralds we have previously observed).

We might try to argue that Mr. Grue should not make inductive inferences based on "grue" because grue things need not be similar just because they are grue, whereas green things are always similar just because they're green. But Mr. Grue would make the parallel, counter-argument that grue things *are* always similar in their being grue, whereas what we call "green" things need not all be similar, because some are grue and some are bleen. To resolve this dispute, we need to answer the following, seemingly easy question: Which provides a preferable

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information that it is a certain way such that our concepts may (or may not) apply to it.

basis for inductive inferences, the similarity between green objects or the "similarity" between grue ones?

It is important to remember, as we have noted in prior chapters, that what is going on with Mr. Grue is *not* that his perceptual mechanisms are malfunctioning. We can stipulate that *all* of the information that both parties are getting from the world is veridical, even on McDowell's view that the content of perceptual experience is all conceptual content. All of the emeralds he observed in the past *were* grue, and the new stone *is* bleen, as he correctly states.

It is obvious that the similarity between green objects provides a preferable basis for inductive inference. But the matter of whether all of the content of our perception is conceptually articulated in form now becomes crucial to our ability to explain why. The correct way to resolve this dispute is simply for us to *look* first at a group of green objects and then at a group of grue or bleen objects and *see* that there is a more fundamental similarity among the former. This requires a lot of information from our perceptual experience. It would not be enough to see merely *that* the particulars we are observing fall under a concept. Rather, we must see *why* those particulars fall under that concept -- namely, because of the ways they are as particulars. If the way a thing is is similar to the way another thing is, then they will have the same natural property which will be a fit basis for inductive inference.[45]

The problem for McDowell's view is his claim that *all* of the information we obtain from perception is of the form "that particular X falls under concept C," and none of it is of the form "why particular X falls under concept C." If all of the content of perceptual experience is conceptually articulated content, then none of that content tells us *why* a particular falls under a concept -- it fails to tell us how the thing is such that it falls under that concept.46 By ruling out non-conceptual content, McDowell eliminates the possibility of our obtaining such *why* information because that information would impose a rational constraint on our beliefs from our perceptual experience which *couldn't* be provided by *conceptually articulated* content. McDowell holds that in perception there could only be either conceptual content, on the one hand, or the Given on the other. If he is correct, then there's no acceptable candidate to tell us *why* concepts apply to particulars. Any explanation will either be in terms of other concepts

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[45]Or, more precisely, the natural property at least *might* be a fit basis for inductive reasoning. As we have seen in Chapter 2, it may be that a set of things appears to have a natural property, but in fact merely includes two subsets of things *each* of which has a distinct, unrelated natural property. As it happens, that can easily be the case with color. But the bent properties we've discussed have members perceptibly belonging to two sets from the outset, and so can be ruled out as acceptable bases for induction without further investigation.

[46]Unless the reason "why" is that the particular falls under a second concept. But that, of course, just pushes the

applied (and we will want to ask why *those* concepts are applied), or will attempt to provide a rational constraint based on *un*intentional Given sense data, which all parties agree is a losing proposition. So given his constraints on what can count as a justifier, McDowell cannot permit any explanation of *why* a particular falls under a concept, and therefore cannot claim that perceptual experience as he characterizes it gives us information as to *why* certain particulars fall under certain concepts.

If it is correct that McDowell is committed to the view that we cannot perceive *why* concepts fall under particulars, then he cannot explain why Mr. Grue is wrong about the new gem and we are right about it -- in other words, he cannot provide an acceptable account of inductive warrant. As we have seen in previous chapters, unless we can take recourse to how the gems are such that concepts do or do not apply to them, then Mr. Grue can continue to respond to our challenges with parallel arguments. If McDowell is without the resources to rule out "grue" he will also be unable to rule out "gred," "grblack" or "grsquareular." In other words, he will have no means of linking sets of evidence with appropriate conclusions: given uniform observations that all emeralds observed before *t* have been green, McDowell will be unable to explain why future emeralds should be expected to be green, red, black, square, or anything else. So his account of inductive warrant will have completely broken down.

If we instead accept that our perceptual experience includes non-conceptual content, then the scenario becomes unparadoxical. We can simply tell Mr. Grue that grue things needn't be similar just because they're grue, whereas green things are *ipso facto* similar. He will just have to accept the point if he is honest and his perceptual mechanisms are not malfunctioning.47 Once he accepts that point, all that remains is for us to remind him that for an inductive inference to be justifiable it must at least predict that things will go on in the future in a similar manner to how they have gone in the past, and that his inference should have been ruled out for failing to do so. Predictions based on predicates that match evidence with conclusions in an entirely arbitrary manner completely miss the point of inductive reasoning. We could all rationally conclude, then, that we had good reason to believe that the new gem was an emerald. Without McDowell's form of SCV, the miners wouldn't face any paradoxical problems characteristic of the New Riddle. Therefore, to retain the prospect of a tenable account of inductive warrant, we must reject SCV. By doing so, we also reject McDowell's account of perceptual experience whereby all of the content of perception is conceptual content.

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problem back a step.

[47]And we can stipulate that they are not.

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