Expressing the Absolute: Pluralism and the World-in-Itself

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The received view is that absolutes lead to monisms. However, this paper argues just the opposite: there is prevalent philosophical tradition in which absolutes demand a pluralistic world of experience. We will explore this tradition starting with ancient Jewish philosophy. We will move through the 17th century rationalists and conclude by investigating how modern philosophies of language and science adopt a concept of absolutes that are only expressed in a pluralistic world.

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1.0   INTRODUCTION

Absolutes find little favor in modern philosophy. The relativistic nominalisms and conceptualisms of the philosophical literature have evolved, and science, in its quantum age, reminds us that it's always a matter of perspective; our results are always parasitical on the experimental arrangements by which we come to them. As attempts to find an Archimedean point are continually frustrated, it becomes more difficult to seriously ask, "But how are things *really*?" The analytic cast has driven home the message that we cannot step outside of our concepts to evaluate an unwashed world. The intellectual treachery that Julien Benda bemoaned in the 1920's has become endemic as even the soberer sciences suspend the search for ultimate truths and content themselves with relativized results. Little room, consequently, is found for those hegemonies of our naïve friends: absolutes.

I will make no attempt to reverse such progress in this paper. That is to say I will never suggest we *resume* the antique task of trying to peel off the layers of truth to find the one truth underneath it all, fixed for eternity. Rather, I will argue that we have never left the altar of absolutes. We have rightly abandoned the hope that we can describe or conceptualize the noumenal real, in the broadest sense of the term. This does not mean we have abandoned absolutes. There are limits to what perspectival philosophy and science admits. To resume the

Austin maxim: "Enough is enough, enough isn't everything." Absolutes persist — somehow, anyway — in the boundary conditions of these limits.

Before we can understand what this means, we have to make the idea of an absolute clearer. Indeed, this will be the chief work of this paper. In setting out my conception of an absolute, the argument in favor of them will already be made. This introduction will be unduly long and necessarily a failed pursuit. The full argument can only come out in the body of the paper that follows. While the introduction will be an adumbration of the central thesis, rendered in broad and too-often metaphysical strokes, the body of the paper will be largely historical and interpretive. It is my hope that the former will excite thinking in the right direction — no matter how frustrated it may be — and the latter will work on this agitation to express the argument.
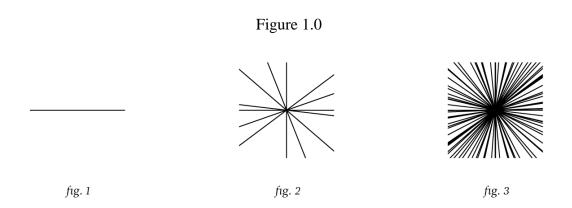
1.1   ABSOLUTE EXPRESSION

Most thinkers stumble over the idea of absolutes because absolutes seem to impose a draconian rule on the world and our concepts thereof. Hilary Putnam writes — after quoting the Austin passage cited above — "Craving absolutes leads to monism, and monism is a bad outlook in every area of human life." [1] The prime argument of this paper is that absolutes *do not* lead to monism and, in fact, monism is incompatible with the idea of the absolute, which we will flesh out in the course of the paper. Absolutes are not, as it were, fixed by God to spawn the specific truths we encounter as direct descendents. Rather, absolutes are *expressed* by our varied and contradictory experiences of the world.

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[1] Putnam, Hilary, and James Conant. *Realism with a Human Face*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard, 1992. p. 131.

To illustrate the direction I am going in, imagine drawing a series of straight lines, all which intersect at the same point. Imagine, as well, that these straight lines are of infinite length such that one line traverses the entire Cartesian plane.

Figure 1.0

fig. 1   fig. 2   fig. 3

At first (fig.1), one just has a single line that expresses very little. Indeed, it is 1-dimensional. Any given schema from which we view the world or some aspect thereof is much like fig. 1. It seems obvious that we could not hope to caricaturize the world — say n-dimensional but, for the sake of this very simple illustration, 2-dimensional — with a 1-dimensional line. As we are restricted to drawing in one dimension, even with several lines (fig.2) or very many lines (fig.3) we have not drawn a plane. As the number of lines we draw approaches infinity, however, the drawing approaches that of a plane. At the limit, the drawing switches from very many 1-dimensional things to one 2-dimensional thing. However, the plane was with us, in a sense, all along. It regulated how we draw straight lines — Euclidean space rather than hyperbolic[2] — what it means to intersect *at the same point* — though each line was

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[2] Interestingly, the choice between such spaces is another case where perspective intervenes. We could repeat this experiment with spaces: "Imagine the drawing of a series of straight lines, all of which intersect at the same point, in a series of spaces. As the 1-dimensional lines approach infinity, they approach the drawing of the 2-dimensional

1-dimensional, the ordered pair at which they all intersected required two dimensions to be caricaturized — and many other concepts necessary to the execution of our drawing. Though we could not draw the absolute of the plane just like we can never make explicit the absolutes that circumscribe the world, the absolute of the plane was expressed in the drawing process. Absolutes are expressed in our conceptual congress with the world as we are forced to examine it from different points of view. We will come back to this.

1.2   THE WAY THINGS ARE

Before we can accept absolutes, we must first accept that there is a way in which things are. Now, difficulties arise as soon as we enunciate this requirement. Articulated within our conceptual framework, "There is a way in which things are," carries a great deal of baggage. The use of words like "is" and "way" suggests a particular ontology and intimates that we are buying into the old myth that if we just look hard enough we can find out what there really is.

I mean nothing like this when I say, "There is a way in which things are." I mean only that there is some pre-conceptual structuring or ordering of the pre-conceptual world that always manifests itself in our varied conceptual schemes and perspectives. I do not mean that these experiences represent this world; how could we know if they did? Rather, all I mean is that there must be some influence of this pre-conceptual world on our varied ways in which we break up our experiences of the phenomenal world.

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space in which they are drawn. As the number of spaces approach infinity, they approach some absolute sense of what space is, through which it is sensible to call them 'spaces'."

It is in this sense that our language, though thoroughly baptized and conditioned by cultural and biological forces, can be said to "picture" the world, in a Sellarsian sense of the term. Sellars argues that right picturings are right in virtue of the linguistic objects, construed as objects in the natural order of cause and effect, occurring in patterns that correctly project the structure of the world. Picturing is "... an isomorphism in the real order."[3] Sellars lays out his criteria of correct picturing saying, "... pictures, like maps, can be more or less adequate. The adequacy concerns the 'method of projection.' A picture (candidate) subject to the rules of a given method of projection (conceptual framework), which is a correct picture (successful candidate), is S-assertible with respect to that method of projection."[4]

In the same way that a Mercator projection looks *prima facie* quite dissimilar from the ball we live on, there are, roughly speaking, accurate transformation rules by which map objects correspond to Earth objects. For a Mercator map to be "correct" we demand that two places that are the same distance away on Earth are the same distance apart on the map. Otherwise, we have made the map wrongly. Similarly, though our language is always within a conceptual perspective — and, thus, recasts the world in terms of the perspective — our utterances, writings, performances, and whatnot can occur such that there are, roughly speaking, accurate transformation rules by which language objects correspond to world objects. There is a plurality of such projection-methods that give us the criterion for correct picturing, but, once we agree upon the conceptual framework we must transform rightly. Obviously, explicit formulation of such rules is prohibited by our inability to step outside of concepts and measure our patterns against those of the real world.

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[3] Sellars, Wilfrid. "Being and Being Known." *In the Space of Reasons: Selected Essays of Wilfrid Sellars.* New York: Harvard UP, 2007. p. 222.
[4] Sellars, Wilfrid. *Science and Metaphysics: Variations on Kantian Themes.* Ridgeview Pub Co, 1993. p. 135.

When I say, "There is a way in which the world is," all I mean is that there is some fixity, no matter how abstract, that allows us to talk about correct projections at all. Our map-making is impossible to reverse-engineer, precluded by the lack of some ur-perspective. But, "There is a way in which the world is" assures us that we are mapping something that has some fixed order and not drawing pictures of formless ether. Perhaps this is an unusual use of the phrase, and it will only get more heterodox. However, one of the goals of this essay is to show that, in philosophic tradition, this is precisely what it means to talk about how the world is.

Invoking "order" and "pattern," we must again be careful. We would be buying into givenness to assume that the world was ordered in the same way that order presents itself to us in our concepts: first, last, inner, outer, less than, greater than, etc. Any attempts to think of the world as ordered pre-conceptually must resist the temptation to try to say too much. Can we even call this a world at all? Doesn't the baggage that comes along with "world" already *say too much*? We will have to be mindful that when we talk about the pre-conceptual world as a "world," we are simply using a familiar word in place of saying nothing at all.

Thus, all we mean by "ordered" is that it is *possible* to picture the world *an sich*, viz. to project from the world *an sich* to our rightly ordered linguistic objects. Furthermore, the rules for such a procedure are *not* fixed but relative to the method of projection. It must be emphasized that we cannot see this projection sideways to ask whether or not it works. Our projection goes on without us ever taking hold of the world *an sich* from which we are projecting. Our already-in-a-picture activities of solving problems, developing concepts, living, etc. project from the world quite on their own. In just getting around in our phenomenal world, the theories and praxes that work — measured against internal standards — project from the pre-conceptual world that supports the pictures in which they have meaning.

This may seem problematic, though. If we cannot measure our pictures against what is being pictured, how do we know we are getting along right? The answer is in a more specific gloss on what we mean by the absolute world. Up until this point, we have been talking about the world as it is, in some way, absolute, but we must take another step back to ask what we have in mind when we talk about a world of absolutes. Is it Kant's noumenal realm? Berkeley's divine perception? Is it Sellars' end of scientific inquiry?

When we say that the world *an sich* exists, all we mean is that it effects a causal influence — in some way consistent — on our ideas. Again, though, the notion of causation gets us in trouble. As its troubled history suggests, we have no confidence that causation, like any other concept, should correspond isomorphically to something in the pre-conceptual world. Causation is not given. What this use of causation means is that the world *an sich* supports pictures of it such that certain pictures work and others do not. Even if we accept radically pragmatist standards and say that our pictures only work because we happen to find them useful based on standard we have ourselves devised, the lack of absolutely incommensurable pictures of the world suggests that there has to be something behind our pictures supporting them.

However, whenever we try to pin this world *an sich* down — Are there noumenal objects corresponding to phenomenal ones? Is the world really objective? — we slip out of the world *an sich* and into our conceptual scheme. As I mentioned earlier, absolutes are expressed by variations in perspectives when viewing something or other in the world.[5] Though the absolute world was prior in the order of being[6] it can only be known in terms of our concepts. This goes further than just admitting that we can only talk about or know about it in terms of human

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[5] The specifics of this will be discussed in the next section.
[6] Again, as Sellars uses the expression in *Being and Being Known*.

conceptual schemes. This goes on to say that we really cannot know if the absolutes expressed

are, in and of themselves, separate from others or even if such a separation is possible.

However, we are slipping into metaphysics. My concern in this paper is not to construct

an elaborate taxonomy and system of the absolute world. I believe that, as a consequence of this

paper's full argument, such an enterprise will not even be possible. My concern is to *show* how

absolutes, in a sense, are both produced by our thoughts and are productive of our thoughts. First,

though we must have a few more resources.

1.3   VERTIGO AND OSCILLATION

John McDowell often writes about the groundlessness we feel when, following Wittgenstein, we

recognize that there is no external way to check whether or not we are using language correctly.

Our praxes are subject to human interaction and this is it. There is no ultimate tribunal. Stanley

Cavell identifies this loss of foundations as a "terror" of which McDowell writes that it is, "...a

sort of vertigo, induced by the thought that there is nothing that keeps our practices in line except

the reactions and responses we learn in learning them...What Cavell offers looks, rather, like a

congruence of subjectivities, not grounded as it would need to be to amount to the sort of

objectivity we want if we are convinced that we are *really* going on in the same way."[7] We

cannot look "sideways" at our projectings to see if we have done it "right," but we can only act

within the already-conceptualized realm of social practice. "The fact is that it is only because of

our own involvement in the 'whirl of organism' that we can understand a form of words as

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[7] McDowell, John. "Non-cognitivism and Rule Following." *The New Wittgenstein*. Ed. Alice Crary and Rupert J. Read. London: Routledge, 2000. p. 43.

conferring, on the judgement that some move is the correct one at a given point, the special compellingness possessed by the conclusion of a proof."

This vertigo is the impetus for the shifting of perspectives that characterize my productive account of absolutes. Consider the example of arithmetic progression by adding two that McDowell discusses. At first blush, we might say that we definitely know whether or not we are adding two correctly — and adding correctly in general — because we have the rules of math. However, McDowell argues that we don't have any ultimate and external perspective on our how our arithmetic rule following relates to the world in which, presumably, there is some convention-independent way to add; what we have are the practices in which we are engaged and our reflection on these practices. This is all we can ask for. There is nothing we are missing. We are chastised for saying "2, 4, 6, 10" and we can understand why. We are agreed with for saying "2, 4, 6, 8." This mosaic of rule-following in its full sense — and not simply having reliably differential response dispositions — is all there is to follow a rule. We do not have to measure the projection up against the world as it *really* is. As Sellars writes:

> Linguistic picture-making is not the performance of asserting matter-of-factual propositions. The *criterion* of the correctness of the performance of asserting a basic matter-of-factual proposition is the correctness of the proposition *qua* picture ... the *correctness* of the picture is not defined in terms of *correctness* of performance but vice versa."[8]

Correctness is always "qua picture" and not the sideways alternative, a correct performance measured against the yardstick of absolute truth.

This doesn't mean that there are no grounds for rightness and wrongness. As Wittgenstein famously admonishes, "...to think one is following a rule is not to follow a rule.

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[8] Sellars (1993) p. 136

And that's why it's not possible to follow a rule 'privately'."[9] Rules are fixed and mutated within the praxes of rule following. What's more, there is no paradise lost here. Our points of stability are always within our conceptual experience and never *sub specie aeterni*. Our search for absolutes is not a search for an Archimedean point of verification.

As the rules-as-rails model of correctness erodes, viz. as we find our foundations necessarily relativized to a certain picturing that we can only know from the interior, it would seem that there is no room for absolutes. Indeed, isn't this the lesson of the above passages by McDowell and Sellars? This surely is not the case. Rather, the point is that we can only vet our performances, our utterances, our propositions etc. against the conceptual schemes through which they are meaningful. However, why should this preclude the *causal* influence of pre-conceptual absolutes on the methods of projection whereby we evaluate correctness?

Consider the popular example of planetary motion. Though we often adopt a heliocentric model of the way our solar system operates, we employ other models when it is convenient. When we consider motion of cars, cheetahs and shaken babies, we comfortably slip into a geocentric point of view regarding motion. When concerned with a larger scale, the sun is no longer fixed but orbiting a galactic center. Now, it would be wrong-minded to ask which is *really* the correct account of motion. It would not be useful to talk about the speed of cars relative to the galactic center when we are concerned, for instance, with cars not crashing. Though we can only ever talk about motion relative to one frame of reference or another — though following the rules of correct motion attribution are always relativized to some perspective — there are strictures upon what perspectives we can take. For instance, we cannot maintain our current understanding of motion and argue that there is none of it in the universe. Of course, this is a

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[9] Wittgenstein, Ludwig, and G. E. M. Anscombe. *Philosophical Investigations: the German Text, with a Revised English Translation*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2001. Book I §202.

rough analogy and things are not as simple as I suggest. The moral of the story, as we shall soon see, is that something or other constrains our picturing.

McDowell advises that the panacea for vertigo is simply, "...to not have felt vertigo in the first place. Now if we are simply and normally immersed in our practices, we do not wonder how their relation to the world would look from outside them, and feel the need for a solid foundation discernable from an external point of view."[10] However, why should we fear vertigo? It seems as if the retirement of the external perspective is a wellspring of creativity precisely because of the vertigo that induces us to oscillate between internal perspectives.

Paul Feyerabend, perhaps the vertiginous philosopher par excellence, writes in several places:

> Knowledge so conceived is not a process that converges towards an ideal view; it is an ever-increasing ocean of alternatives, each of them forcing the other into greater articulation, all of them contribution, via this process of competition, to the development of our mental faculties. All theories, even those which for the time being have receded into the background, may be said to possess a 'utopian' component in the sense that they provide lasting, and steadily improving, measuring sticks of adequacy for the ideas which happen to be in the centre of attention.

Our vertigo keeps us from becoming complacent in our world view and becomes the engine whereby we continue to theorize and refine. We will see this demonstrated in the history of philosophies that follow in this essay in which recognition of a divorce from foundations spurs on study and theorization. As there is no ultimate standard for, say, attributing motion — as we can never peer behind the curtain to see if we are *really* right about motion, checked against the eternal ledger — we survey the various models of motion. At some times we are heliocentric, at others geocentric. At some times we employ classical mechanics, at others relativistic

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[10] McDowell 46.

mechanics. Even though geocentricism has proven to be a poor account of motion from the perspective of the solar system, and classical mechanics a poor account of motion approaching the speed of light, the relations between competing theories are productive**.**

Although such ideals as correctness and meaning are always "qua picture", philosophic and scientific progress encourages us to observe how things change in different pictures. We must move around the landscape to get a sense of its features. What this essay will try to argue is that in doing so, we express absolutes. Our oscillations make the music of an absolute tune. Of course, this will never give us absolutes in themselves; they will always be cast in the manifold of our alternative perspectives. Rather than a something that we latch on to when we open up in different directions, absolutes are eucharistically expressed in the performance of the opening up.[11] We will discuss this in much greater detail in the later section of the paper.

1.4   IN DEFENSE OF PERSPECTIVE

As should be already clear, much of this paper's argument revolves around the metaphor of visual sight. We talk about perspective and point of view to relate moving between theories about the world to moving about a landscape. While perhaps useful for illustrating the point of the argument, this metaphor may be suspect as well.

First, the objection may be made that, in vision, there is a subject-world dualism. This observation is made from a third person viewpoint. To say that we have this perspective or that perspective is to say that what we have is *merely* a perspective as opposed to some more

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[11] This language is taken from Gadamer's discussion of theatre. A play occurs only in eucharistic time, expressed always in the present between the performers and the audience in the performance. Similarly, absolutes are always expressed in the present in the process of opening outward toward alternative perspectives.

objective knowledge. Certainly this cannot be right. How would we gain access to this super-perspective that let us know that our perspectives were *merely* perspectives?

However, this objection loses its bite when we clarify actual vision on Sellarsian grounds. If the world is not given to us in sensation, but, rather, our concepts intervene such that all sensing is conceptual sensation — sensing a pink cube is sensing pink-cube-ly — then we are wrong about what the visual metaphor presumes. Vision does not imply a subject separated from a world that he gets a hold on in sensation. Similarly, using the visual metaphor to talk about theories does not presume some separation from a world that we are given in our theories. Rather, *just like in vision*, what we theorize about is thoroughly produced by the concepts with which we theorize.

Furthermore, as to the objection about a super-perspective that lets us know our perspectives are *merely* perspectives, we answer that "perspective" does suggest something outside of perspective. Of course there has to be something that perspectives are perspectives *on*. But this is not itself a perspective. This is a deduction based on the *reductio* argument that was there nothing to have a perspective on, there would be nothing and, therefore, no knowledge, perspectives, etc. We cannot know what this transcendent[12] something is, but for lack of a better word — and we can never *know* it better — we call it the world.

These are closely related to the second objection that the visual metaphor presumes a scheme-content distinction, a fantasy which Davidson's *On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme* has driven into the ground. However, the same response applies as before. We only think that "perspective" gets us in trouble if we assume that, in sensory vision, there is a distinction between thing sensed and sensation. We argue, again following Sellars, that the phenomenal

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[12] In Kant's sense of the term

world is married to our concepts such that we could not even say there are thing*s* in the world without some object-oriented conceptual disposition.

Finally, though we often talk about conceptual schemes and moving from one to another, I do not believe that they fall into the problem that Davidson addresses in his essay. He is concerned with the view that people have conceptual schemes by which they break up a given world in different, *incommensurable* ways. We are arguing that though there are different ways of experiencing the world, this is not an *a posteriori* reorganizing of a given world. Rather, these schemes intervene before particular experiences. Furthermore, there is nothing incommensurable about these schemes anymore than there is something incommensurable about conflicting theories. They simply are incompatible. That we can move from one scheme to another is a testament to their commensurability. If it makes the argument easier to swallow replace every occurrence of "scheme" with "theoretical framework."

1.5   THE STRUCTURE OF THE PAPER

With the groundwork laid, we will turn to the overall structure of the paper to follow. The method for the essay will be an interpretive historical one. Rather than trying to keep my thesis afloat above the particularly turbulent philosophical waters as a purely novel idea, I will illuminate a thread throughout the history of philosophy will support this idea.

I will start from the Jewish origins of modern philosophy, the early Rabbinical writings in which the seeds of our modern perspectivisms can be found. I will argue that the emphasis on argument, verbal tradition, language and orthodoxy — as well as the elaborate linguistic cosmologies of Kabbalah — are the precursors of the modern theories of complementarity,

proliferation, and the absolutism espoused in this paper. Furthermore, the emphasis on philosophy and law as lived rather than known, a theme which Levinas and his contemporaries will pick up in the 20th century, will play an important role in our argument.

From here we will turn to the 17th century rationalists Spinoza and Leibniz who bring the idea of an absolute articulated through a plurality into maturity. Spinoza is often spoken of as a philosopher of expressionism. His monistic thesis of substance turns on a peculiar sense of attribute. Rather than a model in which the substance possesses attributes, Spinoza's is one in which attributes are not had by substance but, rather, one in which attributes bring out the universal substance in their variform modes. Leibniz's contribution is even more evident. The fractalian manner in which the monad reflects the world will be the biologically-inspired frame on which is hung the argument that absolutes of one level may be expressed by a manifold of lower-level things.

We will skip around a bit in the philosophical chronology to examine the contributions of Deleuze to the issue of absolutes. The rationale for this move is twofold. First, Deleuze gives some of the closest readings of Spinoza's expressionism and Leibniz's mathematical metaphysics. Secondly, Deleuze also gives us the conceptual apparatuses of nonsense and differential fields. Both are needed to demonstrate how we may open out, as I have mentioned before, through proliferation toward a limit. The former is, ultimately, a poetic recasting of the mathematical insights of the latter.

After this, we pause for a few moments on the 20th century hermeneutic set who revive the Jewish philosophy with which we began. Too often, these thinkers are overlooked because of the favor they found with their Derridean posterity who made their thought appear to be esoterica. We will consider Kierkegaard whose model of divine love is certainly predicated on

the aporia of conflicting perspectives and the anxiety of vertigo. Gadamer will give us a few tools to interpret the modernistic trend in drama and literature as expressive of our absolutist thesis. We will look at Caputo whose maxim, "The secret is there is no secret," will be presented as a regulative limit as far as which we should not go.

Finally, we will conclude with the largest section of the essay, on modern philosophy of science and analytic philosophy. Through the Pantheon of Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam, Niehls Bohr, Wilfrid Sellars, Paul Feyerabend and others we will polish our conception of the absolute. The question that will remain is whether or not such absolutes exist. I am less concerned with proving that there are these absolutes which we are developing and more concerned with showing that just as the early Jewish philosophies and 17th century rationalisms explicitly led to absolutes, so do the modern philosophies of science and language.

It is my hope that this historical method will not appear as pedantic namedropping and, instead, that the plurality of often contradictory philosophical thought will express this paper's argument in the same way that the absolute is expressed in our everyday experience and scientific and philosophic inquiry. What I mean by absolutes will come out in the moving from philosophy to philosophy. Furthermore, this paper will be a testament to the difficulties in talking about absolutes in one unified way in the same way that the philosophy we are examining finds it to be impossible to talk about the world in one unified way. We will have to adopt a strategy of complementarity to look at absolutes.

2.0   THE JEWISH FOUNDATION

For the world, truth is not law but content. It is not that truth validates reality, but reality preserves truth. The essence of the world is this preservation (not validation) of truth. "Outwardly" the world thus lacks the protection which truth had accorded to the All from Parmenides to Hegel. Since it shelters truth in its lap, it does not present such a Gorgon's shield of untouchability to the outside. It has to expose its body to whatever may have happened to it, even if that should be its — creation.

Franz Rosenzweig

It may seem bizarre that a paper so indebted to analytic philosophy and philosophy of science should begin with a lengthy section on Judaic philosophy and scripture. Then again, Niels Bohr, Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam, Thomas Kuhn and Ernest Nagel were all either Jewish or of Jewish descent. Now, this is anything but a conclusive proof on the influence of Judaism on modern, secular thought. It does point in a suggestive direction.

This section will draw out three themes that are present in the Jewish religious, philosophical and mystical literature. The first is that truth does not present itself as a unity, but in the intersections of conflicting experience. The arguments between the Rabbis of the Talmud and Midrash, to a name a few, were not just recorded as a practice of fastidious record keeping. Even when a verdict was levied on some behavior or another, it was important to preserve the conversation. The revelation of the tractates is not just the final word but processes of argument and study. Furthermore, Jewish law and philosophy countenances irrational statutes in the face of

the imperative of ceaseless study. Devotees and readers are continually reminded that preclusions of proof or success should only spur one on in the literature.

The second theme we will consider is the present-oriented tense of Jewish thought. Jumping off from the first motif's elevation of experience over thematization and conclusion, the present-tenseness of Jewish thought is reflected in the idea that the law must be lived and not simply grasped. Structurally embedded in the Jewish tradition that oral law must complement written law, presentness is a key factor in Jewish orthopraxy, ethics and philosophy.

The third is the creative power of language. Aggadic texts and the Kabbalists' accounts of creation and the fall of man suggest that creation did not occur ex nihilo, but through a semantic fracturing of God's unity. The close ties between the Hebrew alphabet and Judaic cosmology suggest that the early Jewish mystics believed that the transition from God's original absolute unity to the plurality of the world in experience came about through language. Furthermore, the emphasis on and debate over the true name of God demonstrates the multiplying creativity of the transposition from the absolute world to the phenomenological one. Without an ur-perspective on absolutes, we are left with a — seemingly arbitrary — plurality of perspectives informed by absolutes but irreducible to them. The debate over God's name seems *prima facie* a silly one. However, in the sustained debate over nomenclature, the manifold is fleshed out in the same way the plane was fleshed out by intersecting lines in the Introduction to this paper.

2.1 INTERSECTION AND (DIS)-UNITY

In this chapter's epigram, turn-of-the-20th-century Jewish philosopher and theologian, Franz Rosenzweig, writes, "For the world, truth is not law but content. It is not that truth validates reality, but reality preserves truth."[13] Ever the anti-Idealist, Rosenzweig is arguing that the truths and reasons that we come to in the world cannot circumscribe the world. Instead, to use the analogy Rosenzweig uses, what constitutes truth, logic, reason etc. "hang on the wall" of the world. Just as a painting depends on a wall not for its appearance but for its presentation, the content of our judgments — no matter how necessary we may feel that they are — depend on the absolute world only to be "hung," to be sustained. The world is never given to us, Sellars will say a few decades later, its pre-conceptual content, in some way, carved along the same joints as our conceptual schemes. Perceptual knowledge is knowledge of pictures that are allowed for and limited by the world, not of the world itself.

Rosenzweig later in *The Star of Redemption* brings these insights to bear on the Torah repeating the Talmudic mantra, "God speaks everywhere with the words of men." Though speaking about the Christian ceremony of Pentecost, he is invoking the traditional explanation for why the Torah may, at times, seem unclear. Rosenzweig's adaptation of this familiar phrase neatly dovetails with his world-as-wall model in which truth, logic, etc. are always part of hanging pictures, not properties of the wall. Again, following Sellars, truth is always "qua picture." Similarly, the truths of the Torah may seem obscure because they must be relativized to a particular perspective, that of man, and dislocated from their "position" in the absolute world.

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[13] Rosenzweig, Franz. *The Star of Redemption*. Notre Dame, IN.: Notre Dame, 1985. p. 14

This is not to say there are corresponding truths in the absolute world but to say that — just as the wall supports the picture — the 'truths' of the absolute world support those of the manifold pictures of it.[14] The Torah can only show in the same way that the picture can only display its colors. It cannot enunciate absolute truth just as the picture cannot say anything of the wall. However, the picture can express of the wall that it supports pictures being hung. Similarly, the words of the Torah, written in the language of man's conceptual schemes, can only express the absolute world that supports it.

Maimonides writes in *Guide of the Perplexed* that truth is hidden in the Torah not because it is dangerous or counter to the law:

> ...[truths] have been hidden because at the outset the intellect is incapable of receiving them; only flashes of them are made to appear so that the perfect man should know them. On this account they are called the secrets and mysteries of the Torah, as we shall make clear. This is the cause of the fact that the Torah speaketh in the language of the sons of man, as we have made clear. This is so because it is presented in such a manner as to make it possible for the young, the women, and all the people to be with it and to learn it. Now it is not within their power to understand these matters as they really are.[15]

Now, for Rosenzweig, the obscurity of absolute truth, as we have shown, is because truth qua man's concepts thereof is not a unity but a necessarily plural and incongruous reflecting of the absolute on which it hangs. Mainmonides gloss is less radical. He suggests that the perfect man will be able to grasp them. However, it is unclear if this perfection can actually be attained or if, like Peircean end of inquiry, it is a regulative ideal or limit. Maimonides talks later of "when man becomes perfect" as if it is an actual outcome. Then again, he writes one chapter earlier that some mysteries are "not in the nature of man to grasp." Maimonides seems, then, to

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[14] Strictly speaking, it doesn't make much sense to talk about truth vis-a-vis absolutes, for the same reasons that we ran into difficulties earlier with "cause." Absolute truth is simply the limiting effect of absolutes on the way in which our pictures are made.
[15] Guide I.33

be running into the same difficulties that motivated Rosenzweig to adopt his dis-unity model of the absolute. Certain truths seem irreconcilable as presented through man's conceptual apparatus. However, this is because the language of man in which the Torah must be written to be grasped at all is an alien language for the absolute. The language of man is one level down. Furthermore, the absolute cannot be spoken of in the language of man. This theme does not suggest that the truths Torah are relative but that the real truth that the Torah expresses cannot be collected in a single picture, and the truth of the Torah can never be exhausted in our exegesis.

Let us consider, though, further what the Talmud has to say about the language-of-man dictum. To understand why it became necessary to invoke this concept we turn to Norman Solomon's introductory remarks about the Talmud in his English translation:

> Three assumptions govern rabbinic interpretation of the Torah text:
> The text is free from error and inconsistency. God does not make mistakes! Apparent contradictions can be resolved by correct interpretation, through we do not always know what this is. The text is free from redundancy. Some laws are repeated...but the precise formulation always reveals some new aspect. The text is comprehensive, containing whatever we need to know...

At times, though, these three rules are difficult to maintain in the face of biblical idiosyncrasies. For example, Talmudic commentary frequently features discussion between Rabbis about why certain, seemingly trivial, expressions are included in the Torah. If every letter in the Torah is meaningful, how do we account for superfluous turns of phrase?

Discussing ritual cleanliness, Leviticus 22:4 reads, "What man soever of the seed of Aaron is a leper, or hath a running issue; he shall not eat of the holy things, until he be clean. And whoso toucheth any thing that is unclean by the dead, or a man whose seed goeth from him." This passage is the target of extended Talmudic commentary[16] on why "man" is specified

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[16] Yebamoth 71a

in "what man soever." Some Rabbis argue that the phrase is included to indicate subtleties in circumcision and mourning law. R. Eliezer however responds that the expository use of "what man soever" is merely that "...the Torah speaks in the language of men." Throughout the Talmud[17] this phrase, or variations thereof, reoccur answering the question of expository use by recourse to the idea that the Torah is written with contemporary idiom so that it is familiar and readable to everyone. Apparently unnecessary phrases are not for ampliative meaning but for clarity and readability.

What is interesting to note is that this usage of the "Torah speaks in the language of men" phrase is much more conservative than Maimonides' and Rosenzweig's usages. Rather than the grander conceptual claims of the latter usages, the Talmud's use of the phrase is exclusively limited to the small claim that the colloquial elements of the Torah are not superfluous. Though these two glosses seem radically different, their comparison will prove fruitful and, at the end of our discussion, they should seem more in accord.

Now, the Talmud's usage of the phrase is a claim about the understandability of the Torah, Maimonides' about its mystery, and Rosenzweig's about the conceptual transcendence of absolutes. If we consider that the early interpretation may just be a proto-formulation of the latter, what do we get? Really, the claim that idiomatic language is necessary for reading is not that much different than the claim that the transposition of ur-perspectival absolutes into truths relativized to some picture or other is necessary to say anything at all. The play of idiom relative to its circumscribing language is a micro-level reflection of the play of language (read: conceptual schemes) relative to the world. Both idiom and language in general sacrifice perspicuity for communicability.

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[17] Cf. Baba Mezi'a 31b "The Torah employs human phraseology." Berakoth 31b "The Torah used an ordinary form of expression."

Either vis-a-vis idiom or conceptual scheme, the maxim is the first tool in accommodating disunity while preserving absolutes. The Talmud asks how the Torah is not redundant and answers that it uses common parlance so that it may be accessible. Conflicts in ideal — absolute efficiency and meaningfulness of text — and practice — trivial phrases — are resolved with this strategy. Maimonides asks why is the Torah obscure and answers that conflicts and obscurity result from the impoverished abilities of man to extrapolate absolute truth from the language of man. Finally, Rosenzweig asks how can the Torah be the word of God in a world that recognizes the disunity of the All and answers that disunities are disunities in the conceptual artifacts of man: logos, ethics, etc. God and his word cannot be expected to appear as unified when they have to be expressed through these mediums of man, when all we have are the pictures hung on the wall. All three of these dialogues say, "The Torah speaks the language of man."

Early Jewish philosophy though, does not preempt such modern ideas about disunity only semantically. The methodological prescriptions for Torah study express similar insights. Emmanuel Levinas writes of Torah study, "The lesson of truth is not held in one man's consciousness. It explodes toward the other. To study well, to read well, to listen well, is already to speak: whether by asking questions, and, in so doing, teaching the master who teaches you, or by teaching a third party."[18] Levinas acknowledges that proper Torah study is not an analytic process in which one perspective is continually refined. Rather, Torah study is a dynamic process of accomodating other perspectives, the perspectives of others.

This is the principle motivating the inclusion of Gemara in the Talmud. The complete Talmud does not consist of just the laundry list of oral traditional regulations (the Mishnah) but,

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[18] Levinas, Emmanuel, and Gary D. Mole. *Beyond the Verse: Talmudic Readings and Lectures*. London: Continuum, 2007. p. 78.

rather, includes a much lengthier record of Rabbinic argument about interpretation. This is not just an artifact of fastidious record keeping. Rather, it expresses the idea that truth can only be gotten at in the intersection of perspectives. The imperative toward interpersonal study is so serious that the Talmud reads:

> And this is what R. Jose bar Hanina said: It reads [Jer. l. 36]: "The sword on the *badim* means the sword may cut the necks of the scholars who are studying separately each for himself; and not only this, but they become also foolish and also commit a crime thereby." Rabina said: He who loves to teach many, has the fruit of knowledge. And this is what Rabbi said: I learned much from my masters, more, however, from my colleagues, and still more from my disciples.

On one level, this is just a practical consideration that learning with others is generally more productive. However, following Levinas, the ethical dimension involved in the interpersonal exchange of group study draws out the meaning of the Torah. Again, we have an example of Jewish philosophy espousing a proliferation of perspectives to get at absolute truths. Here are the seeds of oscillation. As we shall see later, the product of this oscillation is not one to be thematized but a meaning extant only in the present-tense experience of the study. It's not that study of the Torah, argument, interpretation etc. will reveal some absolute truth that we can formulate. Rather, it expresses the absolutes of the world that allow for the various perspectives.

Hilary Putnam's explains this idiosyncrasy of Jewish law by saying that, in Judaism, the law must be lived. Only in the immediacy of praxis — rather than past-tense reflection on doxa — the Jewish law is actualized. "Judaism must not be reduced to a dead set of observances, or even a modern set of slogans or an ideology; on the other hand, Judaism is nothing without historic continuity."[19] The law is no more the laundry of obligations than a blueprint is a house. The law comes to be in the interpersonal observation of law and — more importantly — the

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[19] Putnam, Hilary. *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life: Rosenzweig, Buber, Lévinas, Wittgenstein*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2008. p.15-6.

immediate obligation to others. Just as the law is expressed in the hermeneutic intersections of continual study, it manifests itself in the interactions between subjects. For Rosenzweig, writes Putnam, "The new thinking is 'speaking thinking'." The difference between the philosophy of Rosenzweig, which he abstracts from the Jewish tradition, and the philosophical tradition up to his point is that the former in the messy present, responding to another. The alternative is a passive philosophy of linear progression.

Again, we see the idea that absolutes are only ever experienced — and experienced not in the homogeneity of monotypic experience but, rather, in the heterogeneity of interpersonal perspectives. Levinas picks up this thread in his foundational notion that ethics is first philosophy. Only in opening of oneself up to the needs of others can we confront that which breaks from the unity of the I — and its thematized world — and the disunity of the other intervenes. This is the same point made by Rosenzweig's metaphysics. The encounter with the world as a disunity ultimately expresses the metalogical absolute that supports the plural world.

This is why the language describing the fruits of Torah study is abstract. That the Torah is always open to interpretation and demands interpretation expresses that absolute truths are not static facts but dynamic processes. Jacob Neusner writes in his introductory volume to Jewish philosophy, "...the sage's mind joins God's mind when the sage receives and sets forth the Torah."[20] Similarly, Maimonides speaks of the wise man as being initiated into God's word through study. It is not that one can ever know God or the absolute as a singular truth. Rather, knowledge of the absolute is a product of disunited experience.

Nowhere is this better demonstrated than in the presence of *chukkim* in Jewish law. Leviticus 18:5 reads, "Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments..." Following again

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[20] Neusner, Jacob. *Invitation to Midrash: the Workings of Rabbinic Bible Interpretation : a Teaching Book*. San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1989 p. 277.

the principle of non-redundancy, why does the Torah specify "statutes" and "judgments"? Maimonides explains, "Those commandment whose utility is clear to the multitude are called *mishpatim* [judgments], and those whose utility is not clear to the multitude are called *chukkim* [statutes]."[21] However, it is not that, as we will see, *chukkim* are just difficult to understand. Many defy any rational consistency. However, Talmudic imperative specifies that their study and observation be taken with as much solemnity as the others. Again, truth in Jewish philosophy is shown to be anything but a unity. The *chukkim* defy rational grasping and, instead, invite devotees to pour themselves into unending study.

The most famous *chok* (singular of *chukkim*) is that of *Parah Adumah*, the Red Heifer. According to the Numbers, if a man comes in contact with a dead body, he must be cleansed through a ritual in which a perfect red cow that has never been yoked is burnt. The ashes are to be mixed with water and sprinkled over the unclean person on the third and seventh day after contact with a corpse has taken place. However, this process makes those who perform the ritual of burning the heifer impure until they bathe themselves and eve comes.

There are many more details about how the cow should be slaughtered and burnt. Indeed there are so many intricacies that rational explanation seems impossible. Why does this make the unclean clean but the clean, unclean? Why does the cow's color or history of work have any effect on the ritual? There are so many difficulties with this statute, it is often said the Solomon could understand all of God's decrees except the law of the red heifer.

What is the upside of all this? Maimonides instructs that even if the *chukkim* seem impenetrable that should not dissuade one from studying them. Maimonides writes that the more King Solomon struggled with the *chukkim* and those who ridiculed the statutes, the closer he

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[21] Guide III 26

came to the Torah.[22] Elsewhere, Maimonides writes that the particulars of the laws, especially that of *chukkim* are not necessarily reducible to the useful ends of the laws — which are not evident. "...all those who occupy themselves with finding causes for something of these particulars are stricken with a prolonged madness in the course of which they do not put an end to incongruity, but rather increase the number of incongruities."[23] Ultimately, the particulars of laws may be only as they are because some particulars had to be chosen. The *chukkim* seem then to be necessary incongruities built into the law such that the law is never a rational order that can never be teleologically fixed but, rather, it must be continually studied. As there is no definitive explanation for the *chukkim*, the law can only come out in the reflection on it and practicing of it. The law can never be in all places rationally worked out. We must, like trying to put a fitted sheet on a too-large bed, continually go from corner to corner. In the adjusting without end, we find the law, and that is the lesson of *chukkim*.

2.2 THE TREE OF LIFE

The modern attitude seems to regard Kabbalah as mystical claptrap. With all the Zohar for Dummies books and religious trends that make tabloid news, Kabbalah is the furthest thing from most sober minds when thinking about analytic philosophy. However, Kabbalah inaugurated the style of thinking about absolutes wherein language is the thing that divides the absolute world into its plural phenomenality. Modern philosophy of language is still using the ancient strategy of arguing that the dream of knowledge of the world as unity has to be given up because all

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[22] Hilkhot Me'ila 8:8
[23] Guide III 26

knowledge is baptized in language and concept. Thus, all knowledge comes from within a scheme that is a product of man and experience. Just as Sellars argued we have to be standing somewhere, this Kabbalistic linguistic theme argues our world can only appear to us in the language and conceptual schemes in which we are baptized. Such is the Kabbalistic gloss on what it means for the world to have fallen from the glory of God.

The first and most abstract manifestation of this idea can be found in the Kabbalistic cosmologies. Most of the mature Kabbalistic traditions revolve around a system of *Sefirot*, the ten aspects of God (Crown, Wisdom, Understanding, Love, Strength, Beauty, Victory, Splendor, Foundation, Kingship). To be more exact, the *Sefirot* are both predicated of God as well as metaphors for the phenomenal manifold of God as he is in the world.

Moses Cordovero — who along with his successor Isaac Luria founded the major systematic Kabbalistic traditions — writes, "... Ein Sof caused and emanated His sefirot, and His actions are [performed] through them. They constitute the ten 'sayings' through which he acts. They serve him as vessels for the actions which derive from Him in the World of Separation below. Truly His being and essence extend themselves in them..."[24] Before we can examine this passage it is important to note that Ein Sof is the name for God construed (or not construed?) as something like a pre-conceptual infinity.[25] For this reason, Ein Sof is talked about as nothingness as much as infinity. As is often the strategy in religious writing, paradox is used to try to express concepts that are, otherwise, ineffable.

What Cordovero's cosmology is arguing for is not some magical speech in which God creates. Rather, he is saying that, as God passes from the unintelligible and absolute into the

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[24] Cordovero, Moses Ben Jacob, and Ira Robinson. *Moses Cordovero's Introduction to Kabbalah: an Annotated Translation of His Or Neerav*. New York: Michael Scharf. Pub. Trust of Yeshiva Univ., 1994. p. 112.
[25] Compare Descartes' discussion of infinity vs. indefiniteness in his *Principles of Philosophy*

phenomenal world, from God qua Ein Sof to God qua attributes as Sefirot, he divides into a multiplicity of concepts that do not circumscribe God but express him. God does not change or create from his perspective. However, from man's perspective, conceptual difference is inscribed in the world and, to this extent, the world is created.

To make this clearer, we consider the cosmology of Isaac Luria and that of the *Sefer Yetzirah*. The Lurianic creation story begins with Ein Sof occupying everything. To make room for the world God contracts from a point much like a pupil dilating; this is the act of *zimzum*. Then God emanates his light into the void that this contraction creates. This results in an incredibly system of light interactions and the creation of the primordial vessel, *Adam Kadmon*. Harold Bloom describes this as a "war of light" which, "... emanates out from [*Adam Kadmon's*] head in patterns of *writing* which become fresh vessels-of-creation, newly manifested structures of *Sefirot.*"[26] This light becomes two strong and the structure fractures, the process of *shevirah*, and falls to the world in fragments. Thus, the mission of created man becomes to reassemble this creation through right actions, this is the process of *tikkun*.

Similarly, the *Sefer Yetzirah*, the earliest Kabbalistic account of creation, says the God created the world by "engraving." It specifies his tools of creation as text, numbers and communication. Though much more opaque than the accounts of Cordovero and Luria, it preserves the notion of language as creative tool.

Now, what can we take away from these eminently mystical passages that is any worth to our argument? If we abstract the details from the Lurianic story what we are left with is the idea that God had to dissolve his infinite unity to create the world. The method of doing so was language. This divides God into conceptual regions, the *Sefirot*. Then a second division takes

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[26] Bloom, Harold. *Kabbalah and Criticism*. Continuum International, 1975. p. 18

place and the *Sefirot* leave the conceptual realm and fall to the manifest world as pieces. Such a story should recall Spinoza's tripartite division of substance wherein a divine unity, unpresentable in its totality, is expressed through attributes in the world, which manifest as modes. Ein Sof, the absolute, is unreachable from the world. Because it was created in language, it cannot get out of it, lest it no longer be, to get to God qua infinite absolute. It can only encounter God in his plural attributes, demarcated — or engraved — by the conceptual apparatuses within language. We find in the Zohar, the foundational redaction of Kabbalistic thought, this idea explained as follows, "If [angels] did not put on a garment befitting this world, they could not endure in this world, and the world could not endure them, if this is so with angels how much more so with Torah..."[27] This resembles the earlier idea that the Torah speaks the language of man. However, considered in tandem with the Kabbalistic creation story, it enriches the idea to argue that the phenomenal world is fallen because otherwise it would be unpresentable to man. God does not hide himself in the plurality of attributes that express him but do not exhaust him in order to confuse man but in order that he may be presented at all. Such is the problem of absolutes and presentation.

The Zohar elaborates on this theme when talking about the sin of Adam. In the Torah (Gen 3:23-24) the account of God expelling Adam from the Garden of Eden reads, "*Vayashelechu YHVH Elohim migan-eden...vayagaresh et-h'adam.*" Literally translated this reads "Sent YHVH God the garden eden...drove [et]-the man" or "YHVH Elohim expelled him from the Garden of Eden...He drove out *et* Adam."[28] A couple remarks about Hebrew are in order. First, YHVH is the tetragrammaton, the never spoken name of God. Elohim is the plural

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[27] Matt, Daniel Chanan. *Zohar: Annotated & Explained*. Woodstock, Vt.: SkyLight Paths, 2007. p. 5-7.

[28] Ibid.

name of God. The Sonico Hebrew-English Torah explains these two names, "[YHVH] is used whenever the divine is spoken of in close relationship with men or nations, Elohim denotes God as the Creator and Moral Governor of the Universe. [YHVH] describes the Deity stressing his lovingkindness...Elohim emphasizes his justice and rulership." The other interesting bit of Hebrew is the particle, *et.* In English translations of the Bible, *et* is never translated. In Hebrew is just marks a direct definite object. However, many Biblical exegetes think *et* has special significance as it is written with the first and last letters of the Hebrew alphabet, *aleph* and *tav*. Due to the principle of Torah hermeneutics that every letter in the Torah is meaningful, many scholars read into *et* that it hard codes the unity of God's creation in the things talked about. As a side note, this could be just as easily explained with the tongues-of-man argument, the Torah included grammatical particles because that was how man actually spoke. This is likely, but the fact that it is so common to read into the *et* makes such analysis — even if over-zealous— important for the explication of Jewish trends in thought.

The Zohar reads, "Rabbi El'azar said, 'We do not know who divorced whom, if the blessed Holy One divorced Adam or not. But the word is transposed: *He drove out* Et. *Et*, precisely! Who drove out Et? Adam. Adam actually drove out Et.'" [29] The gloss that Daniel C. Matt gives this passage is the following, "Et is the Zohar's code name for Shekhinah, who symbolizes divine speech: the entire alphabet from aleph to tav. Once Et was driven out of the Garden, language itself became corrupt...Here the Zohar suggests that his sin was driving out Et."[30] Whether or not this Kabbalistic interpretation of the Torah holds water — it certainly seems suspect — it has held a central place in the Zohar and the scholarship thereof. Indeed, almost every redaction of essential Zohar passages includes this one.

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[29] Ibid. 19
[30] Ibid. 18

This implies that the sin of Adam may be a small scale reflection of the "fall" from the infinite unity of Ein Sof into the plurality of the world. Just as the demarcation of language (the Sefirot) was the vehicle by which a pre-conceptual God made his way into a phenomenal world, the splitting of the unity language was the fall of man. The theme occurs again — although to save space we will not consider it in detail — in the fall of the tower of Babel when language simpliciter splits into the languages of the world. From these examples, we see that the three falls from unity into the world occur through language. The unity of the world from the perspective of God passes into the disunity of the world from the perspective of man through use of language. We are necessarily damned to be cut off from getting onto the absolutes, but this is not a feature of some arbitrary rule. The justice of God in the Garden is a necessary justice on the condition of the creation of the phenomenal world. Such is the theological pre-figuration of the cornerstone of analytic philosophy, that man is never given the world in itself but rather the world appears through the conceptual linguistic vehicles of our social experience. The lesson of the Sefirot persists.

3.0   SYSTEM AND REASON

...we don't have, nor should we hope for, any mark of reality in phenomena, but the fact

that they agree with one another and eternal truths.

Leibniz

Whereas the preceding chapter set the abstract and thoroughly metaphysical groundwork for the argument, this one will take a step back to look at system. The choice to skip around in history to the 17th century is precisely to show what absolutes look like at the turning point toward modern science. Up until this point, the conceptual resources — as we saw in Jewish philosophy — were strained to talk about infinities, limits and absolutes. Without a rigorous physics and only hints of what would become calculus in the 17th century, earlier thinkers were deprived of machinery needed to move these themes out of their abstract modes and into a system.

Here, though, we will begin with Spinoza. Spinoza is a reasonable transitional philosopher not only because his metaphysics is in accord with that of the Jewish mystics but because it is quite likely that Spinoza, indeed, engaged with the Kabbalists of his time until he was excommunicated from the Jewish community.

Spinoza, with his "geometrical" method as a systematization *par excellence*, follows the same course as the Kabbalistic cosmology. As mentioned earlier, he begins with one undifferentiated substance, divides it into attributes and manifests them in the modes of the

world. He, like the Kabbalists, defies any account of creation *ex nihilo* with the principle that nothing comes from nothing. God's perfection must already contain, as it were, anything to be created. The manner in which Spinoza reconciles this fact with the common intersections and disunities of human experience demonstrates how his philosophy gets at absolutes. As an "expressionistic" philosopher, Spinoza will coin the idea of an experiential plurality that everywhere expresses an absolute.

We will move from Spinoza to his contemporary Leibniz. As Leibniz was a polymath, his biography as well as his philosophy exemplifies the theme of expressive power of proliferation.

Leibniz's metaphysical model of the monad is the first to make explicit the reciprocity of unity and plurality. Though absolutely undecomposable, the monad reflects the entirety of the universe. Such a paradox motivates the Leibnizian system towards the theory of absolutes explicated in this paper.

Both Spinoza and Leibniz will be examined, in part, through Deleuze. Deleuze's exegesis of these philosophers is often heterodox, though, as he often co-opts and transforms their philosophy into that of his own. Concerned equally with language, metaphysics and science — as well as almost every other area of humanities study — Deleuze will be the prime example of a philosopher who tries to redact the argument we are laying out. Though an advocate of nonsense, madness and the like, Deleuze is also one of the philosophers most dedicated to the idea of a grounding. Like the Kabbalists, Deleuze is too often ignored in the annals of sober philosophy. However, we cannot hope to see the absolute but through the lights of philosophic charity. The hegemony of the canon can only frustrate a programme that entails subjects moving from one perspective to another. It is precisely in the free market of philosophical theory that the absolute comes to light.

Finally, this section will end with a brief reflection on Kant. Though the scope and tremendous interlocking of the Kantian corpus will prevent us from anything but an adumbration of his thought, Kant is useful as the philosopher who most rigorously fretted over the problems of an absolute grounding. Though often invoking the *ding an sich*, Kant's was not an easy acceptance of the absolute. His *Critique*, though primarily concerned with the experiential, spends a good amount of time reconciling the idea of a noumenal world with the lack of an Archimedian point. Kant's attempts to construct a noumenal world that that is not purely negative are integral to our attempts to make positive claims about the absolute.

3.1   SPINOZA THE EXPRESSIONIST

Spinoza begins his opus *Ethica* with four definitions from which, alone, we could reconstruct the systematic argument for absolutes in our sense of the term:

> D3: By substance I understand what is in itself and is conceived through itself, that is, that whose concepts does not require the concept of another thing, from which it must be formed.
> D4: By attribute I understand what the intellect perceives of a substance, as constituting its essence.
> D5: By mode I understand the affections of a substance, *or* that which is in another through which it is conceived.
> D6: By God I understand a being absolutely infinite, that is, a substance consisting of an infinity of attributes, of which each one expresses an eternal and infinite essence.[31]

First, we recognize that substance has to be infinite. When Spinoza says that substance does not require the concept of another thing, he means that it cannot be delimited by anything else. Otherwise, it would require that other thing to mark its boundaries. Spinoza will later, P14,

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[31] Spinoza, Baruch de. *A Spinoza Reader: the Ethics and Other Works*. Ed. Edwin Curley. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton UP, 1994. p.85

use this line of reasoning to prove that there is only one substance, God. It takes no large leap of confidence to associate such a notion of substance with the concept of absolute that we have been employing. Clearly, Spinoza cannot mean that God is within the world or, again, it would require another substance, the world. Spinoza reaches this conclusion negatively and, thus, argues that it does not violate the premise that substance-God must be prior to our concepts.

D4 reinforces the idea of God's priority by restricting what the intellect perceives of a substance to attributes. This definition intimates that the intellect cannot perceive substance directly, although as we will later see there is a special "knowledge" of substance. According to D6, the intellect is put in contact, though, with God through these attributes which *express* him. The idea of expression is an important one in Spinoza and he is careful to use the word consistently. In a sense, Spinoza uses the idea of expression to indicate that God does not have attributes in the way that attributes are commonly conceived of being had by that to which they are attributed. Rather, God is known, in a special experiential sense, by attributes as they are manifest by their modes in the world.

Deleuze parses this idea as follows:

> ...attributes are no longer attributed, but are in some sense "attributive." Each attribute expresses an essence, and attributes it to substance. All the attributed essences coalesce in the substance of which they are the essence.[32]

From this interpretation, the model goes something like this: We experience the various modalities, the specific things of the world, which are extended or thought, the two attributes that Spinoza names. The extension or thought of these modes expresses some essential, pre-phenomenal truth about God.

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[32] Deleuze, Gilles. *Expressionism in Philosophy: Spinoza*. New York: Zone, 1990. p.45

Spinoza goes on to say that what extension or thought express about some essence of God is that God is a thinking thing and that God is an extended thing. How is this reconcilable with the account thus far? God cannot resemble the modes of his attributes. Those things which are extended are limited by the limits of their extensions. It is precisely by this limit that we understand extension. The same is true for thought. Both extension and limit are manifestly discrete. God must be undivided and infinite.

The answer to this confusion lies in that, following Deleuze, we can say that attributes are implied by modes but are of God's essence. To understand this, we must look at what Spinoza means by essence to understand what it means to say that attributes express his essence. Spinoza has in mind that the existence of attributes is identical to their essence, or, more precisely, the sense in which an attribute is said to exist is reciprocally parasitical on the sense in which it is said to have its essence. Spinoza writes in a letter to Simon de Vries, "So since the existence of attributes does not differ from their essence, we shall not be able to apprehend it by any experience."[33]

It would be patently wrong to think that, say, a rock was identical to its extension. From the above explanation of attribute though, that is exactly what we would have to say if we alleged that rocks were extended in essence. The rock does not have extension as an attribute but, in its extension, points the way to extension. The various extended modes of the world suggest the extension in their limited occupation of space. Only God, though, has extension as an attribute, his essence convertible with it and, thereby, expressed through it. Deleuze summarizes

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[33] Spinoza, Benedictus De. *Complete Works*. Ed. Samuel Shirley and Michael L. Morgan. Indianapolis, IN: Hackett Pub., 2002. p.783

this point, "Attributes are forms common to God, whose essence they constitute, and to modes of creatures which imply them essentially."[34]

What is important in line of thought in Spinoza is the systematic rigor it brings to the idea that a united absolute manifests itself phenomenally as a disunited plurality. Indeed, it seems that Spinoza, the consummate monist, is not terribly monistic at all in Putnam's sense of hegemonic absolute. Spinoza gives us a method by which the intersecting and all-over heterogeneous world can *express* the absolute. Attributes, common to all experience but not apprehended by it, are suggested by the modalities in which they are manifest. These attributes, then, express God insofar as he is convertible with all of his attributes together. This double step of abstraction — first to attributes, then to substance — allows for disunities such as those between thought and extension. Whereas the Kabbalah simply abstracted from experience and alleged that some opaque *Sefirot* express God, Spinoza builds down to a phenomenal account whereby absolutes are expressed at a double remove. The first move is the rational move of abstraction from modes to attributes. The second is the move of oscillation from attribute to substance whereby, paradoxically, one thing can have an infinity of disparate essences: thought, extension, etc.

Spinoza's tripartite epistemological model makes this clearer. He writes that we have three kinds of knowledge: (1)knowledge from random experience which leads to opinion, knowledge whereby we learn of "common notions and adequate ideas of properties," which he calls (2) reason, and knowledge whereby we know God, which Spinoza calls (3) intuitive knowledge.[35] This lines up neatly with knowledge of (1) modes, (2) attributes and (3) substance. Error comes from the first kind of knowledge and knowledge of true and false from the second and third. Spinoza writes that a true idea is one that is, "...adequate in God insofar as he is

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[34] Deleuze(1990) p.47
[35] Spinoza(1994) p.141

explained through the nature of the human mind."[36] Again, we have this theme of the tongues of man and the fall from God. We cannot know God directly as we know the world through the conceptual praxes of perception and reason. Instead, we know God in an almost equivocal sense of "knowledge," intuitive knowledge. This knowledge is produced causally by our work within concepts, within perspectives, but ultimately exceeds it.

In using our reason to adjudicate our knowledge of experience, we develop our intuitive knowledge, that of God. Hence, "The more we understand singular things, the more we understand God."[37] Just as the attributes implied by their modes, things in the world, express the essences of God, knowledge of attributes by way of abstraction produces this third knowledge. Indeed, knowledge of absolutes, the third knowledge, can only be such a production of what we call conventional knowledge because we cannot know — insofar as knowing is conceptual — the pre-conceptual absolutes. Such is Spinoza's way of phenomenologically systematizing the hitherto abstract and mystical arguments toward an absolute.

3.2   LEIBNIZ'S PLEATS

If Spinoza was the philosopher of over-charitable unity, then Leibniz was his uncharitable counterpart of disunity. Objecting to Spinoza, Leibniz writes:

> [Spinoza] says that mind and body are the same thing, only expressed in two ways, and that "thinking substance and extended substance are one and the same substance, which is now conceived under the attribute of thought, and now conceived under the attribute of extension" ... This is not right in my view. Mind

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[36] Ibid. 142
[37] Ibid. 257

and body are no more the same thing than are the principle of action and the principle of passion.[38]

What Spinoza meant by this was well explicated earlier by Deleuze in the passage where he claims that God is the coalescing of all the expressed essences. From the viewpoint of God, there is no difference in attribute. Leibniz, however, is not concerned with starting from God and building down from his perspective. Being a scientist, how could Leibniz possibly have the hubris to proceed in this way? Rather, just like the higher order becomes expressed in summation to infinity in Leibniz's calculus, his absolutes build from the ground up. Leibniz will adopt the perspective of the atomic unit, the monad. From here, it would certainly be wrong to say that extension and thought are ever the same thing. From this viewpoint, it should be much easier to see how plurality and unity are related. After all, we do not have the perspective of God and revelations from such a perspective, such as those of Spinoza, must seem spurious.

Leibniz's metaphysics, as summarized in the *Monadology*, revolves around his obtuse simple substances, monads. Often called mind-like, monads are not extended or divisible and they make up everything. Leibniz is notoriously unclear as to what, if anything, monads correspond to in the perennial philosophy of the world. This obscurity led Bertrand Russell to famously contend that the *Monadology* was a "fantastic fairytale, coherent perhaps but wholly arbitrary." Indeed, it would not be too much of a stretch to consider that the *Monadology* is something of an elaborate metaphor for Leibniz's metaphysics. For this reason and for that of the room in this paper, we will not go into the specifics of how Leibniz's metaphysics explains the world but will merely consider the form of his metaphysics. It is this structure, rather than the particulars, that will be important in understanding the full argument of this paper.

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[38] Leibniz, Gottfried Wilhelm. *Philosophical Essays*. Ed. Roger Ariew and Daniel Garber. Indianapolis: Hackett Pub., 1989. p.275

Leibniz's metaphysics is one in which the entire world is reflected in every one of its atoms, the monads. Though each monad is necessarily different, through each monad's relations to every other monad, the entire universe is expressed. "...each simple substance is a perpetual, living mirror of the universe."[39] As all the monads have qualitative relations to the others — their qualities are parasitical on their relations to other monads — they may be viewed as something like an infinite array of biological gears in an incredible complex machine. I use the word biological because of the dynamic nature of monads to adapt and change as per the harmony in which God keeps the world. Monads do not directly interact but are kept in line by God.

Deleuze instructively compares the monadic metaphysics of Leibniz to a pleated sheet that is inflected at every point. Through this continual folding, every fold is itself folded, the two sides of the sheet become, in a sense, one. As the number of folds approaches infinity, two sides of a surface approach a certain fusion. Leibniz writes, "The monads have no windows through which something can enter or leave."[40] However, the internal unity of the monad reflects the exterior plurality of the world. This paradoxical formulation is what Deleuze tries to explain with the similarly vague and unimaginable notion of infinite folding.

A perhaps better metaphor is the fractal. At every "point" on the border of a fractal — take the Mandelbrot set — we can zoom in *ad infinitum* and find greater detail. At every point, there is an inflection. Thus, it becomes almost arbitrary to speak of a border. Though the points that comprise the fractal and those that don't are determined, the constant inflecting makes it impossible to speak of when one passes "into" the fractal. For where should one orient themselves as to outside and inside?

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[39] Ibid. 220
[40] Ibid. 214

Though these are certainly interesting metaphors — and Deleuze's writing on Leibniz is replete with them — what is the upside of all this? Leibniz's metaphysics may be, as Russell argues, arbitrary as just a metaphysics. However, when, as Deleuze does, the monad is transposed into a key of epistemology, it becomes much more interesting. If we think of the relation of monads to the world as that of different viewpoints of the world — different pictures — Leibniz's *Monadologie* begins to seem much less like a fairytale and more like the analytic philosophy of the 20th century. Each picture of the world is necessarily related to all others. They build on each other and depend on each for their sense. Indeed, no picture of the world can be independent from the others. As in the Deleuzian model, the interior and exterior are married.

However, is this too far of a stretch? Leibniz seems to think something similar. Insofar as Leibniz identifies monads with minds or spirits, it doesn't seem too transgressive to talk about a monadic epistemology. He actually uses the terminology of perspective to explain the relation of the monad to the world at large:

> Just as the same city viewed from different directions appears entirely different and, as it were, multiplied perspectively, in just the same way it happens that, because of the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different universes, which are, nevertheless, only perspectives on a single one, corresponding to different points of view of each monad.[41]

The universe is convertible with the multitude of perspectives as they are all reciprocally dependent. Here is a revisiting of the Spinozian theme that the plurality of God's essences are all one in God but many in the attributes that express them.

Such a view of the Leibnizian system as one concerned with how the world appears and is known, is reinforced in the passage where Leibniz compares human truth to that of God's. In the passage that opens this chapter, Leibniz says, "...we don't have, nor should we hope for, any

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[41] Ibid. 220

mark of reality in phenomena, but the fact that they agree with one another and eternal truths."[42]

Just as in the model of absolute that we set out in the introduction, absolutes — eternal truths — exert a causal influence on what pictures we many form. We cannot measure the truths of our pictures against eternal truths, anymore than we can know an entire building from any single angle of view:

> ...the reality of bodies, of space, of motion, and of time seem to consist in the fact that they are phenomena of God, that is, the object of his knowledge by *scientia visionis*. And the distinction between the appearance bodies have with respect to us and with respect to God is, in a certain way, like that between a drawing in perspective and a ground plan ... God not only sees individual monads and the modifications of every monad whatsoever, but he also sees their relations, and in this consists the reality of relations and truth.[43]

The difference between sides of the pleated sheet, in Deleuze's metaphor, is a matter of perspective. To man, the world is a plurality because his perspective is limited to one at a time. To God, the world is a unity because his perspective is infinite. As we have seen in Spinoza, as well as in the Rabbinical writings and in the Kabbalah, absolutes must decompose into pluralities from the perspective of man.

Unlike Spinoza and the Jewish philosophers, though, Leibniz does not allow for us to get back to God by the proliferation of perspectives, the oscillation between viewpoints. Leibniz does not leave the door open for the intuitive knowledge that Spinoza countenances as the third knowledge. Instead, he argues that only God has such knowledge. This tension between Spinoza and Leibniz illustrates the sticking point of absolutes. Either we cannot know them and it becomes suspect how we can even say anything of interest about them, or we can know them through some mystical becoming one with God's mind, as in Spinoza and the Kabbalists. Kant

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[42] Ibid. 186
[43] Ibid. 199

will confront this same problem in his discussion of the noumenal real. However, before we get to that we must take a brief detour to examine a few pieces of Deleuze's thought, which we have, thus far, only seen mediated through that of Spinoza and Leibniz. Leaving no room for God, Deleuze cuts something like a middle path between Spinoza and Leibniz.

3.3   DELEUZE

Deleuze wrote prolifically about almost every area of philosophic interest: metaphysics, aesthetics, mathematics, language, politics, history, etc. In this way, his corpus seems to be an experiment in multiplying perspectives to express absolute truths. For this reason, it would be impossible to talk of Deleuze's work in summary as if it were anything but heterogeneous through and through. This is not to say that he is inconsistent. Rather, he concepts and terminology change and evolve. Manuel DeLanda describes the task of expositing Deleuze as trying to pin down a live butterfly. Therefore, I will examine only one aspect of Deleuze's philosophy and how it comes to bear on absolutes. The first is Deleuze's mathematically-inspired ontology wherein essences are dynamical fields rather than fixed points. This is his attempt to answer for the varieties of human experience, to maintain some kind of realism in the face of perspectivism.

Deleuze's metaphysics is an obvious choice for an essay that argues that absolutes are expressed in interstices of empirical perspective. After all, the chief theme in Deleuze's body of work is that difference should replace unity at our ontological foundation. This is difference not in the Hegelian sense of negative definition in the space of mutual exclusion, but difference in the "affirmative" Nietzschean sense. The former depends on a more primary identity to engage

in such a dialectical "space." Deleuze has in mind a difference such that identity is only ever an anterior proposition on top of certain series of repeated change. "That identity not be first, that it exist as a principle but as a second principle, as a principle *become*; that it revolve around the Different: such would be the nature of a Copernican revolution which opens up the possibility of difference having its own concept, rather than being maintained under the domination of a concept in general already understood as identical."[44] This is not so much an alternative to identity and difference as much as a new conception of difference. Again, Deleuze's philosophy hinges on the idea that difference, as it is normally understood, is only identity in the negative. Deleuze is trying to develop a positive difference that is irreducible to any non-identity.

What Deleuze has in mind is a philosophy that seeks to see eternal ideals not as points of truth but as fields of possibility that dictate the various actualization of things in the world. He writes:

> Events are ideational singularities which communicate in one and the same Event. They have therefore an eternal truth, and their time is never the present which realizes and makes them exist. Rather, it is the unlimited Aion, the infinitive in which they subsist and insist. Events are the only idealities. To reverse Platonism is first and foremost to remove essences and to substitute events in their place, as jets of singularities.[45]

Here Deleuze has taken the plural realizability of eternal truth, shifted it from an effect of human perspective and relocated in a complicated system of eternal truth. That is to say, Deleuze reconciles our inability to collect all of experience under a single model and the existence of absolute reality by supplementing the idea of the absolute real.[46] Breaking from the Platonic tradition in which the absolute is modeled on the phenomenal, Deleuze uses all the resources of

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[44] Deleuze, Gilles. *Difference and Repetition*. New York: Columbia UP, 1994. p. 40-1

[45] Deleuze, Gilles. *The Logic of Sense*. New York: Columbia UP, 1990. p. 53
[46] This is an alternative to supplementing our conception of experience and knowledge.

modern mathematics to try to create an elaborate, ever-changing "field" of the absolute real. Seeking to escape the relativism of his 20th century contemporaries, Deleuze espouses a complex realism that allows for a world of disunity. It is not that there is no eternal truth; it is just that its dynamism manifests itself in such a way that it is impossible to reverse engineer and fix.

To make this clearer, DeLanda compares the differences between the Platonic-Hegelian tradition and that of Deleuze to the differences between a figure in Euclidean geometry and a figure in Riemannian geometry. In the former system, a sphere, say, is defined in terms of a 3-dimensional space in which it is embedded: the sphere is the set of all the ordered triples equidistant from a central ordered triple. In the latter, however, the sphere is the *space* and no extrinsic metric is needed, the sphere is 2-dimensional. What Deleuze and DeLanda are trying to do is find a way that values can remain objective without superadding an extra dimension, a God's-eye-viewpoint. For Deleuze, all of our problems with truth do not come from being unable to see our practices sideways but from their being no extrinsic measure of truth rather than the field of possible truth that manifests itself variously. Deleuze often compares the relationship of the eternal to the manifest as an egg to the animal it becomes. The eternal virtual contains the many actualizations within it just like the egg contains the chicken. The chicken is not inside the egg — except at the very end — but the biological and material conditions that may develop into many possible chickens are in the egg. Eternal truth is a "...structure of spaces of possibilities, spaces which, in turn, explain the regularities exhibited by morphogenetic processes."[47] This illuminates Deleuze's indebtedness to Nietzsche's genealogical thought: the telling of the story of truth and value reflects what is eternal, the manifold of possibility.

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[47] De, Landa Manuel. *Intensive Science and Virtual Philosophy*. London: Continuum, 2004. p.10

At this point, readers may wonder why we have gone down this dark path. How possibly can the vagaries and poesis of Deleuze possibly shed light on Spinoza and Leibniz, much less help to mediate them? Deleuze says that he sees the novelty of his and Spinoza's thought as realizing univocity and multiplicity over the one and many, the categories of ultimately Platonic thought. The former division of being says that the variety of experience is to be accounted for as multiple actualizations of eternal truth. The lesson Deleuze derives from Spinoza is that being, *precisely in its difference*, expresses — or, perhaps, affirms — the unity of truth. The disunity of experience is not something to be overcome but actually necessary if we are to make any sense of absolutes. Thus, Deleuze concludes *Difference and Repetition*:

> This programme is expounded and demonstrated with genius from the beginning
> of the *Ethics*: we are told that the attributes are irreducible to genera or categories.
> Because they are formally distinct, they all remain equal and ontologically
> one...We are told on the other hand, that the modes are irreducible to species
> because they are repartitioned within attributes according to individuating
> differences which...immediately relate them to univocal being...Being is said
> according to forms which do not break this unity of sense; it is said in a single
> sense throughout all its forms ... That of which it is said, however, differs; it is
> said of difference itself.[48]

Absolutes can only be articulated by the different stuff of the world conforming to the same sense of absolute being. This is what I meant in the introduction when I said that absolutes exert a causal influence on the pictures within which truth is found. Deleuze wants to call these conditions absolute truth, but it is only an equivocation with the truth with which we are familiar.

Consider Deleuze's four-fold division of the meaning of propositions. Deleuze first lays out the tripartite model of denotation, manifestation and signification. These are all, generally, in the realm of representation. Denotation connects the proposition to a state of affairs. Insofar as denotations are talked about in terms of truth, a true denotation is actually "filled" with a state of

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[48] Deleuze (1994) 303-4

affairs. A true denotation represents a real or at least possible state of affairs. Manifestation enables denotation to work by representing the speaking subject in the proposition. Manifestation ties meaning to a specific context. Finally, signification represents general concepts in propositions. It sets the conditions of truth for the proposition with respect to the universals at play in a certain conceptual scheme. What is interesting to Deleuze about all these dimensions of proposition is that they are all relative to a specific perspective, or picture in our terms. Ultimately, Deleuze concludes that none of these three can fix the "sense" of a proposition as they are all parasitical on each other rather than being informed by some absolute ground. Denotation is always relative to the subject manifest in the proposition. This subject can only speak relative to a scheme which fixes universals in a system of signification. Finally, this signification depends on denotation to be manifest.

Thus, Deleuze introduces the fourth dimension of meaning, sense. There is no extension to sense and thus it is non-representational[49]. Rather, it is expressive. We cannot say *what* it expresses — other than generally — because it does not have specific extension, as we just said. This expression is certainly tied to Spinoza's use of the term. Even if our representation schemes vary, as they must, sense is always constrained by the absolutes that ground it. Although concerned here with language, this is a mirror of Deleuze's ontology as well. We can accept the perspectivisms by which value supervenes on point of view. We just have to also accept that there is an extra-representational meaning to experience as well, the expression of absolute univocity. This is what is shown in oscillation, in my sense.

To conclude, it might suffice to say of the central tenet of his philosophy that Deleuze makes difference, phenomenal disunity, a necessary condition for being to have any unity

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[49] Non-representational in the sense that there is no one-one correspondence between sense and something in the world.

whatsoever. His position inverts the maxim of Putnam that absolutes reduce to monisms. Absolutes only makes sense, vis-a-vis the necessarily phenomenal world, in terms of pluralism. Difference in the world is the plural modality of absolute being. Just as God is expressed only in the different attributes which are different in the world but the same in him, as we discussed earlier, absolute truth, for Deleuze, is expressed only in the iterated difference of the world that speaks univocally.

Deleuze's philosophy, though, indulges in parable, metaphor and creative expression. There is still a very real worry that he has not settled anything but merely painted a compelling picture. It would seem easy to look at his work with the same incredulousness that prompted Russell to say of the *Monadologie* that it was a fairytale. Whether an interesting fairytale or a plausible ontology, Deleuze demonstrates that a middle ground between Spinoza and Leibniz takes the expressionism of the former and combines it with the nature-centric perspective of the latter. Deleuze starts with world of experience — rather than God — and tries to build his way to eternal truth through expressionism. Like Leibniz's, Deleuze's absolutes are only gotten at by the things in the world informed by them and expressive of them.

However, one question still remains unanswered by the Jewish philosophers, Leibniz and Spinoza, and only abstractly addressed by Deleuze: if the absolute cannot be represented, only expressed, how can we say anything about it at all? If we accept Deleuze's division between representation and sense, how can we know that there is a ground to be expressed at all? This is *the* question when dealing with absolutes. We turn now briefly to Kant and his struggle with a positive account of noumenon.

3.4   KANT *AN SICH*

Strictly speaking, Kant is unable to say anything positive about the world of things-in-themselves. This is the only realm in which it would make sense to talk of absolutes because absolutes must be before the subjective contributions of perception and the whole point of a thing-in-itself is to abstract from a thing all the phenomenological baggage of perception. However, Kant's inability to positively characterize the noumenon is not for a lack of effort. Kant wants absolutes in his metaphysics. He recognizes that even if all experience is mediated through the forms of sensibility and worked on in concert with the understanding, it still must be experience of something. It is experience of phenomena. However, as Kant has demonstrated the irreducible subjectivity to such experience — and how could any proponent of an active sensibility in experience think otherwise — we find ourselves wanting of some stable ground outside of all experience. If sensible intuition could exhaust being, get a hold on things in themselves, how could we say that there was anything before there were subjects to perceive it? If there is no eternal excess of truth over experience, wouldn't everything — and not just knowledge — begin with experience?

Thus, Kant posits the noumenon, the objects of pure understanding. He means this in the strong sense: the noumenon is not just unperceived as are, say, mathematical truths, but the noumenon does not pertain to experience. Sensible knowledge cannot give us noumena in the same way that the categories, though objects of pure understanding, are only sensible in terms of phenomena.

The effect of noumenon is that it regulates how much sensibility can say about the world. Our sensible knowledge may penetrate very deeply into the phenomenal world but is absolutely

unable to know things-in-themselves, independent of any possible experience. "The concept of a noumenon is thus a merely limiting concept, the function of which is to curb the pretensions of sensibility..."[50]

Kant brings much needed clarity to the concept of an absolute foundation outside of experience by insisting that not even the categories can apply to noumena. Although the categories are transcendent of experience, they only have a sense with regard to some possible experience to which they may apply. The function of the categories, Kant reminds us, is to bring intuitions under objective unification. Since there are no intuitions on which to operate regarding noumena, there could be no application of the categories — except in a purely logical, trivial sense. From this it follows that questions such as, "Are the noumena one or many?" don't have any non-trivial meaning. Furthermore, any attempts to form some sort of isomorphism between noumena and phenonomena should, at best, be unimportant. This seems right and dispels the idea that absolute things-in-themselves are lurking behind the veil of appearance. We will keep this in mind for the rest of our discussion about absolutes and suspend any questions about whether absolutes are many things, a unified field, God, etc.

Indeed, Kant cannot say anything at all about noumena except that they are unknown in themselves and may causally contribute to phenomena. However, there is a bit more to get out what he says, or doesn't say, that may help us in our survey of absolutes. Much of what are working behind the scenes to motivate Kant's division of phenomena and noumena are his objections to Leibniz's philosophy. Arguing against Leibniz's "intellectualised appearances,"

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[50] Kant, Immanuel. *Critique of Pure Reason*. Trans. Norman Kemp Smith. Houndmills, Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2003. p. 272

Kant objects to his reduction of all being to intellectual representation, to monads.[51] Kant proposes, instead, that there are two independent sources of representation, the understanding and the sensibility. Though all objectively valid knowledge comes as a fusion of the two, we can think of two independent origins of representation: the world of noumena on one hand and the world of phenomena on the other.

What is so striking about this treatment is that the difficulty with absolutes — construed as noumena — is that when we talk about finding absolutes we are speaking nonsense. The only things we can "find" in any non-trivial manner come at the intersections of understanding and sensibility. Kant takes Leibniz's purely intellectual problem with absolutes — we can only have one perspective instead of a God's-eye-view — and makes it a problem with the complex of human experience. It is not a question of which perspective we have but that God's perspective doesn't involve sensibility or the categories, which only have sense in terms of the phenomena they describe.

When we encountered the difficulties with the Torah exegesis, when we had to, with the Kabbalists, reconcile the unity of God with the diversity of creation, and when we tried to build down from God to the world with Spinoza, we found ourselves with the abstract conclusion that the "language" of God was simply different from that of man. What was obvious and one in God fell into the disunity of experience because of some vague difficulty with man's knowledge. Was man just made wrong to take in absolutes?

Finally, with Kant we have something of an answer. The problem is precisely that all human knowledge begins with experience. If we were to find absolutes it is not that we simply need to know where to look. We would have to not look at all. Whatever ultimate foundation

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[51] Kant says the opposite of Locke, that he "sensualised all concepts of the understanding." However, we will not deal with Locke in this paper.

there might be for knowledge, it could only be thought *and* could not be known determinately, as are the categories, through experience. This kind of knowledge of course, is impossible as all knowledge involves sensibility and understanding.

However, our reason tries to exceed what we are capable of knowing. This is the message of the transcendental dialectic. We are drawn to look for absolutes, for God. We are damned to failure from the start, but Kant does acknowledge that there can be practical uses for this. In our reason-strong desire to find the world-in-itself we are led by the nose through the pursuits of science.

4.0   THE CRISIS OF VERIFICATION

With Kant's suspension of the absolute truths to the realm of the non-sensible and making them, *eo ipso*, unknowable, the case for foundations looks sorry indeed. Even if we do countenance there are absolutes, they are necessarily precluded from human knowing. How then can we measure the things we say to be true against the universal register? From what authority do we derive the right to pass judgment on truth and falsity? Such concerns usher in the skepticism that would dominate philosophical accounts of truth up to the present.

One response to such pressures was to simply drop the ideas of truth and falsity or right and wrong and view their remains as artificially imposed orders, handed down from seats of power. Such was the tradition taken by the more radical post-Nietzscheans. However, no matter how nicely formulated such nihilisms sound in theory, they fall short of a complete system. The sticking point is always that to take such nihilism to the extreme that makes the whole system work one has to answer both how *all* value can be artificial in the face of common human experience and how the nihilistic system itself is not a wolf-in-sheep's-clothing of artifice, itself some sort of absolute. While the latter almost seems like a triviality, the former poses more serious concerns. Even if value is socially constructed through-and-through and there is no foundation whatsoever, we are stuck with the system in which we find ourselves. Whether propagated through conscious hegemony or biological selection, values in some way persist such that there are better and worse ways of doing things. Of course, this "better" and "worse" would

be better and worse relative to the system in which one finds themselves. What use, then, is bemoaning the loss of a universal foundation that we never had. Shouldn't we get on trying to figure out how to get the most out what we do have and find ways to maximize accuracy within the strictures of a socially defined value scheme.

Such considerations are what motivated pragmatic accounts of truth to answer the challenge of preserving truth in a world where we are so epistemologically impoverished as to not be able to get a hold of universal truths. This section of the essay will consider how pragmatism evolved out of its Peircean roots and gave birth to the 20th century philosophy of language and science. We will first consider Wittgenstein, whose substitution of rules for eternal grounds of truth tries to quiet the clamor over the loss of foundations. We will then touch on the radical nominalism of Quine and the less radical nominalism of Nelson Goodman. Both defer the question of "How do we verify?" replace it in priority with "How do we set up the orders by which value questions make sense?" From Nelson Goodman we will consider his student Hilary Putnam, whose internal realism is one of the more mature formulations of local, rather than eternal, sources of rightness.

Here it will seem that we have put the last nail in the coffin of absolutes. Readers should rightly wonder how we can possibly countenance both the conclusions of these philosophers and hold out any hope for absolutes. In fact, this essay will argue that the freedom that local realism and nominalism give us points the way to absolutes. If our truths are fully parasitical on the socially, historically and biologically constructed conceptual schemes, we can abstract any determinateness from our truths and ask what with what kind of absolutes are we left. We cannot be left with absolutes that are like genera to the species that are the things of the world. Absolutes will only be able to support the many different schemes that we countenance. The

question no longer is how can we vet our propositions against an eternal truth; we understand now exactly what it means to say they are of different kinds. Rather, we will look to the expressed absolutes as the limiting and regulative ideals which constrain the ways in which the world can be coherently understood. In the end, we will combine the expressionistic philosophy of Jewish and Rationalist history and the linguistic inquiry of contemporary philosophy to produce a model in which we look to absolutes as the boundary conditions for our various schemes and sciences.

This claim will give us pause to look at one specific line of thought in the concurrent philosophy of science literature. By looking at Bohr and Feyerabend, we will get a better idea of what it means to say that the plurality of perspectives is expressive of absolutes. Just as with the philosophers of language, the perspectivisms of these philosophers of science will argue that we cannot measure our propositions against how things *really* are. We can only move from theory to theory, from point of view to point of view and see how things change. Through the principles of proliferation and complementarity what is expressed is that our freedom to invent new theories is underwritten by the absolutes which constrain our picture making.

We will finally make this completely clear by considering at length Wilfrid Sellars' philosophy of meaning. Borrowing from Kant and Wittgenstein, we will read Sellars' work as an attempt to accommodate the semantic dimension of truth with absolutes. Through Sellars' Thomistic account of truth and meaning we will find a fertile possibility to work absolutes in side by side with perspectivism or scientific relativism. This will, as Sellars loved to say, not be the cash — for a full-fledged modern theory of absolutes — but only a promissory note suggesting what direction we should take if we want to understand them.

4.1 PRAGMATISM

In 1877, in *Popular Science Monthly,* Charles Peirce published the piece "The Fixation of Belief." In it, he took issue with the common instinct to look for some universal verification system for truth and falsity. Instead he proposed, "...the sole object of inquiry is the settlement of opinion. We may fancy that this is not enough for us, and that we seek, not merely an opinion, but a true opinion. But put this fancy to the test, and it proves groundless; for as soon as firm belief is reached we are entirely satisfied whether the belief be true or false."[52] It should be noted that the inquiry that Peirce is specifying is a semi-technical term, by which he means the agitation of *justified* doubt. Motivated by skepticism that is not merely speculative Peirce takes away *a priori* metaphysical certainty and relativizes it to some scheme we have decided on *a posteriori* for answering questions.

The important point here is not that whenever someone is satisfied we find truth regardless of the rationality of this satisfaction. Otherwise, rhetoric would be a wellspring of truth. However, within whatever worldview or conceptual scheme we operate, the standards are set for what constitutes good evidence. The scientific method, for example, by which we require tests to work out to confirm hypotheses is such an internal conceptual metric for satisfying questions of truth.

Thus, important for Peirce are the methods we set for establishing satisfaction as to questions of belief. He writes, "But, above all, let it be considered that what is more wholesome than any particular belief is *integrity* of belief, and that to avoid looking into the support of a

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[52] Peirce, Charles S. *Essays in the Philosophy of Science.* New York: Liberal Arts, 1957. p.13

belief from a fear that it might turn out rotten is quite as immoral as it is disadvantageous."[53] The importance of "integrity" is that it demands that the way in which fix beliefs is coherent, that we don't countenance bad reasoning and contradiction. However, as we shall see shortly, the standards of reason are no more fixed than those of truth. Such concerns are what will ultimately usher this strand of modern philosophy from its pragmatic age to nominalist age.

A contemporary of Peirce, William James begins to realize that the standards of reason depend on the perspective from which we are working and that no necessary standards for reason are given. He espouses what he calls a radical empiricism, arguing that the world is absolutely irreducible to a unity. "There is no possible point of view from which the world can appear as an absolutely single fact."[54] This encompasses all aspects of human experience including rationality. Thus, James replaces Peirce's integrity of belief or ability to adjudicate arguments with his "workability" of belief. This is so much of a point of contention as it is a successor concept. Peirce did understand that a pragmatic account of truth depended on the entire system of belief, verification embedded in the conceptual scheme. James merely supplements this idea by making explicit the contention that no method or scheme will ever be able to cover all questions of belief. Rather, we assess on a case by case basis what is best to believe.

4.2   WITTGENSTEIN

Wittgenstein takes these pragmatist themes and tempers them by arguing that *all* meaning is subject to socially constructed schemes of performance. Whereas to the pragmatists, we could

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[53] Ibid. 29 Italics mine.
[54] James, William. *The Writings of William James: a Comprehensive Edition, including an Annotated Bibliography Updated through 1977*. Ed. John J. McDermott. Chicago: University of Chicago, 1977. p. 135

ask, "What is truth?" and depend on the decided upon schemes of verification to intervene and provide us with an answer, Wittgenstein takes the critique one step lower. He argues that "truth" only has any sense at all in virtue of some scheme of meaning, some picture. To the pragmatists, we could answer what truth is, internal to our framework: a way of adjudicating between conflicting views. To Wittgenstein, truth is a normative system of interactions and performance. Truth is a polytypic mosaic of rule following rather than a monotypic algorithm for decision making.

When Wittgenstein introduces his concept of the language-game he writes, "Here the term 'language-game' is meant to illuminate the fact that the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life."[55] The focus of Wittgenstein's recasting of language as a game is that there is an irreducible element of meaning that is the active performance of language. Language is not ossified into a set of meanings that we select from when we chose to speak or write. Language is not meaning first and then practice. Rather, the use of language is primary and the meanings of what we say come out in the patterns of interacting with life.

The oft-abused dictum that meaning is use, derived from Wittgenstein, is meant to emphasize this fact. The meaning of words is parasitical on the pattern-governed systems of behavior in which language plays a part. Meanings are not the usages, they are the ways in which we characterize familially-related groups of performances. The consequences of this go very far indeed. We cannot, as explained in the McDowell argument addressed in the introduction to this paper, look sideways to see if we are using words correctly, actually following rules. We are always engaged in the whirl of organism — or, as Wittgenstein says, in "forms of life" — and even the practice of giving justifications, asking if we getting along well, is part of this whirl.

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[55] Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* Book I - §23

When we use language we are not tapping into some spring called "meaning." When we ask for and talk about meaning, we are using shorthand to talk about some sets of pattern-governed behavior.

This is what causes Wittgenstein in the *Tractatus* to deny that ethical propositions have sense. "The sense of the world must lie outside the world. In the world everything is as it is, and everything happens as it does happen: *in it* no value exists ... It is clear that ethics cannot be put into words. Ethics is transcendental."[56] We cannot formulate rules, because actions are not tokenings. Value, just like meaning, is reflective. When we talk about value we are waving our hands at bundles of behavior.

The move from the turn-of-the-century pragmatists to Wittgenstein can perhaps best be seen in the passage, "It is what human beings *say* that is true and false; and they agree in the *language* they use. That is not agreement in opinions but in form of life."[57] The Peircean end of inquiry presupposes that opinions have some existence in the intending subject. The meaning of these opinions would have to be fixed *a priori* and it's just which ones agree that changes values. Conversely, for Wittgenstein it is behavior all the way down — or at least so far as we can possibly be concerned — and the meaning of the opinions depends on this behavior by which they are said to be exhibited.

With Wittgenstein, we come almost as untethered as possible from absolute foundations. We will see this account be sharpened in the nominalism of Quine and Goodman, who transpose Wittgenstein's practical considerations into a sort of linguistic ontology. However, the freer we become the more the absolute — counter-intuitively — looms. Even as the philosophy of

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[56] Wittgenstein, Ludwig. *Tractatus Logico-philosophicus*. Trans. David Pears and Brian McGuinness. London: Routledge, 2001. p.86
[57] Wittgenstein *Philosophical Investigations* p. 241

language pushes us further away from the idea that our experience inherits values from eternal forms, we cannot think away the fact that there is something rather than nothing. As sophomoric as this sounds, it is just as difficult to dispense with. Even if all value, from our perspective, is wholly decided by the ebb and flow of social life, there must be some causal origin that sets our picture making in motion and limits it. Wittgenstein feels this as early as his *Tractatus* when he writes, "It is not *how* things are in the world that is mystical, but *that* it exists."[58] Absolutes are not absolute values but whatever allows for values. To recall Rosenzweig, the many brush strokes in the paintings do not comprise the absolute. What is absolute is the wall that allows paintings to be hung at all.

4.3 NOMINALISM WITH SEVERAL FACES

Sellars once wrote, "... that admirer of desert landscapes, Quine enjoys them all the more because of his geographer's knowledge of the jungle."[59] Sellars said this to illustrate his idea that even if the abstract terms and ideals we use in ordinary conversation can be reduced to mere collections of simpler, less mystical things, we should not do so. However, the quotes illustrates the tension that drives Quine's corpus. On one hand, Quine is dedicated to the elimination of the abstract entities that plague questions of language and ontology. Things and attributes are "myths." On the other hand, they are "useful myths," because they simplify our conversations and theories.

While, Wittgenstein, the consummate quietist, was more concerned with how people talk or use language than with what there is, Quine certainly takes up the Wittgensteinian banner and

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[58]Wittgenstein *Tractatus* p.88
[59] Sellars, Wilfrid. *Naturalism and Ontology*. Atascadero, Calif.: Ridgeview, 1996. p. 6

extends its application to ontology. He shows that the question of what a certain term means is caught up in what objects we countenance. The message of nominalism is not that things don't exist but that the question of whether or not something exists can be analyzed into a lower-level question.

This accounts for the superabundance of language over the world such that it is impossible to set up transformation rules between the uses of language and the things in the world. This does not mean that we can't, to use Quine's favorite example, figure out that utterances of 'Gavagai' are associated with, say, a rabbit. Of course, we can do linguistic fieldwork just as we can reflect on our own verbal occasionings and recognize regularities. But all this does is find an entry in our "translation manual" that matches up with the dispositional regularities of 'Gavagai.' However, we cannot answer questions such as, "Does 'Gavagai' means rabbit or temporal rabbit slice?" This is not some epistemological failing on our part. It is, as Quine reminds us, because there is no right answer. Just as, for Wittgenstein, there is nothing more basic to meanings than grouped pattern-governed behaviors, uses of language, Quine recognizes there is nothing more basic than grouped patterned-governed behaviors to reference. Quine takes Wittgenstein's insights about meanings and shows how this reduces our ontological commitments. This does not deny there is matter in the world but only that the lines drawn by our lexicons do not reflect the ontological order. The nominalist method is first to argue that sets do not have any ontological excess over the mereological sum of their parts and then to argue that the abstract objects, physical things, etc. of experience are really just such sums of simpler quanta.

This may seem to limit the freedom one has to when dealing with the world. However, exactly the opposite is the case. As Sellars mentions in the introductory quote to this section,

these lovers of desert landscapes love it all the more because of their knowledge of the jungle. Even if we could get to the simplest stuff of the world, it would leave us utterly unequipped to deal with life. Our myths are convenient myths. What's more, since nominalism frees us from the obligation of keeping our pictures in line with the universal register — our theories are better and worse pantheons of the myths we choose to countenance — we become the architects of our worlds. While it may seem that nominalism cuts off creativity by refusing to countenance classes — and with them the bundles we are want to call things, people, etc. — it opens the door for us to chose the individuals that make up our world. Nelson Goodman, a contemporary and close interlocutor of Quine, writes:

> ...the nominalistic prohibition is against the profligate propagation of entities out of any chosen basis of individuals, but leaves the choice of that basis quite free ... in contrast, the typical physicalism, for example, while prodigal in the platonistic instruments it supplies for endless generation of entities, admits of only one correct basis.[60]

The focus of nominalism is not a draconian eliminativism but the creative freedom that comes from realizing that the very entities without which we cannot get about in the world are practical fantasies. What's more we have the latitude to modify such schemes wholesale.

Such an argument is the driving force in Nelson Goodman's philosophy of "worldmaking." Explicitly picking up the Kantian theme that our knowledge of the world is deprived of "pure content," the transcendent things-in-themselves of understanding, Goodman posits that values we encounter in the world must be constructed by the subjects that encounter them. We set up perspectives or schemes, 'worlds' in Goodman's terminology, by which the individual units of our experience are fixed. The world is not given to us but made and remade by our personal and interpersonal experiences. Again, it must be kept in mind that Goodman

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[60] Goodman, Nelson. *Ways of Worldmaking*. Indianapolis,: Hackett Pub., 1978. p. 94-5

isn't saying something mystical like we are creating matter *ex nihilo* in experience. Rather, he is arguing that without foundations we have to determine the metrics of identity, substance, quality and the like for ourselves. Furthermore, this freedom imparts to us that there are multiple worlds, not in Lewisian sense, but in the sense that there are multiple — perhaps even an infinity of — acceptable schematizations.

By these lights, truth is no longer is relation between what we say and the one world as it actually is. But what is it then? A good first answer is that truth is a standard set, like all values, internal to each of these worlds. Does this mean that anything goes? No. Goodman writes that there are better and worse worlds for dealing with our experience. For example, a world in which subatomic particles are taken as individuals and all experience must be in the terms of the incredibly small motions of these incredibly small particles would be quite difficult to maneuver in. In such a system, there can be truth but it wouldn't help us out very much. Too this effect, Goodman writes:

> Some truths are trivial, irrelevant, unintelligible, or redudant; too broad, too narrow, too boring, too bizarre, too complicated; or taken from some other version than the one in question, as when a guard, ordered to shoot any of his captives who moved, immediately shot them all and explained that they were moving rapidly around the earth's axis and around the sun.[61]

Truth has been deferred to a secondary condition behind utility or the other practical considerations thoroughly fleshed out by custom.

However, this still seems as if it gives too much license to our worldmaking. There must be more constraints to our recreating of the world that speak to the rightness of our worlds. Here Goodman faces the wall we have found ourselves facing all along. "... if nothing stands apart from all versions, what can be the basis and nature of these constraints [on worldmaking]? How

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[61] Ibid. 121

can a version be wrong about a world it makes?"[62] The answer Goodman gives is not entirely satisfying. But aporia is the gatekeeper to the halls of absolutes, and, like Kafka's doorman, it will make us wait with it the entirety of our lives. We should not expect satisfying answers at this point.

Goodman says that rightness of worldmaking is something that comes out of moving from world to world and examining the relationships between versions. By seeing how each version hangs together and relates to other versions, by seeing how well each world works, we get a sense about rightness. There is no meta-world standard of rightness but only the rightness of a world viewed under the aspect of another world. There is no absolute standard but only the experience of moving from viewpoint to viewpoint and taking the lay of the land.

Hilary Putnam, the student of Nelson Goodman, recoils a bit from what he sees as a bit too radical a dissolution of the phenomenal/noumenal distinction. Whereas Goodman takes the contributions of Kant and the analytic set to support the hypothesis of many "worlds," Putnam wants to recast this in a less "naughty" light. Putnam wants to say that there is only one world. However, as quantum physics has demonstrated that there is an unbridgeable gap between the observer and the system observed, there is always a cut between us and the world. Putnam takes the modern scientist's position that our results when interrogating experience are results of a experimental arrangement. Instead of finding content in the world, we are given results in which our perspective is a factor. Indeed, we cannot be given the world, but only outcomes of experimental arrangements.

By giving Goodman a fresh coat of paint, Putnam is trying to bring back a sense of realism to his tradition. Wittgenstein's quasi-mystical quietism, Quine's ontological skepticism

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[62] Goodman, Nelson. *Of Mind and Other Matters*. Cambridge, Mass. [u.a.]: Harvard Univ., 1984. p. 37

and Goodman's worldmaking all seem to have gotten away from any sense of realism. Analytic philosophy has seemed to be veering toward relativism because of a failure to realize that relativism, just like strict realism, requires that, "... one can stand within one's language and outside it at the same time."[63] Realism obviously does this as it announces from within one's perspective that the world, outside of all perspectives, is given to it within that perspective. Relativism does this by assuming one is necessarily warranted in its abandonment of realism.

Putnam is not arguing that his analytic forefathers have made this mistake. The issue is that they have couched their philosophy as a philosophy that is past realism and, as a result, their philosophy has lost a bit of its humanity. After all, most people are realists in their perennial philosophies.

However, realism has only lost its bite in the wake of Wittgenstein, Goodman, Quine,etc. if we assume that there is some meaning to strict realism, something that Putnam denies. We haven't lost some united theory of everything, some God's eye perspective. Indeed, this ur-perspective is an incoherent fiction. Just because there is only one world does not mean that it is possible to unite under one blueprint as does Leibniz's God. All characterization whatsoever requires us to take a stand within a perspective.

In his famous argument against the fact-value dichotomy, Putnam puts forth the idea that our subjectivity is too entrenched in experience to separate the furniture of the world from the value we assign to it. Our conceptions of seemingly firm things such as truth and reason are "companions in the guilt" with the values such as goodness and beauty. All are products of a single world that we can only observe after having been run through the wringer of perspective.

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[63] Putnam (1992) 23

Realism can be saved but not as a global realism. Rather, Putnam argues for internal realism by a sort of *reductio*. We cannot say that things are different than they seem because this presumes that things are characterizable in a way different than that of any specific perspective. This is what Putnam denies. Instead, we should be content with our local measures being realisms internal to our perspective for our theory to be coherent.

What Putnam accomplishes is something of a revival of the Kabbalistic idea that the sense in which things can be said to be at all is parasitical on their entrenchment within language, within perspective. This, we recall, was expressed in the Lurianic story of creation. The world came into existence as a pre-perspectival unity that was nothingness as much as it was being, collapsed through language — the letters of the alphabet, the Sefirot, the names of God — into being. It is not surprising, given the commonality of theme, that Putnam would come to publish *Jewish Philosophy as a Guide to Life*. Though a *prima facie* departure from the majority of his corpus on language and meaning, Putnam's *Guide* emphasizes how Wittgenstein, Levinas, Buber, and Rosenzweig all elevate the experiential element of meaning above any thematization or recording of it. However, this is what Putnam's internal realism has been arguing all along. The declaration that the world is — and is in some way— is sense-dependent on our position in a perspective, as a subject in the world. The immediacy of experience and a history of such experience are conditions for meaning.

4.4   A SCIENTIFIC PERSPECTIVE

The influence of Niels Bohr on Putnam is evident. Putnam peppers his essays with reference to Bohr and his idea of complementarity. Roughly, this important concept for Putnam — as well as

for Paul Feyerabend, which we will soon see — states that when dealing in quantum physics, all knowledge about some object or another cannot necessarily be combined in a single, unified picture. Bohr writes:

> In quantum physics, however, evidence about atomic objects obtained by different experimental arrangements exhibits a novel kind of complementary relationship. Indeed, it must be recognized that such evidence, which appears contradictory when combination into a single picture is attempted, exhausts all conceivable knowledge about the object.[64]

The famous example is that of light, which can be characterized, in different experimental arrangements, as sometimes a wave and sometimes a particle. Our complete knowledge of light, though, requires us to hold both of these pictures side by side in abeyance and answer that a complete characterization of light cannot be reduced to one.

This dovetails neatly with Bohr's treatment of the effect of observation on experimental results. Unlike the hackneyed idea that quantum physics argues that when one observes a system they disturb it, Bohr's interpretation is that values are always values of what he calls phenomena, "*whole* experimental arrangements." It's not that some spooky force intervenes when we, say, look at light that pushes it either into a particle or a wave. Rather, we are only capable of measuring within a certain system that includes the observer and his method. We are not measuring the same light in two different ways. We are measuring the outputs of two different experimental arrangements, both of which involve light. Complementarity hooks up with this interpretation to say that our knowledge of things, under the aspect quantum physics, is not a unified picture that answers all questions in one stroke. Knowledge of things, rather, is an aggregate knowledge of different experimental arrangements which involve the object. Thus, as Putnam writes, there is a cut between observers and nature in that we can only measure these

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[64] Bohr, Niels. *Essays 1932-1957 on Atomic Physics and Human Knowledge.* Woodbridge, Conn.: Ox Bow, 1987. p. 4

phenomena — these whole experimental arrangements — and not the things themselves. We actually do not have a sense of what such a measurement would even be like.

In this discussion, the close connection between Bohr's theories and those of Kant's should be evident. Whereas Kant's idealism attributed the rift between knowledge and things-in-themselves to the inextricable element of sensibility in human experience, Bohr find the problem in the idea that to explain something we must have a single picture of it that accounts for its behavior in all situations. Of course, Bohr limits his conclusions to those regarding quantum physics. In a classical physical system, Bohr makes no such contentions. Maybe, though, philosophy has just been in its quantum age all along.

However, are we not perhaps falling into the trap of pop-science whereby we manhandle specific scientific terms to suit our philosophical purposes? It seems that Bohr himself believes the insights are complementarity can be extended past quantum physics. He concludes his 1954 essay, "The Unity of Knowledge," by relating the insights that quantum physics have given us to the notions of aesthetics that he argues we have harbored for quite some time. Bohr's intent in this brief section is to talk about how there are necessary connections between art and science. In the spirit of an abstracted complementarity, he argues that even if the methods, starting points and goals of science and art are different, they enrich each other. 'Knowledge' is syncategorematic and the objects of knowledge depend on the way they are to be known (in science, art, religion, etc.). Bohr goes as far to extend the purview of complentarity by repurposing the same language used in his discussion of science to talk about art. He writes:

> Literary, pictorial and musical art may be said to form a sequence of modes of expression, where the ever more extensive reununciation of a definition, characteristic of scientific of scientific communication, leaves fantasy a freer display. In particular, in poetry this purpose is achieved by the juxtaposition of

words relating to shifting observational situations, thereby emotional uniting manifold aspects of human knowledge.[65]

These "shifting observational systems" are precisely what is to be explained — vis-a-vis quantum physics — by his interpretation of quantum physics and his concept of complementarity. Just as the irreconcilable differences between the wave and particles models of light demand that scientists keep both in mind to "know" light, the conflicts and shifts in art demand that readers perceive the work as a whole to "know" its meaning. In both situations, something that cannot be depicted in a single and united picture is *expressed* in the moving between perspectives.[66] This is the oscillation I have discussed throughout this paper.

The productivity of oscillation anticipated by the modality of Spinoza's ontology and the perspectivity of Leibniz's nature-mirroring monads and systematized by Bohr's complementarity finds its most vocal advocate in Paul Feyerabend. The principle that guides Feyerabend's philosophy is that of anti-methodological proliferation. Just as a child learns by playing with very few rules, human knowledge should progress by the mantra "anything goes." Against, the models that call for the expulsion of old theories from the canon or the warding off of seemingly crazy ideas, Feyerabend declares that all thought, dialogue and conflict should remain accommodated together. He points out that very rarely are advances in science made by playing by the rules we have in place. Most advances have come at the tail end of an idea that seems crazy by the lights of currently acceptable theory.

Beyond this practical concern for the health of potentially useful new ideas, Feyerabend argues that there something of a universal — monadic even — sense dependence of one idea on all others. By retaining old, used up theories next to the speculation of future theories and the

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[65] Ibid. 79

[66] Does Bohr have Spinoza in mind when he writes this? The terminology of 'modes' and 'expression' certainly suggest it.

ratification of what is currently accepted, all human knowledge is thrown into greater relief. Poetically, Feyerabend writes in two places:

> Knowledge ... is not a series of self-consistent theories that converges to an ideal view; it is not a gradual approach to the truth. It is rather an ever increasing ocean of mutually incompatible alternatives, each single theory, each fairy-tale, each myth that is part of the collection forcing others into greater articulation and all of them contributing, via this process of competition, to the development of our consciousness.[67]

This argument for the freedom of competition for theories is all but a direct adopting of the themes of complementarity for an (anti)-methodology. Whereas knowledge cannot be unified as a single enunciation, we must countenance a plurality of acceptable, incompatible theses.

Feyerabend diverges from the Bohr perspective in that, for him, anything goes. While surely this works for theory making and remaking, it cannot possibly be working for science. As we have emphasized throughout this paper, there are limits to our worldmaking. Our pictures are constrained by that noumenal world from which they are projected. However, this does not mean that we can compare our models to this noumenal world. We reach the same standstill we found ourselves at from the outset of the essay. How can we possibly characterize the causal limiting force of an absolute world that we cannot measure against our picture? How do we climb back up Spinoza's ladder from the modes to God? How do we move from one of Leibiz's perspectives of the city to the blueprint?

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[67] Feyerabend, Paul. *Against Method*. London: Verso, 1993. p. 21

4.5   SELLARS

We will find our answer in the Thomistic-inspired theory of meaning of Wilfrid Sellars. By dividing language into reciprocally dependent orders of picturing and signifying — meaning in the natural order and meaning in the normative order — Sellars is able to walk the fine line between a world without foundations and a mystical circularity of meaning. These are Sellars' storied Scylla and Charybdis: the elephant on the back of a series of turtles and the Hegelian serpent. By examining Sellars' theory of meaning, we will hopefully see a way around our obstacle. This solution comes in the form of Sellars' argument that accomodates both the social-normative dimension to meanings as well as the dimension of meaning imparted by the world, by things in themselves.

Sellars divides language into two isomorphic orders drawn on the lines of the difference between the meta-language and the object-language. In the second of his 1971 Matchette Foundation Lectures, *The Structure of Knowledge: Minds*, Sellars writes that the difference between parroting words and knowing the meaning of words is:

> …that the utterances which one makes cohere with, each other and with the context in which they occur in a way which is absent in mere parroting. Furthermore, the relevant sense of 'knowing the meaning of words'… must be carefully distinguished from knowing the meaning of the words in the sense of being about to talk about them as a lexicographer might — thus, defining them. Mastery of the language involves the latter as well as the former ability.[68]

On the one hand, language is structured by a logic of objective relations. Sellars will often talk of this as the structure of language objects *in rerum natura*.[69] I will refer to this

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[68] *"The Science of Knowing" Problems from Wilfrid Sellars. Digital Text International.* Web. II sec.24
[69] Such as on page ix in the Preface to *Science and Metaphysics* and then, later, on p.137.

dimension of meaning, following Sellars' suit, as that of *pictorial meaning*. On the other hand, language is structured by a normative logic, where the concept of linguistic 'meaning' is comprised of acceptable language 'moves' in the language game. This sense of 'meaning' includes the sense in which we may be said to have given the meaning of a word when we offer another word that shares its meaning as well as other broader formal rules regarding usage. I will refer to this as *signifactory meaning.* However, both of these 'meanings' will be explored in subsequent sections. For the time being, it will suffice to say that just as Sellars sees both senses of 'meaning' to be necessary for linguistic mastery, language is the product of the mutual conditioning of pictorial and signifactory meaning.

As mentioned earlier, the pictorial meaning of language must be conceptualized as the patterns of linguistic objects in the world and their correspondence to other actualized things in the world. The sign designs, sounds, gestures, etc. of language occur in a certain regularity isomorphic to those regularities of the things which language is generally said to be about: pink ice cubes, flashes of lighting, red books.

Sellars adumbrates these linguistic objects with characteristic subtlety arguing that they are neither cognitive nor conceptual. For any relationship between a linguistic object *X* and a physical object *Y*, both "…belong to the real order, i.e. neither belongs to the order of intentionality…"[70] However, it must be noted that, in a sense, linguistic objects are only such linguistic objects by virtue of their involvement in the super-structure of language. Although, when construed in a picturing relation with objects in the real order, their spatio-temporal character, on par with the spatio-temporality of the objects they picture, is essential. However, it is only in the context of some system of representing — even if this system has not yet reached a

[70] Sellars "Being and Being Known" p. 219

full robustness of language, further governed by the conceptual constraints of a system of signifying[71] — that sign designs, sounds, gestures, etc. can be said to be linguistic objects. The alternative would be to countenance, for example, that the trail of an ant on the beach that looks like a word is, in fact, a word. It certainly is not.

To bring some clarity to linguistic meaning as construed in the context of picturing, we consider Sellars' example of the robot that is wired to picture thunder and lightning by way of marks on an internal tape. Whenever the robot's sensors are triggered by, say, a flash of lightning it will print '::' on the strip. Whenever, the robot's sensors are triggered by a roll of thunder, the robot prints '||'. Sellars goes on to give the robot ability to scan its tape and make inductive generalizations. If the robot always detects '::' followed by '||' and never '::' by itself, the robot might print ':: $\rightarrow$ ||'. Of course the robot can erase such Robotese sentences if he ever scans his tape to find that he has printed '::' without '||'.

We are supposed to extend this thought experiment to assume that, in the manner detailed, something without the potential to conceptualize may respond to the real order with linguistic objects (sign designs and the like) that have a structure — which may itself be pictured — that corresponds to that of the real order. The important difference between such picturing and what will be done on the side of signifying is that the picturing is done by virtue of properties of material exclusion or modality imposing their structure by way of a system of physical cause and effect. The robot is wired to write '::' when it senses lightning — the lightning causes the '::' design to be printed, mediated only by the physical hardware and wiring of the robot. To reiterate, "A statement to the effect that a linguistic item pictures a non-linguistic item by virtue

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[71] As in the case of lightning-picturing robots and, putatively, animals.

of the semantic uniformities characteristic of a certain conceptual structure[72] is, in an important sense, an object language statement, for even though it mentions linguistic objects, it treats them as items in the order of causes and effects…"[73]

In this level of meaning *qua* picturing Sellars locates the concept of truth-as-correspondence. Though Sellars finds the first dimension of truth to be a semantic metric based on the assertibility — the ability to be properly asserted within the rules of language usage — Sellars does leave place for a second dimension of truth – that of correspondence. Such a truth may be said to obtain when linguistic statement correctly pictures the world. He relates this to the way in which '…one geometrical figure can be said to be a 'true' projection of another if it is drawn by correctly following the appropriate method of projection."[74] To relate this back to the robot example, as long as the robot is working properly — is calibrated accurately, etc. — its Robotese statements about lightning and thunder are 'true' if the '::'s and '||'s occur in the same patterns as lightning and thunder. However, Sellars clearly believes this to be a derivative sense of 'true' and eventually will use 'true' only when talking about assertibility. He will talk about this truth of pictorial meaning as a correct picturing or something similar. It should be noted that later in this essay it will be important to the overall structure of the argument that truth-as-correspondence is an epistemologically secondary concept and that it assesses the achievement of the projection of the non-lingustic objects into the linguistic order. As it will turn out, the entire non-linguistic order is, in a sense, a real (though theoretically conceived) order, conceived as it is so as to account for the language of which it is a projection.

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[72] Sellars does not mean the semantic uniformities are caused by but, rather, are similar to the conceptual structure.
[73] Sellars, Wilfrid. *Science and Metaphysics Variations on Kantian Themes*. Ridgeview Pub Co, 1993. p. 137
[74] Sellars, Wilfrid. "Truth and Correspondence." *Science, Perception and Reality*. Ridgeview Pub Co, 1991. p.222

However, often when we ask for the 'meaning' of a word, we are not asking for someone to show us how our linguistic objects cohere in a structure that matches up with the coherence of extra-linguistic objects. Although this is what is accomplished by successful answers, as the intimate relationship between signifactory and pictorial meaning will show, no one explicitly says, "Excuse me, Jones, but what of the place of '*triangle*' utterances relative to triangles in the real order."

Significatory meaning is what Sellars uses as a vehicle to make statements that, for example, two singular terms have the same use in our language. To this end, Sellars introduces the punctuation of dot-quotes. To denote the use of bit of language, as contrasted with the sign design itself or the phonemes involved in the verbal utterance, Sellars sets words and phrases off by two ·'s on either side of the word. Thus, through the use of dot-quotes, Sellars is able to turn common terms into sortals that collect all the words, phrases, etc. that share the same rules for use. In same way that 'triangularity' is an abstraction of attributions of 'triangular' to things,

the ·triangular·

is a distributive singular term that ranges over uses that correspond to how 'triangular' is conventionally used. This punctuation technique gives Sellars the grammatical resources to make assertions such as

'Triangle's (in English) are ·triangle·s

just as

'Dreieck's (in German) are ·triangle·s

The dot-quote device allows Sellars to demonstrate what he considers to be the 'heart' of signifactory meaning — "…the basic role of signification statements is to say that two

expressions, at least one of which is in our vocabulary, have the same use."[75] Sellars later warns in a footnote that the meaning of this statement is obscured by the now-familiar formulation "meaning is use." Meanings are not usings. Rather, the structure of signifactory meaning is shown in the usages which signification groups into identities, classes, etc.

Sellars argues that these functional grouping terms, formed in the Sellarsian grammar with dot-quotes, are what are actually behind abstract objects. An abstract object is simply an unperspicuous way of representing the distributive singular terms that may be formed by adding a 'the' to a dot-quoted expression in the same way that adding a 'the' to common nouns such as 'lion' forms distributive singular terms. Sellars, in this way, analyzes objects such as triangularity and redness as

the ·triangular·

and

the ·red·

respectively. By reducing abstract objects to distributive singular linguistic expressions, abstract objects are shown to be linguistic patterns of identity. This is what Sellars means when he writes, "…of course there are such abstract objects as attributes. I shall go on to develop a theory as to just what sort of objects they are … although there are attributes, there *really* are no attributes."[76]

Abstract objects exist in the sense that there is a normative, logical structure of language that enables lexicographers as well as laymen to collect the functional role of various expressions under a distributive singular term. Abstract objects do not, though, exist *in rerum natura* as real, extra-linguistic objects. To cut even more finely, though, Sellars argues that the dimension of

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[75] Sellars. "Being and Being Known" p. 225
[76] Sellars. *Naturalism and Ontology* p. 41

signifactory meaning, the conceptual structure of language, does, in some way, share a common structure with the natural order. Thus, while an abstract object cannot be said to name something in the natural order, there must be something that *really* exists that somehow occurs in patterns isomorphic to the pattern of abstract objects.

In a way analogical to the way in which real space is commonly seen as comprising physical objects governed by modally robust properties of material exclusivity — that cube cannot exist in the same position as that prism, that circle cannot be a square — Sellars' linguistic order is comprised by, among other things, abstract objects which stand in a structure governed not by modal material exclusivity but by logical normative exclusivity. A ·cubic· ought not to be in the same logical position as a ·prismatic·, a ·circular· ought not to be a ·square·.

As mentioned earlier, Sellars identifies truth, in this the signifactory dimension of language, as assertibility — or, as he terms it, *S-assertibility*. The 'S' stands for 'semantic' and is to remind readers that when Sellars talks about some expression as assertible (or true) he is not speaking of some extensional quality. An expression is S-assertible if it is authorized by the rules of the language. Thus, the semantic truth of language is determined by ought through-and-through, with the rules of usage dictated by the logical structure described above.

However, things are not so cut and dry as suggested by the neat organization of the preceding sections into 'Picturing' and 'Signifying.' Sellars does argue, though, that the orders of picturing and signification cannot directly cross over. Sellars writes, "… signifying and picturing are radically different relations…that take radically different terms."[77] It would be a category mistake to say that the meaning of a word is some object in the real order or to assert anything else which confuses the two dimensions of meaning.

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[77] Sellars. "Being and Being Known" p. 219

There is a relationship though between picturing and signifying. The two orders of meaning, as suggested earlier, do have similar structures. Moreover, Sellars is convinced that picturing is causally prior — prior in the order of being[78] — to signifying. Sellars writes that picturing is an, "…isomorphism which is a necessary condition of the intellect's intentionality as signifying the real order…"[79] This should not be surprising as a 'world' in which there were just rules of discourse and linguistic analysis but nothing *really* and, coincidentally, no *real* relations would be untenable. Furthermore, as robots can picture but only man can signify, it follows that signification would be ontologically latter.

To bring the relation between picturing and signifying into fuller relief, Sellars suggests an analogy between picturing and signifying, on the one hand, and the relationship between micro-physical theory and the physical objects they purport to explain, on the other (as well as the relationship between thoughts and thinking-out-louds). Just as picturing is prior in the order of being, the particles of micro-physics[80] and thoughts are preconditions for there being the physical objects and thinking-out-louds that they are said to cause. However, the objects of signifying, physical objects, and thinking-out-louds are prior in the order of knowing. This epistemological primacy is due to the fact that we conceive of picturing relations, micro-physical theory, and thoughts as, in a sense, theoretical constructions designed to explain the language, physical objects and thinking-out-louds with which we are ostensibly familiar. Sellars clarifies this structure of epistemological priority in terms of the way in which we move from thinking about signifying to thinking about picturing. Sellars argues that when we intend the rules of

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[78] To be fair, this talk of priority is not one that Sellars introduces in this essay. cf. *Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism* or *The Structure of Knowledge*.
[79] Sellars. "Being and Being Known" p.218
[80] Sellars does not think that micro-physical particles are what there *really* is, it is just the closest we have gotten to the perfectly fine-grained breakdown of the world that the Scientific Image will eventually give us.

language, when we consider 'stands for' talk, 'denotes' talk, 'translates as' talk, etc., our attention is drawn to the uses of language. Namely, our attention is drawn to similarities and dissimilarities between expressions. This, in turn, draws our attention toward actual language uses in the cause-and-effect structure of the world, Austin's illocutionary and perlocutionary arena:

> Once we recognize that to say of a predicate that it stands for a certain attribute, e.g., triangularty…[is] to tell us that the predicate functions linguistically as does the predicate built into the attribute expression … our attention is focused on *how* this predicate functions. And this takes use from 'stands for attribute talk' to talk about specific matter-of-fact relations…[81]

To summarize this extended discussion of priority, we may say that although the picturing relations, micro-physical entities, and thoughts cause and structure the signifying relations, physical objects, and thinking-out-louds, we really only know the former in the imprecise terms — and in the context of usage — of the latter. Such is the Manifest Image.

This *prima facie* strange — or at least reciprocal — dual structure of back-and-forth priority is the Sellarsian dialectic. Sellars writes of this reciprocality, "…we *explain* the correspondence between overt speech and the real order in terms of the idea that overt speech is but the manifestation at the overt level of inner patterns and connections, but this is compatible with the idea that we conceive of these inner patterns and connections in terms of their manifestations."[82] This overt manifestation of inner content conceived in terms of overt manifestations is both a slogan of the Sellarsian dialectic as well as a signpost pointing to the Scientific Image. In fact, to be more accurate, this concept should be formulated as, '… the overt manifestation of inner content conceived — *for the time being until, in the endgame of ultimate*

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[81] Sellars, Wilfrid. "Scientific Realism or Irenic Instrumentalism." *Metaphysics and Epistemology*. Ridgeview Pub Co, 1979. p.182
[82] Sellars. "Being and Being Known" p.226

science, we know the inner content in its ultimate and irreducible terms — in terms of the overt manifestations.'

We see that Sellars provides a way that absolutes can exert a casual force on our picturings. Though, in our manifest image, there is some freedom in our picturing it must be a projection of the world as it is in itself. This is the causal influence of the absolute. The rending of our conceptual schemes from the noumenal world is accounted for, in Sellars account, by his insistence that the picturing order is always known in terms of the signifying order. It should be noted that Sellars does hold out hope that one day we can move from the manifest image to the scientific image in which we know the world on its own terms, the two orders of meaning collapse into one. However, Sellars constant invocation of Kant and Peirce suggest that, despite Sellars' optimism that we can move into the scientific image, it may be a regulative ideal that leads on our refinement of the manifest image.

5.0   CONCLUSION

Now that we have moved — often all too quickly — from early Jewish philosophy to the consummate philosopher of modernity, Sellars, what have we really achieved? Surely, our enterprise is a failed one if all we have accomplished is to detail a fine history of tangentially related ideas. The main goal of this paper, we will recall, was to argue that in the philosophical tradition there was a pervasive strand of thought that held that absolutes were not be hegemonic and unitary. Rather, the argument goes, absolutes exert a casual influence on the way that we create our many varied pictures of the world. Only in the intersections of acceptable but incompatible pictures do we get a sense of absolutes.

From the absolutely mystical origins of Kabbalah to the refined and precise analytic and scientific modern philosophies, proponents of absolutes have countenanced a model in which absolutes are manifest precisely in a heterogeneous manifold. That the world cannot be subsumed under a unified theory is no more an argument against absolutes than the fact that light is both wave and particle is an argument against the existence of light. Quite the opposite, the plurality of mutually incompatible perspectives affirms there must be something absolute that supports perspective. What the discontinuities and contradictions of experience testify to is that the purview of absolutes cannot be the particulars of the phenomenal world. Such facts are just aspects of a picture of the world. Absolutes ratify picturing wholesale, they are the wall on which pictures are hung.

The form of the argument we have drawn out is as follows: We often find ourselves wondering how the world *really* is. Whereas we usually go on our business just fine without any traces of skepticism, we get the feeling — from time to time — that the world has to be cut up, mapped out, laid down in some divine encyclopedia before there was even any human experience to take it in. Just that the world is and things occurs with predictive regularity, suggests that there is a way in which the world *really* is. For ancient religious practitioners, this probing took place to answer the question of how we get from God to man. How can divine unity and perfection present itself in such a fractured, imperfect way? There must be some absolute outside of the powers of man, some higher-level order that makes the whole thing tick. It was the struggling with these issues of the absolute that led to the traditions of Talmudic study and Kabbalah.

As man's conceptual apparatuses evolved, these questions eventually became recast in terms of language. Why should we expect the world to line up with the conceptual schemes that evolved contingently? As we have to answer that we *cannot* expect this, we are forced to confront the irreducibility of our conceptual taxonomy to the world in itself. Our usages of language are underwritten by traditions of practice, the normative pressures of our interpersonal lives. Our concepts are not vetted by God. If there is any pre-conceptual absolute, we have no reason to assume it matches up with our conceptual schemes. What, though, does it even mean to try to talk within our conceptual schemes about things that we posit that are transcendent of these schemes?

The search for absolutes becomes even more frustrated when we, following Kant, realize that if there are these absolutes — and what would it mean for an absolute to "exist" — they cannot be anything like our normal instances of knowledge. We are left with absolutes that we

cannot reverse engineer from experience and cannot know. Furthermore, we are bedeviled because we can no longer write these problems off through elaborate cosmologies, stories of man's fall or mysticism. However, we cannot shake the feeling that there must be something supporting the world. We surely did not create it. Is the solution simply to not think about it, to not feel the vertigo?

While this may indeed be a viable solution, it doesn't explain why the world occurs regularly and not chaotically.[83] Though we have no justification for assuming that our conceptual world is isomorphic with the pre-conceptual world, our pictures of the world generally work. It certainly seems that the absolute must affect the ways in which we know the world in some way. Our ways of worldmaking must be cosigned or caused by the absolute world in some way. What would a model of absolutes look like following this intuition? Let us pursue an absolute world related to the phenomenal world not as genera are related to species but as a map is related to the land.

Following Sellars, we can say that we project from the world a pattern-governed series of linguistic performances, viewed from the perspective of cause and effect. Though known in terms of the normative structures that govern these performance — viewed from the perspective of these conceptually conditioned rules of use — these linguistic instances express the world in their patterning. Just as Spinoza argued that the modes of attributes express God precisely in the fact that they are plural and not one, so do the models we make of the world. The picturing relation that ties us to absolutes becomes evident in the plurality of signifying relations which it causes, abetted by social interaction.

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[83] There is the possibility that we just have gotten quite good at making chaos look like order. Perhaps our concept-making covers all sorts of sins.

As we realize that no one model of the world is how the world *really* is, we are beset with vertigo. We move from acceptable model to acceptable model and find that truth is always qua picture. However, in this oscillation we discover that something has to support these many different models, all which are useful for our getting around. We can picture the world in many different ways in our patterns of behavior, but we cannot do so in every pattern of behavior.

Here, critics may interject and say, "But why can't any pattern, any conceptual scheme, be acceptable? Aren't acceptability criteria part and parcel of the goals and standards we have established socially?" I cannot help but see this as mistaken. If we were truly perfectly free to conceptualize the world as we pleased, some unlucky few, the conceptual tyros of the world, would be faced by experience that breaks down from time to time. We may encounter bits of the world that we don't understand or that force us to reevaluate the way we think, but we never experience such radical conceptual dissonance that our experience resembles a computer glitching or a video off track. Something must constrain the way in which we make conceptual schemes such that they exhibit, at least, a general reliability.

The problem with this argument is that I cannot give a counter example that shows a conceptual scheme that doesn't work. Try as I might, I cannot conjure a way of cutting up the world that just cannot be acceptable under any standards. Rather, than a counterexample to my argument, this inability is a testament to the *a priori* influence of the absolute on our concept formation. Though we may make mistakes in the way we construe the world, the preconditions that allow for picturing of the world limit the structure of our conceptual schemes. Though a product and reflection of the community in which they are formed, our concepts hang on absolutes. This is the message of a manifold of acceptable but mutually incompatible conceptual schemes. From Jewish antiquity to modern philosophy of science and language, the freedom we

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have to create with our concepts and language reflects the absolutes that support this freedom

and constrain its use.

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