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Experientialist Semantics: Relativism and the Individual

by

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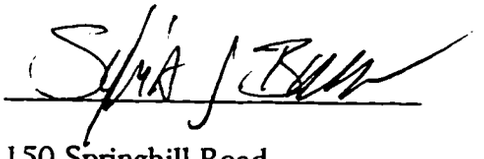

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To Anthony W.E.A. Burrow and Terese H. Burrow

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Abstract

Conceptual relativism is identified with linguistic relativism in that truth and meaning in a language are understood only in relation to a conceptual scheme. George Lakoff describes his account of conceptual relativism as "experientialism", for truth and meaning are based on the individual's experiences in the world. Lakoff claims that experientialism offers an account of relativism which avoids subjectivism, which is the focus of this thesis. But what does this claim entail, and how can Lakoff justify it? To situate Lakoff's theory, I offer a background understanding of the main issues of relativism. Then I outline the two main philosophical influences on Lakoff's relativism, Benjamin Lee Whorf and Hilary Putnam, showing where experientialism diverges and conflicts. Finally, I show that Lakoff fails to justify his claim that meaning and truth are shared among members of a linguistic community. This leaves Lakoff with a subjectivist account of semantics.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

George Lakoff's semantic theory centres on a radically different approach to language, that which he calls *experientialism*. Broadly stated, this view holds that meaning and truth are ultimately based on one's bodily experiences in the world. Experientialism takes its start from Hilary Putnam's "internal realism", aiming to incorporate and expand upon the latter.

The essence of Putnam's thesis that Lakoff incorporates is this: it only makes sense to talk of the external world from the perspective of our internal conceptual schemes; *we* cut the world up into objects. In Lakoff's opinion, Putnam's internal realism "preserves basic realism.... But it needs to be further developed. So far it hasn't offered new theories of meaning, reason, categorization, etc."[1]

The two claims of experientialism that I intend to centre on are summarized by Lakoff as follows:

> - Since bodily experience is constant experience of the real world that mostly involves successful functioning, stringent real-world constraints are placed on conceptual structure. *This avoids subjectivism.*
> - Since image schemas are common to all human beings... *total relativism is ruled out, though limited relativism is permitted.*[2] (my italics)

So, Lakoff claims experientialism can offer an account of relativism which avoids subjectivism. Even while we cut the world up into objects, Lakoff claims that a Real World exists and constrains relativism through our physical and social experiences. The problem with such an account is that conceptual relativism is usually understood as the thesis that *since* we carve the world up into objects, it is

unintelligible to speak of an ontologically real world; if the world does not come 'ready-made', already carved into objects, then it is not the sort of mind-independent world realism supposes.

If conceptual relativism denies realism, then how can Lakoff assert that the Real World constrains relativism? And if the world really is divided up according to private conceptual schemes, what constrains my sentences from being true simply because they correctly correspond to the objects in the world that *I* pick out?

Lakoff's view is that our words pick out particular objects since universals, or categories of things, do not exist in the world. This thesis is the essence of nominalism. Since we reason about objects as things belonging to certain categories, a worry for nominalists is this: if there is nothing common to a set of particular objects other than that they are called the same name, then there is no reason why one object belongs to one category as opposed to another. If so, I can call an object whatever name I like, without needing to fit it it into any particular category. In that case, nominalism reduces to subjectivism. But this is not an immediate worry for Lakoff as, strictly speaking, he is not a nominalist.

What is central to Lakoff's thesis is the idea that concepts are expressed in language. This is usually associated with conceptualism, and Locke in particular. Locke endorses universals, as he asserts we 'abstract' or form a general idea of a category from our experience with particular objects. Lakoff rejects the hierarchy associated with this model of concept formation, for he claims that we most often

categorize at a level which is neither the most particular level nor the most general; this he calls this the "basic-level" category. On Lakoff's account, we are more likely to reason about cats and dogs rather than about Persians and Huskies or felines and canines. And when we do form general concepts of particular objects, the general concepts will not reflect the properties essential to the particulars that fall under it, as general categories "have different properties than superordinate categories."[3] Because Lakoff holds we mostly reason about "basic-level" categories, we do not usually reason about objects as instantiations of universals, as universalism holds. So although Lakoff accounts for universals, it is not in the usual sense of universalism.

Lakoff's theory is best identified with a resemblance theory of language, as it is central to his theory that we classify objects according to resemblance relations. This calls for similar properties to be shared not among all the objects of the class, but between sets of members within the class, with enough similarity between all the objects allowing them to be grouped together. It is because we consider these objects to be similar that general classes of objects are formed (not because the world is naturally divided into kinds, as the universalists suppose), and it is through social conventions that objects are given the same name.

Resemblance theory, unlike the realist theories of nominalism and universalism, claims that the reason why an object is given a certain name has nothing to do with explaining the nature of the world in terms of whether universals really exist or just objects. Rather,

> the only explaining that has to be done on why a given object is a table is to be done on causal terms. What does have to be explained is something about

> ourselves, namely how it is that we can (indeed, must) experience in terms of kinds and generality, that we form concepts, and that we develop language for communication.[4]

What Lakoff will need to explain is how experience and concepts are shared between members of the linguistic community and how linguistic communities successfully use the same terms to apply to the same objects in order to assert relativism. Otherwise, his theory will fall into subjectivism: whatever word I consider to apply to an object, because of the category I place it in, will do.

Since Lakoff's claim is to relativism and not subjectivism, and since Lakoff explains neither of these terms explicitly, this thesis will proceed as follows. The next chapter provides a background understanding of what relativism entails. As an historical introduction, I will begin with a section devoted to the different interpretations of Protagorean relativism. The next section will follow up with an introduction to contemporary accounts of relativism. Following this general discussion I will explain and discuss the two main philosophical streams of influence behind the sort of relativism Lakoff espouses. The first is the linguistic relativism of Benjamin Lee Whorf and the second is Putnam's internal realism; these comprise chapters 3 and 4, respectively. Chapter 5 is devoted to an in depth discussion of Lakoff's account of semantics, in which I focus on his claim that his relativism avoids subjectivism; I will argue that it does not. But first, what does it really mean to make this claim?

Subjectivism is often regarded as something akin to solipsism, which is usually associated with the claim that we cannot have knowledge of an external world. But

this is taking solipsism only as an epistemic notion. Solipsism can include many other divisions: psychological, ontological, and semantic.[5] So a general definition of solipsism might look like this one: "The term "solipsism" (Latin *solus*, alone, plus *ipse*, self) would generally suggest any doctrine that attaches prime importance to the self."[6] A broad definition of this sort imparts the understanding of 'subjectivism' that I take Lakoff to have, when the 'self' is simply considered equivalent to 'subject'.

Two ways of distinguishing what 'relativism' entails have been proposed by Richard Bett. In one sense, Bett describes relativism as "weak relativism". An example of weak relativism is an ethical relativism which does not suppose objective moral principles, because principles are relative to the culture or community. For example, Aristotle could be called a relativist in this sense, as Aristotle held that what is good varies between individuals and communities. But Aristotle is not regarded as a relativist in the sense we usually devote to 'relativist'; his is a theory of relativism only in a weak sense.

What is usually associated with relativism is what Bett calls "strong relativism", which is opposed to weak relativism. Strong relativism holds that any one statement can be both true and false between different communities or individuals. It is strong relativism which is "relativism in the deep and interesting sense, in that it can be seen as something opposed to objectivity -- for example, in truth or metaphysics."[7] Strong relativism that applies to the individual is also called "first-person relativism". As Putnam points out,"first-person relativism sounds dangerously close to solipsism. Indeed, it is not clear how it can avoid being solipsism".[8]

1. Introduction

I will consider Lakoff's claim that he "avoids subjectivism" to be identically the same as "avoids solipsism", or "avoids first-person relativism", or even "avoids subjective relativism."[9] Either of these terms I consider interchangeable, but I will use the term 'subjectivism' to both avoid confusion and deviation from Lakoff's usage of the term. I consider Lakoff's claim to relativism to be about relativism in the strong sense.

Lakoff's point behind "avoiding subjectivism" is that he does not want his theory to result in truth and meaning as notions that are completely internal to the individual, as if there were no real world or no social context. As he states: "The experientialist approach is... to attempt to characterize meaning in terms of *the nature and experience of the organisms doing the thinking*. Not just the nature and experience of individuals, but the nature and experience of the species and of communities."[10]

Lakoff's relativism is a reaction against metaphysical realism, ontological realism, or as Lakoff calls it: "the God's eye point of view", or "objectivism." As Lakoff describes it, the main characteristic of this latter view is that it supposes a fixed totality of objects in the world and along with that, the correspondence theory of truth: if the words of a sentence correctly correspond with the objects the words pick out, the sentence is true.

Although Lakoff renounces objectivism, he maintains that his account not only must account for *realism*, but it also must be committed to *objectivity*[11]! This leaves us with a confusing picture as to what sort of relativism Lakoff's experientialism really entails. I will briefly outline Lakoff's rejection of objectivism

here to show the main elements his experientialism does embrace.

As mentioned, Lakoff considers the key feature of objectivism to be the correspondence theory of truth. Lakoff rejects "objectivist semantics" on Putnam's grounds that the correspondence theory of truth falls prey to two fatal problems: it (i) results in a vicious regress when we attempt to explain how meaning arises in virtue of reference relations; and (ii) reduces meaning to a relation between meaningless parts, which absurdly allows the meaning of the parts of a sentence to be changed significantly while not changing the meaning of the whole.

Because Lakoff denies correspondence, we cannot consider his relativism as something predicate logic could account for. That is, we cannot consider the claim "the chair is soft" to be true or false by adding a second predicate, such that the full sentence is "the chair is soft to John." To do so would suppose that both predicates correctly correspond to the objects picked out by 'chair' and 'John' for the sentence to be true, which Lakoff denies. Lakoff also denies that the correspondence theory of truth can account for the meaning of a sentence, as he does not consider meaning to be a function of truth conditions.

We might want to disagree with Lakoff's take on relativism by disagreeing with his characterization of the correspondence theory of truth. But I do not aim to pit one theory against another; rather, my aim is to understand what Lakoff's claim to relativism involves and to see whether his theory is justified in that claim.

Experientialism accounts for meaning as a relation between meaningful parts, which are meaningful concepts and meaningful words. Terms are meaningful through

an account of social use; cognition is meaningful via relations between concepts and conceptual structures (the latter are called "Idealized Cognitive Models" or ICMs). Cognitive meaning is the basis of linguistic meaning on Lakoff's theory; we express our concepts in language. In addition to this, Lakoff holds that language influences concept formation in a Whorfian way. Whorf's thesis is that any particular language and its grammar will shape, to a large extent, the concepts held by the speakers of that language.

In summary, Lakoff's view is as follows. Individuals of a linguistic community have shared meanings and understandings not only through shared physical and social experiences, but also through a convention of use which accounts for meaning in the language. Because the language itself influences the concepts of individuals, meaning is a holistic notion that is tightly related to a linguistic community.

In chapter 5, I point out that Lakoff does not adequately explain why individuals should share conceptual schemes, hence it is unclear why they should share cognitive meanings. Secondly, I argue that Lakoff cannot convincingly justify his account of a social division of labour that lies behind his theory of social convention; so, he cannot produce an adequate account of linguistic meaning. Without a well explained account of shared speaker or cognitive meanings, and without an adequately justified account of expression meaning, Lakoff is left without a basis for claiming his semantic relativism; what we are left with concerns the individual, not some shared feature of a group of individuals.

Since meaning is not just a function of truth on Lakoff's account, it might be

possible for him to offer objective truth conditions that would constrain subjectivism. But Lakoff's take on truth is this: "[w]e understand a statement as *true* in a given situation if our understanding of the statement fits our understanding of the situation closely enough for our purposes."[12] So, properly speaking, Lakoff's account of truth concerns only one person's understandings; it cannot correctly be said to be a relativistic account of truth. Since Lakoff cannot account for anything more than a subjective account of meaning, my conclusion is this: although Lakoff's semantic theory wishes to endorse relativism, he cannot avoid subjectivism.

And the problem with private language, as Wittgenstein famously points out, is that if I select my own word to associate with an internal state for its meaning, there will be no way of ascertaining if the next time I use the word that it will be used correctly. And that means that "whatever is going to seem right to me is right. And that only means that here we can't talk about 'right'."[13]

NOTES:

1.George Lakoff, Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things [WFD] (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) p. 265

2.Lakoff WFD p.268

3.Lakoff WFD p.51

4.A.D. Woozley, 'Universals' in The Encyclopedia of Philosophy (P. Edwards, ed. New York: MacMillan and Free Press, 1967), p.205

5.See Tom Vinci's outline of 'solipsism' in Robert Audi, The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy (New York: Cambridge U Press, 1995) p.751.

6.C.D. Rollins, in The Encyclopaedia of Philosophy (P. Edwards, ed. New York: MacMillan and Free Press, 1967), p.487.

7.Richard Bett, "The Sophists and Relativism" Phronesis (1989, v. 34, no. 2.) p.140

8.Hilary Putnam Renewing Philosophy. (Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1992) p.75.

9.This last term is that of Maurice Mandelbaum, which describes a relativism with "truth being relative to characteristics of the person making the assertion." In "Subjective, Objective, and Conceptual Relativisms", The Monist (vol. 62, no.4, Oct. 1979) pp. 403-404.

10.Lakoff WFD p.266.

11.ibid.

12.Lakoff WFD p.316

13.Ludwig Wittgenstein, Philosophical Investigations. (G.E.M Anscombe, trans. New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1958) §92, p. 258.

CHAPTER 2. RELATIVISM: Protagorean and Contemporary Accounts

2.1 PROTAGOREAN RELATIVISM

Protagoras' account of relativism is relayed in detail in Plato's *Theaetetus*, where it is placed within a discussion of knowledge. Very little is said concerning the role of language; we can assume it is because the model of language at the time was simply that words were considered labels for objects in the world. Necessary to this account of language as a set of proper names is the supposed existence of objects prior to the labelling. So the world, on this picture, must be mind-independent.

A problem with this account of language is: how can the wind be both cool and warm to different observers, if -- as the principle of non-contradiction demands -- the wind itself cannot be both cool and warm at the same time? This is precisely the issue Protagoras addressed with his 'man is the measure' doctrine.

Protagoras' doctrine is said to be this: "a man is a measure of all things: of those which are, that they are, and of those which are not, that they are not."[1] But what does this really mean? As I see it, there are two main interpretations. The first holds that Protagoras' relativism must deny objective existence claims. The second allows Protagoras to assert that the world can seem different ways to different people, while not denying objective existence claims about the world.

The first interpretation takes Protagoras' doctrine to mean that any existence claims about the world depend on subjective opinion or experience. The second interpretation encompasses two different ways of accounting for relativism while still

allowing for a mind- independent world. One is that the doctrine claims that my judgement of the world is true, even if it conflicts with yours. This I will call the judgemental sense of seeming. The second interpretation is that whichever way the world seems to me is correct for me, the way it seems to you is correct for you. This I will call the perceptual sense of seeming.

As Protagoras' theory receives many varied and conflicting interpretations, my aim is to order and explain these in the aim of showing the many ways Protagoras' relativism has been accounted for. This will provide the historical background behind the issues and problems of relativism that we will see resurface in contemporary theories of relativism.

2.11 Relativism without a Real World

The first interpretation of Protagoras' relativism maintains that one cannot make any assertions about an objectively existent world; one can only state how the world appears to the perceiver. Heraclitus exemplified this view. According to Heraclitus, we can never know the world apart from appearances; as he states, "the real constitution of things is accustomed to hide itself."[2] So understanding Protagoras as a Heraclitean entails the metaphysical thesis that it makes no sense to speak of an objective world; what matters is only how the world appears to the subject.

This way of regarding Protagoras' relativism has been historically attributed to Plato.[3] As Miles Burnyeat points out, Plato's interpretation of Protagorean relativism denies that sensation yields knowledge of the world as it really is, 'in itself'. This is

because the senses cannot result in knowledge of an objectively existent world, if it is in a continual state of change. Plato takes this to mean that one's perception of objects does not constitute knowledge. Knowledge for Plato "must pass two tests: it must be always of what is and it must be unerring."[4] These stringent requirements pave the way for Plato's Theory of Forms. True reality for Plato is a world of changeless objects of being, the world of Forms; it is only in relation to these that true knowledge obtains. If Plato was right, then Protagoras' doctrine entails that one can only make subjective assertions about the world, because one never really knows the world 'in itself'.

But this interpretation should not be taken to represent Protagoras' own position, if it is true that the prevalent theory of Protagoras' time supposed that proper names were attached to objects of a Real World. Plato's theory supposed that proper names applied to the ideal world of Forms, not the objects of sense perception.

The alternative is to interpret Protagoras as a relativist who did not need to deny an ontologically objective reality. This view permits two main interpretations of how the world seems to someone. These are the aforementioned judgemental and perceptual senses of seeming.

2.12 Judgemental Seemings

As Aristotle has pointed out, the judgemental sense of seeming is not the same as the perceptual sense: I can judge the sun to be several thousand miles across, while

according to my senses it really only seems as if it's a foot in diameter.[5] If truth is to be assigned to sentences of the judgemental sort, then it is the judgement and not the content of sense experience which matters. Thus, it is not necessarily the case that this view denies the existence of a mind-independent world; it would be correct to assert that the sun seems (in the judgement sense) to be a foot across and this would not suppose to be a claim about the sun itself.

But as Barnes points out, Aristotle did not interpret Protagoras' doctrine in this light; neither did Sextus: "If the man seems to someone not to be a trireme, then he is not a trireme (496: *Met* 1007b21 = A 19). Sextus has a different gloss: 'Everything that seems to men, actually is: and what seems to no man, is not' (493: A14)".[6]

Interpreting Protagoras in the above sense entails the following, Barnes points out: "If a subject S judges an object O to be F, then O is F and "O is F" is true, if that is the judgement of S, where 'judges' also encompasses 'believes or opines'."[7] This is such an outrageous claim that it was certainly meant as a refutation of Protagorean relativism. Indeed, as Miles Burnyeat shows, such an interpretation renders Protagoras as a "subjectivist whose view is that every judgement is true *simpliciter* -- true absolutely, not merely true for the person whose judgement it is."[8]

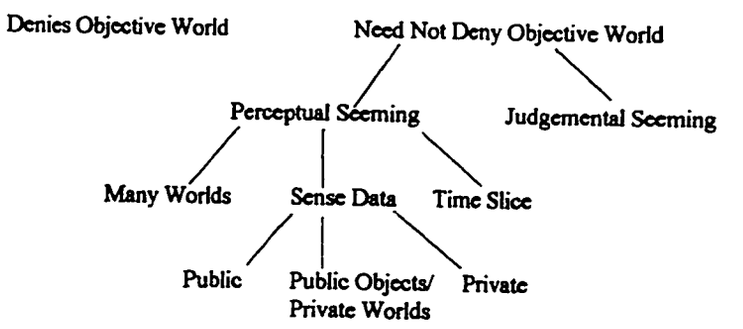
2.13 Perceptual Seemings

In the spirit of giving Protagoras a fair reading as a relativist, his doctrine has also been interpreted in the perceptual sense. Adopting this view need not make

Protagoras out to say that the way the world seems to S *is the way the world is*. If A perceives the wind to be cool while B perceives the wind to be warm, it does not entail a contradiction in the nature of the wind.[9] The claim the perceptual sense rests on is this: properties of a perceived object do not completely comprise the object. So instead of the wind itself having the properties of being both warm and cool, the properties of warmth and coolness belong to how the wind seems to A and B, respectively.

There are three competing ways of interpreting the way in which the world can perceptually seem to someone. The first regards the way the seeming in terms of 'sense data', private perceptual stimuli. The second is the 'many worlds' view, that the object in the real world has features that correspond to different internal worlds. The third is the 'time slice' theory, that different slices of reality show themselves to different people at different times.

Figure 1. 'Man the Measure' Doctrine Interpretations



2.131 Sense Data

The sense data theorist holds one of two views, corresponding to whether the sense data is or is not of mind- independent objects.

2.1311 Mind-dependent objects

According to this view, qualities comprise the objects; if qualities are simply private perceptual seemings then the sense data or "sense-objects" comprise the object. Now, the objects of sense data can be either private to the individual or commonly available. The latter view is upheld by Francis Cornford. Cornford explains this in reference to the sense data of 'hot' and 'cold': "For him [Protagoras] both the sense-objects exist independently of any percipient. The hot and the cold, together with any other properties we can perceive in the wind, would constitute 'the wind in itself'.... Protagoras would deny that the wind was anything more than the sum of these properties, which alone appear to us."[10]

On the other hand, if the objects of sense data are private to an individual, then the distinction between reality and illusion disappears; each perception of each individual will be correct, as part of a private reality. This is the sort of view I.M. Crombie holds: "All [perceptions] are equally "true", all perception is infallible (since there is nothing to check it against, no reality apart from each man's private reality); and therefore all perception is equally knowledge."[11] As Mohan Matthen points out, both Crombie and Cornford agree that objects are mere collections of sense data; they just disagree over whether the sense-objects exist publicly or not.[12]

2.1312 Mind-independent objects

For the sense data theorist who holds that objects exist in the Real World, such as Matthen, relativism is simply between equally valid sense perceptions of objectively real objects. Matthen supposes that sense data comprise the private world of the individual along with objects in the world that are not comprised of such properties. Any assertions made will be true if they correspond to the private world of the individual -- not the public world. As he summarizes, "private worlds contain public objects, but truths about these objects are private, and it these private truths that constitute the private worlds."[13]

This means that an object perceived can enjoy an independent existence in the real world, while still being able to explain how the attribution of properties is relational. That is not to say, though, that the perceiver somehow *creates* her own private world, Matthen points out. The properties of objects are causally efficacious of the percepts in the mind of the perceiver, so they cannot be created by the perceiver.[14]

2.132 Many Worlds

We saw that Matthen's view brings in the notion of a public world of real objects along with private worlds constituted by sense data. As such, Matthen's view incorporates a version of Miles' Burnyeat's many worlds view. The difference is that Burnyeat's many worlds theory posits *many mind-independent realities*. Burnyeat's interpretation of Protagoras runs roughly as follows.[15] First, Burnyeat points out that

the real existence of the world was not questioned in Protagoras' day. Since it is clear Protagoras held that the world seems one way for S_1 and another for S_2 , there must be something that can explain the truth of such statements. The answer Burnyeat offers is that different internal realities of S_1 and S_2 correspond to different external realities they perceive.

Perceiving the many "ways the world is" must really be perceiving many different mind-independent worlds. Burnyeat holds this must be so, as the Ancients upheld both a correspondence theory of truth and the Principle of Non-Contradiction. So the statements of S_1 and S_2 cannot each be true if they are contradictories; that would entail that the world itself is inherently contradictory. For Burnyeat, postulating many worlds, both internal and mind- independent ones, is the only way to preserve realism while maintaining an accurate and cogent picture of Protagoras' relativism.[16]

2.133 Time Slices

Another way of accounting for many mind-independent realities is not to consider them as different *worlds*, but different 'slices' of the same world. This is the view Richard Bett advocates. According to the time slice view, "[d]ifferent aspects of reality make themselves manifest to different people at any given point in time."[17] For example, the same wine might seem sweet to me when I am healthy but bitter to me when I am ill because different aspects of the wine are apparent to me at different times.

According to Bett, the Ancient's correspondence theory of truth is still upheld, but it is simply the nature of the world to present itself in different, even contradictory, ways at different times. Thus the reality words correspond to must itself be inherently contradictory, which violates the Principle of Non-Contradiction. This means truth is "relative only in the sense that which of the many (objective) truths about reality it is *open to one to apprehend* depends on one's physical or mental state. *What is true* is not itself, on this view, a relative matter."[18]

2.14 Concluding remarks

To summarize, I presented three competing ways of regarding Protagoras' doctrine that fall under two major headings. The first denies realism; one's perceptions of the world are all that matters for knowledge claims; one can never really know the world 'in itself'. This can be taken to incorporate a Heraclitean view of nature, which was Plato's reading of Protagoras. The second main view does not deny realism; one may *judge* that the world seems a certain way, or the world may *perceptually seem* a certain way, without the corresponding claims necessarily entailing that the world *is* a certain way.

The perceptual account of how the world seems can be accounted for in three main ways. One can account for how the world seems by explaining different sense data for different individuals, which may or may not deny an objectively existent world. Or one can account for different perceptual seemings as a part of internal worlds that correspond to different mind-independent worlds. Lastly, instead of

positing different *worlds*, one could consider different perceptual seemings as different *slices* that the world is disposed to present to different people at different times.

2.15 Lakoff

The majority of the above readings of Protagoras focus on preserving realism in the face of relativism. It is precisely this view that George Lakoff upholds: one can be a relativist without denying the real world. As such, Lakoff's relativism can be interpreted as making claims about perceptual seemings, without denying a mind-independent reality. So it could be that Lakoff endorses a sense data theory like Matthen, Burnyeat's many worlds theory, or a time slice theory such as Bett's. But Lakoff's theory is not the same as any of these. Lakoff avoids a sense data theory, claims *one* mind- independent reality, and considers our perceptual seemings to comprise many internal worlds which are not necessarily 'slices' representative of the real world. Lakoff's aim is to argue for a theory which maintains that there are many internal worlds corresponding to one Real World.

Lakoff avoids succumbing to the notion of a perceptual veil between the individual and the world, for his theory is based on "direct experience" with the world. Our mental perceptions of the Real World are not constitutive of internal realities for Lakoff, as experience is not a purely psychological notion; experience is "embodied" (a notion which is not clearly explained). Internal reality based on embodied experience is itself "real and meaningful", according to Lakoff. This is the heart of Lakoff's experientialism, which aims to incorporate Hilary Putnam's

"internal realism"; I expand upon this view in the fourth chapter.

The picture Lakoff's relativism leaves us with seems similar to one positing naive realism, such that both the world 'out there' is real and so are one's perceptions and judgements of it. This raises a problem if we try to account for both meaning and truth on such a model, however. Unlike the Ancient Greeks, Lakoff does not endorse correspondence relations with the world for either meaning or truth; in fact, his whole project is based on rejecting this commonly regarded relation of language to the world. So if correspondence relations to the real world don't fix meaning and truth in language, why couldn't one's assertions be true simply in relation to one's internal perceptions of the world?

I will outline Lakoff's account of language more fully in the last chapter of this thesis, where Lakoff's problem of holding relativism in meaning and truth is discussed. Before delving deeply into such matters, I want to first provide a clearer understanding of the background behind relativism in general. Although relativism has remained a part of philosophy since Protagoras' day, a shift in contemporary times occurred, that of supposing relativism between conceptual schemes. As we will see, this is really the driving force behind Lakoff's relativism.

2.2 CONTEMPORARY RELATIVISM

Protagoras' relativism might be considered a simple beginning, compared to contemporary theories of relativism. This is because language played no role in the relativism of the Ancients. Language had nothing to do with how we perceived the

world, or whether the world was mind- independent or not. Any statements made about reality would be true or false if they accurately reflected the facts of that reality. This meant, according to Richard Bett, that Protagoras was hardly the sort of "strong" or "serious" relativist we might see today:

> the *true facts* about the world, in this picture [of the fifth century B.C.], are objective and independent of us; it is merely that these true facts are equally expressible in any number of different, but mutually translatable, *notations*. To develop any serious kind of relativism out of reflection on language, one would need something like the notion of a *conceptual scheme*, embodied in language and imposed on the world through the use of that language; nothing like that is hinted at [at that time].[19]

It would have been a foreign concept for the Ancients to have supposed that one's statement about the world could be correct or incorrect because of the way of describing the world. But this is just the sort of claim contemporary relativism incorporates.

Bett offers an admittedly broad definition of contemporary relativism which illustrates what is generally taken to be its fundamental feature: "It is the thesis that *statements in a certain domain can be deemed correct or incorrect only relative to some framework*."[20] So, for example, one can be a relativist about such matters as ethics, aesthetics, knowledge claims, ontological claims, and truth.

The notion of a framework that is most often associated with relativism is usually described as a "belief system", "conceptual scheme", "background", or "perspective".[21] If the framework is simply that of the individual, it is usually referred to as subjectivism.[22] But the framework can be other than that of the individual, as is the case when concepts are shared among a linguistic community; this idea is

commonly associated with conceptual relativism.

Some relativists, however, hold that a framework is a sufficient but not a necessary feature of relativism, as Michael Krausz does:

> Besides characteristic "framework" relativisms, we should note "nonframework" ones, such as those which hold that of a given domain the range of ideally admissible interpretations is multiple. That is, more than one uniquely correct interpretation applies to it, on account of a multiplicity of its standards -- which in turn may well be incongruent.[23]

"Nonframework" relativism, as Krausz describes it, comes across as an 'anything goes' relativism. I take Krausz's definition to entail that conflicting interpretations are equally admissible, not because they are interpretations relative to some framework and the frameworks are equally admissible (as framework relativism holds), but because there can never be any standards against which to judge it. This is a vacuous notion of relativism, though; without any standards against which to judge interpretations they should admit neither of correctness nor validity.

"Framework" relativism starts to sound just like "nonframework" relativism, if framework relativism is taken to hold both that conceptual schemes are frameworks and that any conceptual scheme ought to be as good as any other. This problem is not a necessary feature of conceptual relativism, however. For one thing, framework relativism need not include the notion of a conceptual scheme.

For example, James Bayley claims that "[r]elativism is usually understood as the claim that standards, principles, ideals (henceforth "criteria") for acceptability of a belief lack validity outside some limited, statable context."[24] The context suggested by Bayley is simply the situation at hand. Since this context could be a physical or

social one (such as the number of people in a room), the context against which one judges criteria need not be a conceptual framework. Bayley's account cannot mean to endorse the notion that a framework can be a conceptual scheme, as one cannot state just *what* the context of the cognitive framework is, as Bayley's account requires; one can only state *that* there is one.

To sum up, the usual view associated with contemporary relativism is that truth and meaning are defined in relation to a conceptual framework, such that conceptual relativism draws in relativism of truth and meaning. But this is not a necessary feature of framework relativism. Some, such as Bayley, consider the framework simply to be the context at hand.

Still, it is not even necessary that a contemporary account of relativism needs to include the notion of a framework in the first place. "Non- framework" relativism takes a more radical approach, in which the whole notion of a framework is eliminated altogether -- so any one interpretation is as admissible as another; but this results in a nihilististic relativism.

2.21 Framework relativism

If relativism is understood in the common "framework" sense, it can be categorized in several different ways. One way is to first bifurcate it into 'strong' and 'weak' relativism, as Bett does. For Bett, relativism is a weak or "superficial" doctrine if it runs along the lines of ethical relativism. Relativism about values is weak relativism in that it need not be a thesis directed against *objective* values, just universal moral

claims. Bett gives Aristotle as an example. Certainly, Aristotle considered what is good to vary with both the individual and the situation, such that there can be no one account of the good for everyone. But this is such a weak sense of relativism that it does not warrant calling Aristotle a relativist (*viz.* a "strong relativist"). Such "weak relativism" is not a relativism of any great philosophical significance and so, properly speaking, we should not even call this relativism.[25]

The only "serious" relativism for Bett is strong relativism. Strong relativism opposes some form of objectivity: "It denies that any kind of "God's-eye view" is available in this domain [the one that is applicable]; and it denies that judgements in this domain can be correct or incorrect in an absolute, unqualified sense."[26] Relativism of this sort is relativism in "the deep and interesting sense", as Bett puts it. Whether or not this relativism is the only really interesting one is inconsequential. But the point Bett has made is not; relativism is generally taken to oppose objectivity. But objectivity of what? Values, principles, conceptual schemes, the Real World, truth, meaning? Picking a member of the list is just what defines the sort of relativism in question. For example, opposing objectivity in truth gives us relativism about truth; opposing objectivity of conceptual schemes gives us conceptual relativism; and so on. How many members of the list a philosopher considers important will determine the taxonomy of relativism subsequently offered.

Bett offers a categorization of relativism which I think reflects a common division of relativism. On this model, relativism (or what Bett calls "strong relativism") falls into three categories: cognitive relativism, ontological relativism,

and relativism about truth. For Bett, claims about knowledge relative to some framework is "cognitive relativism"; this I would suggest be called "epistemological relativism". In a similar vein, Bett categorizes "ontological relativism", or "metaphysical relativism" as claims concerning existence that are relative only to some framework. Concerning truth claims, he states that "one could be a relativist about truth in general, in which case, presumably, any sentence with a truth-value would fall within the scope of the thesis."[27]

These three main divisions of relativism are not all reflected in Lakoff's version of relativism. First, Lakoff's relativism clearly does not entail metaphysical relativism. Lakoff maintains a "commitment to the existence of a real world, both external to human beings and including the reality of human experience."[28]

Secondly, it is questionable whether Lakoff is a relativist about truth claims. Lakoff never directly states that something like a sentence is 'true for the person' or 'true for the culture'. He apparently wishes to avoid truth relative to the individual (subjectivism about truth): he proposes a "conception of truth that is not merely based on internal coherence."[29] The important question is whether Lakoff's account of truth succeeds in this aim. This will be discussed in detail in the last chapter.

The sort of relativism Lakoff is concerned with might be called 'conceptual relativism' or 'cognitive relativism'. It would be misleading, though, to consider Lakoff's relativism to be the same as the above sense of cognitive relativism, for that is only concerned with knowledge claims. That cognitive relativism has been identified with knowledge claims is not unique to Bett's description, either. For

example, Bayley also holds that "[c]ognitive relativism... holds that knowledge in one context may not count as knowledge in another."[30]

But Lakoff's cognitive relativism includes relativism about beliefs, opinions, wishes, desires, etc.; it is a relativism about conceptual systems. Lakoff adheres to the common notion of conceptual relativism as it has been generally understood since Donald Davidson's widespread use of the term. As a brief outline, conceptual relativism

> holds that the influence of language on thought is so pervasive and so compelling that, insofar as it is a question of truth or falsity, one cannot legitimately compare statements made in one language with those made in another: the truth of each must be assessed within the framework provided by the conceptual system.[31]

Now, Lakoff's conceptual relativism differs from this categorization in that truth is not necessarily relative to the conceptual scheme; as is noted above, Lakoff claims truth is not simply an internal notion.

A concise definition of conceptual relativism that accurately reflects Lakoff's position is that conceptual relativism "holds that there is no such thing as a schemeless access to reality."[32] One cannot make claims about the nature of reality apart from the perspective of one's conceptual scheme. So it appears that any claims about reality are relative to the conceptual scheme. This results in metaphysical relativism. That is, one cannot make objective claims, including the claim that the world is mind- independent, if any existence claims are only correct in relation to the scheme of the perceiver. But Lakoff clearly holds both conceptual relativism *and* that there is an objectively real world! The question of whether these two views can mesh

and just what they entail is the topic I will turn to now.

2.211 Conceptual Relativism

Conceptual schemes are ways of apprehending reality or of organizing experience. The major historical figure lying behind this notion is Kant: Kant's idea was that *a priori* concepts of space and time are needed to make sense of the input given through experience of the perceptual world. If we did not have ways of categorically organizing our experience first, according to Kant, we would be unable to make sense of the empirical world around us.[33]

With the ensuing focus on language in philosophy -- and on Quinean theory in particular -- conceptual schemes have since come to be regarded as virtually inseparable from language. Quine puts it this way: "Where I have spoken of a conceptual scheme I could have spoken of a language."[34] Davidson provides a summary of this position (which he will refute, along with the conception of conceptual schemes):

> We may accept the doctrine that associates having a language with having a conceptual scheme. The relation may be supposed to be this: if conceptual schemes differ, so do languages. But speakers of different languages may share a conceptual scheme provided there is a way of translating one language into the other.[35]

Of course, Quine's claim is that any translation of one language into another is always indeterminate. That is, given a foreign speaker's language and behaviour, and any translation manual offered for that speaker's utterances, an equally consistent and correct - but different - translation manual can always be offered. What is clear

is that translations differ according to different conceptual schemes, and that if one translation is as equally good as another, so too are conceptual schemes -- for these are interchangeable (although distinguishable) notions.

Language on this model is more precisely seen as what filters reality, as a classifier and organizer of reality. If language is what makes sense of reality, then wouldn't it be indiscernible whether or not the world exists in some objective way apart from our description of it through language? Any description of the world will be true in relation to the conceptual scheme. So, if the statement in question is "quarks exist", and if some conceptual scheme considers quarks to exist, then it is true for that scheme that quarks exist. This understanding of conceptual relativism would render a result almost as radical as Aristotle or Sextus' reading of Protagoras, that however one judges the world to be is the way the world *is*. But this is not the only way of interpreting conceptual relativism.

One could also take conceptual relativism as a thesis *endorsing* a mind-independent reality. That is, if conceptual schemes can slice the world up into objects, doesn't that already suppose an ontologically existent world (the "dough")? Viewed this way, conceptual relativism entails metaphysical realism. Or does it? What is entailed by metaphysical realism? If metaphysical realism upholds the existence of an ontologically real world, such that the world is objectively existent *including all its objects*, then metaphysical realism denies conceptual relativism. Objectively existent objects are not created by schemes; they are out there in the world already.

2.212 Metaphysical relativism

One contemporary author, Michael Levin, has referred to metaphysical relativism as "reality relativism": "the thesis that the world has no mind-independent characteristics, ie. that the characteristics the world does display depends upon human mental activity."[36] Levin's definition depicts metaphysical relativism as the contrary of metaphysical realism, which he understands as the thesis that the world does not causally depend on the existence of minds. Although this is so, metaphysical relativism does not *contradict* metaphysical realism, according to Levin:

> Reality relativism is contrary to but does not contradict the dependence of thought on the nature of the world. The world might have an intrinsic character to which the mind was unresponsive (survival perhaps being insured by God). In such a case thought would not depend on reality although reality was absolute.[37]

Levin considers metaphysical relativism to entail the following: If reality really is dependent on our carving up of it, then it would reduce to the absurd conclusion that if conceptual schemes didn't exist, neither would electrons, chairs or tomatoes.[38] But surely this is not what conceptual relativism must result in! It is one thing to assert that conceptual schemes, to use a familiar analogy, are our cookie-cutters of the world, and quite another to say *there is no dough unless we stamp out our designs*.

So conceptual relativism does not necessarily deny metaphysical realism. Bayley puts the point this way: "[n]o chairs exist apart from schemes, although objects shaped like chairs may. A thing is a chair only if sentient creatures take it as something to sit on."[39] Just because conceptual schemes divide the world into objects

does not mean that there is *nothing independent of the perceiving minds*; perceivers simply classify what's there into different sorts of objects. This is the sort of realism Putnam presents: no objects exist in the world independently of conceptual schemes, but still the matter of the world is ontologically independent of our sorting it out into different objects. But if the matter of the world is not comprised of objects, then the question we are left with is, "what *is* this mind-independent matter?" and this is something Putnam does not explain.

Now if we agree that this interpretation of conceptual relativism is possible, does that mean conceptual relativists hold that there *must* be some fixed substratum of the world, the essential dough of the division? Not necessarily. Nelson Goodman holds, for example, that "[t]alk of unstructured content or an unconceptualized given or substratum without properties is self- defeating; for the talk imposes structure, conceptualizes, ascribes properties. ... We can have words without a world but no world without words or other symbols."[40]

So, conceptual relativism may deny any fixed structure of the world at all, such that we create world- versions, or worlds, on the basis of how we conceptualize and talk about the world, as Goodman proposes. Or less drastically, conceptual relativism may maintain that we divide up the world based on our conceptual schemes, without denying that there is something metaphysically real already out there to be divided up. The way in which we slice reality just creates a division of some sort of objectively existent matter into certain objects and classes of objects.

In either case, the basic claim of conceptual relativism is that it denies the

notion of a "ready-made" world with an objectively existent set of mind-independent *objects*. The relation between the world and conceptual schemes can be summarized thusly: conceptual relativism implies metaphysical relativism in the sense that whatever objects are said to exist are relative to the scheme, but it need not deny the sort of metaphysical realism that holds the matter (the "dough") of the world exists independently of being classed into certain objects. But conceptual relativism must deny metaphysical realism in the sense that the world is comprised of a set of objects which have a completely mind-independent existence. The very thesis of conceptual relativism is that a conceptual scheme sorts the world into objects.

So the answer to the question we started with, namely "Does conceptual relativism imply metaphysical relativism?" receives no immediate negative or affirmative answer. If we are talking about the sort of metaphysical relativism which denies the existence of the essential "dough" of the division, then the answer is "yes" if we are Goodmanites and "no" otherwise; if we are talking about the sort of metaphysical relativism which denies a mind- independent world already carved into objects, then the answer is "yes".

2.3 Remarks: relativism and Lakoff

It is not clear that when Lakoff asserts that "there is no God's eye point of view" of the world that he is not also denying any fixed part of the world; we might think his rejection of "objectivism" is a rejection of the metaphysical realism that considers both the world and its objects mind-independent. It would then seem quite puzzling

how Lakoff could assert both conceptual relativism and this sort of metaphysical realism. The latter view is wholly incompatible with conceptual relativism, which denies that the world's objects are mind-independent.

The puzzle is solved when we see that Lakoff actually endorses the sort of metaphysical realism which claims an essential "dough" of the division but denies that this "dough" is formed into objects apart from conceptual schemes. This sort of realism is best exemplified in Putnam's account of "internal realism", which Lakoff aims to adopt.

Lakoff's version of internal realism, "experientialism", claims that our direct experiences of the world are the basis for our own "internal realities". So at least in this sense, Lakoff's theory sounds like Goodman's: both adhere to the view that one's perspective on the world, as something given through experience, creates worlds. These worlds are Goodman's "world versions" and Lakoff's "internal realities". These worlds result for both, because both hold that we can have no independent access to reality outside of our own conceptual schemes. The difference is that Lakoff supposes the existence of one Real World, which Goodman staunchly denies in place of many made worlds.

So given this quick gloss of Lakoff's internal realism, it seems that if Lakoff doesn't want to buy into a radical Goodmanite relativism along with conceptual relativism, supposing some sort of metaphysical realism is a good way to achieve some grounding. This is just the sort of approach we saw Miles Burnyeat take to Protagorean relativism. But what is interesting about Lakoff's theory is that his

conceptual relativism is highly influenced by the relativism of Benjamin Lee Whorf -- the main figure in philosophy of language who promoted conceptual relativism part and parcel with metaphysical *relativism*.

NOTES:

1.J. McDowell, trans. Plato, Theaetetus. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1973), 152a

2.Heraclitus fr.123, S. Kirk and J. Raven, trans. Greek Philosophy, R.E. Allen, ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1985) p.40

3.Jonathan Barnes, The Presocratic Philosophers (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1982) p.542.

4.M. Burnyeat, introduction in The Theaetetus of Plato, : (Cambridge: Hackett, 1990) p.8.

5. Posterior Analytics, 428b3

7.Barnes pp.544-545

6.Jonathan Barnes, Jonathan. The Presocratic Philosophers London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982.

8.M. Burnyeat "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's *Theaetetus*", The Philosophical Review 85, 1976, p.46. Burnyeat's view of Protagoras' "subjectivity *simpliciter*" might not be so simple; as Barnes argues, Protagoras can be interpreted as holding a "crypto-subjective" view: if I say "the wind is cool" my assertion has an objective air, but it has a hidden subjectivity to it, namely the unsaid part in which I am really stating that the wind is cool *for me* (Barnes p.551).

9.This Socrates points out in Plato's *Theaetetus* (M. Burnyeat, ed. Cambridge, Hackett, 1990) 152b.

10.Francis Cornford Plato's Theory of Knowledge (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1935, 1960) p.35-36

11.I.M. Crombie An Examination of Plato's Doctrine's (London: Routledge and Keagan Paul, 1963) p.8

12.M. Matthen, "Perception, Relativism, and Truth: Reflections on Plato's Theaetetus 152-160" (Dialogue 24, 1985) p.38. Both Cornford and Crombie's views are of Plato's interpretation of Protagoras' relativism.

13.Matthen p.35

14.Matthen 53. To think personal worlds are created by the individual would put Protagoras in the same camp as "such recent idealists or relativists as Jean-Paul Sartre, Nelson Goodman, Hilary Putnam and Jacques Derrida" (ibid). It seems unfair to lump Putnam in with this group, as I will address later on in my discussion of Putnam's "internal realism".

15.M. Burnyeat "Protagoras and Self-Refutation in Plato's Theaetetus" (*The Philosophical Review* 85 Apr. 1976, pp.172 - 195).

16.Although Burnyeat's theory is directed against an Idealist reading of Protagoras, such as the one Plato gives, Matthen agues that Burnyeat fails to show anything more than Protagoras was not an anti-realist. See Matthen, p.52.

17.Bett p.167

18.Bett p.167

19.Bett p.157

20.Bett p.141

21.Bett p.142

22.Bett p.142

23.Michael Krausz, Introduction, Relativism: Interpretation and Confrontation. (M. Krausz, ed. Notre dame: U of Notre Dame Press, 1989) p.2.

24.James Bayley, Introduction to Aspects of Relativism: Moral, Cognitive, and Literary (New York: University Press of America, 1992) p.2

25.Bett p. 148. Bett is making a reference to the idea that the Sophists were relativists; the mere fact that they allowed relativism about value does not warrant us calling them relativists. Still, the point is made that relativism about value is a philosophically insignificant doctrine -- for Bett.

26.Bett p.145

27.Bett p.142

28.Lakoff WFD p.158

29.Lakoff WFD p.158

30.Bayley p.3

31.Maurice Mandelbaum "Subjective, Objective, and Conceptual Relativism" The Monist (v.62, no.4 Oct.1979) p.417

32.Bayley p.5

33.Some have come to regard Kant as a sort of relativist, those who take Kant's categories to admit of different sets for different individuals (this is noted by S.D. Edwards in Relativism, Conceptual Schemes and Categorical Frameworks (Hunts, England: Avebury, 1990) p.33n15). I consider this a highly unlikely prospect, given the primacy of the objectivity of reason, embodied in the noumenal world to which each of us belong by the lights of our rationality. Moreover, the *a priori* notions of space and time are necessarily available to every rational being, and these are what organize our experience through the categories; so even if differences in the categories were entertained, the objective necessity of space and time would ensure commensurability between conceptual schemes and thus deny relativism.

34.W.V.O. Quine, Theories and Things (Cambridge: Harvard U Press, 1981) p. 41.

35.D. Davidson "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" in What is a Theory of Meaning (M. Dummett, ed.

36.Michael Levin, "Reality Relativism" Aspects of Relativism (James Bayley, ed. New York: University Press of America, 1992) p.69.

37.Levin pp.73-74

38.Levin p.70

39.Bayley p.9

40.Nelson Goodman, Ways of Worldmaking (Sussex: Harvester Press, 1978) p.6

CHAPTER 3. WHORFIAN RELATIVISM

Benjamin Lee Whorf was greatly influenced by his teacher Edward Sapir; their theory of linguistic relativism is commonly called "the Sapir- Whorf hypothesis."[1] The hypothesis is often cited as follows: "one's conception of the world is relative to the language one learns,"[2] but it can be more specifically broken down into two parts, as Paul Kay and Willett Kempton do, following Roger Brown. Brown summarizes the hypothesis as follows:

> (1) Structural differences between language systems will, in general, be parallelled by non-linguistic cognitive differences, of an unspecified sort, in the native speakers of the two languages.
>
> (2) The structure of anyone's native language strongly influences or fully determines the world-view he will acquire as he learns the language.[3]

Kay and Kempton explain that (1) and (2) are often taken to suppose the tacit proposition that

> (3) The semantic systems of different languages vary without constraint.[4]

It is the tacit proposition (3) that Kay and Kempton argue against; their conclusion is that Whorfian relativism is "limited" in that it does in fact allow similarities between cognitive systems, which means that languages maintain some set of semantic similarities. Considering Lakoff's endorsement of Kay and Kempton's experiments in support of the Whorfian hypothesis, it is not surprising that Lakoff presents a similar position. Lakoff's claim is that both cognitive and semantic differences are limited between individuals, with enough similarities ensuring that meanings are relative to the linguistic community and not subjective to the

individual.

By outlining Whorf's linguistic relativism, my aim is to draw out the conceptions of relativism which drive Lakoff's own relativism. If Whorfian relativism is "limited", as Kay and Kempton suppose, then this would provide good support for Lakoff's claim that experientialism avoids subjectivism, that conceptual schemes and semantics are shared among members of a linguistic community. But the differences between the two versions of relativism show that Whorf's theory does not support Lakoff's own claims of universal cognitive and semantic similarities.[5]

What is Kay and Kempton's understanding of "limited" Whorfian relativism? Kay and Kempton presume relativism to be limited because it allows cognitive and semantic similarities between linguistic communities. This is supposed to allow for intertranslatability and commensurability of conceptual schemes. Understanding just what Whorf's relativism entails will provide the background understanding behind Lakoff's claim to intertranslatability and commensurability (which will be detailed in 3.2). With these areas in mind, I will turn to Whorf's view of relativism.

Whorf's relativism holds three major tenets: (i) language shapes one's "background", one's conceptual scheme; (ii) one's conceptual scheme "dissects", or organizes and categorizes the world around us; and (iii) the world itself is simply a state of flux, of unorganized existence apart from our conceptions of it.

A basic metaphysics is seen in each language according to Whorf, which explains (i) above, that one's language shapes one's conceptual scheme. Similarities in people's cognitive systems will thus run parallel to the language they speak. In the

case of English, the basic metaphysics incorporated into the language and shared by each speaker's conceptual system are "the two grand cosmic forms" of space and time. In the case of the Hopi (who have no conception of time parallel to ours), the metaphysical assumptions are something akin to a subjective realm of the mind, plus the objective realm of "manifesting".[6]

It is important to note that Whorf does not claim our concepts shape the language we use; his claim is that language shapes our concepts of the world. The metaphysical categories implicitly held by one language but not another are parallelled in the sort of conceptual scheme, or "background" that is common to the speakers of one language but not necessarily the speakers of another language. This categorization is central to Whorf's linguistic relativism: "We dissect nature along lines laid down by our native languages. The categories and types that we isolate from the world of phenomena we do not find there because they stare every observer in the face."[7]

Now, Whorf does not hold that this organization of the world presupposes a set of objectively existent objects; Whorf does not attempt to meld his linguistic relativism with metaphysical realism, as Lakoff does. Whorf's relativism instead encompasses metaphysical relativism of a Heraclitean sort: "the world is presented in a kaleidoscopic flux of impressions which has to be organized by our minds -- and this means largely by the linguistic systems in our minds."[8] The linguistic systems Whorf has in mind are systematic patterns of conceptualizing, patterns which are laid down by corresponding grammatical patterns in the language.

The relation between grammar and metaphysics is so intimately related for Whorf that as one commentator puts it, "Whorf shares with many philosophers the view that grammar just *is* a kind of metaphysics...."[9] Whorf's notion of grammar concerns not the vocabulary, but the inherent structures in a language, such as the ordering of verb in relation to object, or the lack of adjectives or tenses. Since one's view of the world is relative to the grammatical patterns of one's language, conceptual relativism is a necessary component of Whorf's linguistic relativism:

> the background linguistic system (in other words, the grammar) of each language is not merely the reproducing instrument for voicing ideas but is rather itself the shaper of ideas, the program and guide for the individual's mental activity....[10]

Whorf's conceptual relativism is a required part of his account of meaning, because in his view conceptual frameworks greatly influence linguistic meaning. For example, the Hopi regard the movement of water on the ocean as an event (reflected only as a verb), something like `sloshing occurs'; and that is very different from seeing it as a series of objects (as nouns). The last way is of course how English speakers consider it, but for Hopi speakers it does not make sense to speak of a succession of waves, for they do not conceive of such objects as 'waves'. Thus the meaning of the Hopi word akin to our 'wave' will not encompass the same notion as the English, because of the differences in how each linguistic community categorizes the world.

This is what Whorf's linguistic relativism amounts to: metaphysical categories shape conceptual categories and conceptual categories shape semantics. So, the

essence of Whorf's thesis is that semantics is shaped by metaphysics.

Now, it might seem problematic for metaphysical categories to exist prior to some sort of conceptualization of the world, but it has been argued that Whorf posited his notion of the metaphysics of a language to be apparent *a priori*. This is a sort of Kantian metaphysics, with the notable exception that Whorf held *a priori* metaphysical concepts not to be common to all rational beings by virtue of their rationality, but rather to be common to all members of a linguistic community by virtue of their language. The upshot is that Whorf does not claim to *prove* his claims concerning *a priori* concepts. His argument is a transcendental one, supposing *a priori* metaphysical concepts and illustrating their influence on language.[11]

Whorf's emphasis on the importance of grammatical patterns, and the metaphysics 'implicit' within them, brings in a holist account of meaning. Firstly, the grammatical patterns of a language engender meaning more so than individual word reference on Whorf's account.[12] Secondly, since grammatical patterns are implicitly a part of conceptual schemes, as we have seen in the case of 'wave', meaning is tied to both conceptual schemes and grammatical patterns. The meaning of words are also largely determined by whole sentence structures.[13] So if we say "a few drops of rain", the word 'few' will have a *different reference* (not a vagueness of extension) than "a few diamonds", according to Whorf. One might be tempted to claim against Whorf that just *some* words, like 'few', have an indeterminate reference; but on the contrary, Whorf asserts that even words like 'tree' can have a different reference for different languages, depending on the metaphysical category (and hence the conceptual

category) that 'tree' falls under.[14]

Lastly, sentences only make sense within the grammatical patterns of the language for Whorf. So, as he neatly summarizes, "reference is the lesser part of meaning, patternment the greater."[15] These grammatical patterns of a language only make sense within the context of the whole language. So to sum up, Whorf's conception of linguistic relativism not only closely intertwines conceptual and metaphysical relativism through the grammar of a language, it also draws in relativism through a holistic account of meaning.

Lakoff's relativism, on the other hand, holds that meaning is influenced by the particulars of experience as they are conceptualized, not by *a priori* metaphysical concepts. Still, Lakoff holds along with Whorf that the ways in which members of a linguistic community conceptualize about the world largely influences semantics. One of the examples Lakoff gives is that members of a mountainous region develop similar concepts of many sorts of hills based on similar experiences. The meanings of different words corresponding to the sorts of hills will be commonly understood through both shared meaningful experiences and linguistic conventions. For Lakoff, the meanings of words in a language are not shared because of grammatical patterns that shape conceptual schemes. Rather, it is because conceptual schemes are similar (based on similar experiences) and meanings are shared through linguistic conventions that meanings are common to a linguistic community.[16]

Lakoff's relativism will be explained further in the next section. First, though, I want to address a problem that has been levied against Whorf's linguistic relativism,

a problem which may correspondingly apply to Lakoff, since both seem to offer translations of other languages while claiming linguistic relativism. This problem has been called the "linguist's fallacy" by Max Black and the "self-excepting fallacy" by Maurice Mandelbaum[17].

3.1 The linguist's fallacy

Stated generally, the fallacy is this: relativists about language make objective assertions about the semantics of other languages, which supposes the relativist is somehow exempt from relativism. For example, even though he is an outsider of the Hopi linguistic community, Whorf seems to objectively state what Hopi world- views are reflected in the Hopi language. How can that occur, unless Whorf is able to escape his own language? The answer for both Mandelbaum and Black is of course that Whorf was fallaciously exempting himself from linguistic relativity.

Seeing this as an inherent problem for Whorf rests upon two factors, that (i) conceptual systems are incommensurable, such that it is impossible to have a similar background system "calibrated" to another in order to apprehend linguistic meanings; and (ii) people cannot escape the relativism of their own background systems in order to translate another language, for everyone is bound by their own conceptual schemes as they fix meaning in their own language. If Whorf can claim to understand the background conceptual scheme driving another language, he ought to be able to translate that language. But conceptual relativism denies commensurability; and as part of linguistic relativity, it ought also deny translation.

One can reply that conceptual relativism need not deny understanding of other conceptual schemes. For Whorf, it is not because of one's conceptual scheme that one has the language one has, but *because of the language one has that one has a certain conceptual scheme*. So if it's possible to learn another language, it seems possible its grammatical patterns could alter one's way of conceptualizing about the world, so that one could emulate the way native speakers of that language conceptualize about the world.

One might then argue that if one is a linguist of the proficient sort Whorf had in mind, then surely this master of language acquisition ought to be privy to an understanding of the conceptual schemes of many other languages. Surely then the linguist, if anyone, should be able to make assertions about the meanings of other languages without suffering the linguist's fallacy. That is, the linguist need not be able to *translate,* but rather *acquire* another language (translation is not necessary to acquisition) so as to understand what the conceptual schemes of other languages are like.

Whorf's theory seems to support this reasoning, as his view is that linguists, as experts who can speak and use other languages proficiently, indeed do experience a broadening in their understanding of the many different ways of conceiving of the world. It should follow, then, that the more languages a linguist is proficient in, the closer that linguist is to understanding an objective view of the world. Thus Whorf states: "the person most nearly free in such respects [to conceive of the world with absolute impartiality] would be a linguist familiar with very many widely different

linguistic systems."[18] But Whorf continues, and he makes a crucial point.

Whorf's point is that *there are no such* linguists. Therefore, there is no escaping the fact that people will be led from "the same evidence" to different pictures of the world -- unless their background systems can in some other way be "calibrated".[19] Certainly, Whorf's appeal to the empirical "fact" that there are no such linguists does not deny the *possibility* of his theory allowing a linguist privy to a God's eye view of the world because that linguist knows all, or maybe very nearly all, the different languages. But since there are no such linguists, Whorf cannot be one of them. Yet given this, how is it possible for Whorf to even *understand* other languages, like Hopi? In order to understand the Hopi, his conceptual system would need to be "calibrated" to theirs -- an impossible feat for incommensurable systems.

3.11 Incommensurability and translation

It is possible to see a way out of this problem for Whorf if we accept Kay and Kempton's take on his account of relativism. Kay and Kempton's understanding of Whorfian relativism is that it is not "absolute linguistic relativism", but a "modest version". This modest relativism upholds two claims: languages differ semantically but not drastically so, since conceptual schemes allow for universal similarities.[20] As such, Kay and Kempton wish to view Whorf as a relativist, but not of the sort that necessarily claims incommensurability between conceptual systems and non-intertranslatability between languages.

Lakoff appears to accept Kay and Kempton's claim when he asserts that

"Whorf believed that conceptual systems could be radically different, but he did not believe that they could be totally different. That is, Whorf was not a total relativist."[21] Lakoff's justification for this comment is that Whorf himself shows this in his "Language: Plan and Conception of Arrangement".[22]

However, it is entirely unclear what leads Lakoff to this conclusion, when within the above article Whorf states that languages might have such features as the following: word categories, like verbs, nouns, etc, or none at all; gender classifications like male or female, or "many varying kinds" like animate or inanimate, rational or irrational; some derivations from word bases or "pilings of derivative upon derivative, e.g., the mock-learned 'honorificabilitudinity'...., or none at all".[23] These would in fact be radical differences between languages if they obtained; and if two conceptual systems should happen to support such opposing elements in different languages, then I don't see why they would not be totally different. Just why Lakoff supposes that such radical differences between conceptual systems should not mean they are completely different is not explained.

The problem with Kay and Kempton's view of Whorf, and hence Lakoff's, is the philosophically unjustified claim that Whorfian relativism allows for similarities between different conceptual schemes. Looking directly at Whorf's texts, it is apparent that he *does* take different background conceptual systems to be incommensurable. Whorf begins by stating that "The relativity of all conceptual systems, ours included, and their dependence upon language stand revealed."[24] In order to overcome this relativity, conceptual systems would need to be "calibrated" so

as to remove themselves from radically different metaphysical perspectives.[25] It is impossible to move away from linguistic relativism without "calibration" between conceptual systems. Without such "calibration", conceptual systems will remain radically different.

If Kay and Kempton's suggestion that Whorf denies incommensurability fails as a way out of the linguist's fallacy, then the other route worth considering is to examine Whorf's notion of translation. If the need for "calibration" is taken to also mean "the failure of intertranslatability", then how can Whorf offer translations of say, the Hopi language into English? This brings Whorfian relativism back to the problem of the linguist's fallacy.

Now, although he does not claim that Whorf encounters any self- excepting problem, Donald Davidson points out that "[t]he failure of intertranslatability is a necessary condition for difference of conceptual schemes...."[26] If Davidson's is a good "translation" of Whorf's notion of "calibration", then Kay and Kempton cannot uphold the possibility of universal conceptual similarities. For if Whorf were to make such a claim, languages could be successfully intertranslated on his account. And that would have unsavoury consequences for Whorf's theory, as Max Black points out: "The admitted possibility of translation from any language into any other renders the supposed relativity of such systems highly dubious."[27]

And yet Whorf must endorse *some* notion of translatability between languages, as his works involve innumerable comments of the sort that the sentences of certain foreign languages are semantically equivalent to English sentences. Indeed,

he is claimed to have outlined a grammar and dictionary of the Hopi.[28] Thus the uneasy dichotomy the linguist's fallacy puts Whorf in is this: either Whorf commits such a fallacy and maintains relativism, or else he loses his grip on linguistic relativism in admitting the possibility of translation.

Kay and Kempton offer two readings of Whorf might serve as solutions to this last problem. First, Kay and Kempton claim that the sort of linguistic relativism Whorf offers does not really entail "absolute" linguistic relativity, in the sense that Whorf holds thought to only *tend* to fit a certain linguistic mould. This would mean that Whorf's relativism would not necessarily deny the possibility of translation. A radically different language would not need to result in a radically different conceptual scheme, so conceptual schemes would not really need to be incommensurable.

But surely, a watered down version of linguistic relativism in this sense could not be what Whorf was offering. Language clearly forms not only one's ways of thinking, but the very nature of an individual's consciousness, according to Whorf:

> every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness.[29]

A second solution we might find in Kay and Kempton results from their claim that neither Whorf nor Sapir could really have believed they could explain in English what the Hopi were saying.[30] If that were the case, it would drastically undercut most of Whorf's claims about language and conceptual schemes. Instead, maybe Whorf

did think he could explain what the Hopi were saying but not, strictly speaking, through *translation.*

Whorf does not claim to offer translations in the sense that translations will capture accurately the meaning of the sentences of other languages. When Whorf states, for example, that we can understand the Hopi "walalata" as "plural waving occurs", he is not attempting to accurately offer the Hopi way of conceiving of the world, for it can really only be properly expressed in Hopi. His notion of translation is instead best regarded as an *approximation* of the Hopi's way of conceiving the world, given in English.[31]

What this means, most importantly, is that translation on Whorf's account does not entail commensurability. Having the ability to translate or even fluently speak a language does not mean that one understands the background conceptual system, or that conceptual systems are commensurate:

> Scientific linguists have long understood that ability to speak a language fluently does not necessarily confer a linguistic knowledge of it, ie., understanding of its background phenomena and its systematic processes and structure, any more than ability to play a good game of billiards confers or requires any knowledge of the laws of mechanics.... [32]

It is apparent then, that Whorf's does not need to find a way out of the linguist's fallacy because Whorf claims to offer 'approximations' of the meanings of other languages, not translations. This means we can't suppose that *acquiring* another language must result in similarities between conceptual schemes on Whorf's account, as learning another language need not mean one also understands its conceptual scheme.

To sum up, Whorf holds that grammatical patterns of a language implicitly contain basic metaphysical concepts; for example, English's basic metaphysical concepts are space and time. Since basic metaphysical concepts vary with the language, they influence the conceptual schemes of speakers within a linguistic community. So conceptual relativism is entailed by Whorf's linguistic relativism. And since the linguistic categories of a language determine one's view of the world, and the world is a Heraclitean flux of impressions, Whorf's relativism also encompasses metaphysical relativism.

Holding this view of linguistic and conceptual relativism does not mean that Whorf suffers the linguist's fallacy in claiming to offer explanations about the conceptual schemes of other languages. That is because Whorf is not claiming to offer translations, but only approximations -- which do not deny incommensurability.

3.2 Lakoff

What Lakoff supports and emphasizes in Whorf's theory is the idea that language affects conceptual structure. Lakoff particularly stresses that through influencing conceptual structure, *non-linguistic* cognition is also transformed. Calling this a "Whorfian affect", Lakoff cites Kay and Kempton's experiments which show how differences in non-linguistic cognition depend on differences in linguistic structure.[33] He asserts that this empirical research "counters an all-too-common view in cognitive psychology that language plays no cognitive role other than to provide labels for concepts -- labels that stand outside of "real cognition.""[34]

Now, even though he accepts Whorf's notion that language affects our concepts of the world, this not Lakoff's central claim. The predominant view Lakoff presents is that concepts shape language. On the experientialist account, our experience of the world affects language by leading to the automatic formation of certain linguistic categories.[35] That is, through experience we form conceptual categories which become a part of a shared language. A frequently given example of Lakoff's is the "container schema": it is in virtue of our bodily experiences as containers through which objects enter and leave that humans form the background "container schema". Having this schema means we tend to automatically classify objects in the world as either in or out of some form of container. Lakoff supplies some sample metaphors which employ this schema: "The visual field is understood as a container: things *come into* and *go out of sight*. Personal relationships are also understood in terms of containers: one can be *trapped in a marriage* and *get out of it.*"[36]

When Lakoff speaks of automatic classification, he has this Whorfian notion in mind: our linguistic categories serve to order and divide the world without our awareness of that fact. Whorf holds we have "background phenomena, of which the talkers are unaware or, at the most, very dimly aware.... These automatic, involuntary patterns of language are not the same for all men...."[37] Lakoff similarly claims: "Grammars of languages are used automatically, effortlessly, unconsciously, and almost continuously...."[38]

According to Lakoff, meanings based on a conceptual scheme become conventionalized as part of the grammar of a language.[39] This conventionalization

was also integral to Whorf's idea of coding: grammatical patterns in a language codify a certain way of carving up the world, which must be tacitly agreed upon by the linguistic conventions of a speech community.[40]

To summarize thus far, both Whorf and Lakoff adhere to linguistic relativism in that the meaning of sentences vary according to the linguistic community; and both views incorporate conceptual relativism in the sense that conceptual systems vary according to the language. Yet, Whorf and Lakoff differ on just what they consider integral to conceptual relativism.

As we saw in the last section, Whorf's conceptual schemes are incommensurable: one cannot successfully translate between languages because it is impossible to really understand another conceptual scheme. The most one can do is to approximate what the other language means by its sentences. Even this does not mean that one has actually understood anything about the background system of the language as it is parallelled cognitively. Unlike Lakoff, Whorf does not suppose similar cultural and physical experiences shape conceptual schemes in similar ways. The grammatical patterns of the language are what count in shaping background systems, not one's physical or cultural situation. So not even immersion in a culture renders understanding of that culture's background conceptual system on Whorf's account.

Lakoff, on the other hand, holds that conceptual schemes vary across language *and* culture, with the social interaction within a culture motivating linguistic semantics. And some concepts are *only* understood in virtue the culture. For example,

"Tuesday" has a linguistic meaning only because it is related to a social concept of a week, which Lakoff refers to as "cultural schema".[41]

Now, Lakoff's conceptual relativism does not entail incommensurability. This is radically different not only from Whorf, but from how conceptual relativism has been commonly understood. According to Lakoff, incommensurability is not entailed by conceptual relativism, if conceptualizing *capacities* are taken into account: "the picture is different if one assumes that people share a general conceptualizing capacity regardless of what differences they may have in conceptual systems."[42] But Lakoff leaves out just why having a similar *capacity* means there are actual similarities. This is particularly troublesome since a shared *capacity* appears to have nothing to do with commensurability. For example, a calculator and a person can each add up 7 and 5, but this shared capacity doesn't say anything about commensurability between human minds and calculators![43]

Also a feature of Lakoff's view is that commensurability is not understood by the translation criterion; if conceptual schemes are taken to be incommensurable that does not mean translation is impossible.[44] According to Lakoff, several kinds of commensurability are possible, although he elusively states that "the question of whether conceptual systems are commensurable cannot be answered in absolute terms; it can only be answered relative to the way the question is put."[45] More clearly, Lakoff explains why someone's ability to understand a language is *independent* of his ability to translate it:

The reason: He has the same conceptualizing capacity and the same basic

> experiences. His conceptualizing ability would enable him to construct the other conceptual system as he goes along and to understand it via the shared preconceptual structure. He may be able to *understand* the other language even if he cannot *translate* it into his own.[46]

So even when two conceptual systems are radically different, similarities in shared bodily experiences still allow for *understanding* between the systems. This means, according to Lakoff, that translation will not be impossible (although it may be difficult). This conflicts with Whorf's claim that it is impossible to actually understand the background conceptual scheme behind another language -- one is hardly even aware of the background scheme of one's own language.

Whorf's take on linguistic relativity is thus juxtaposed to Lakoff in this respect: Whorf claims we can approximate the meanings of another language, without really being able to understand it, where understanding a language means having access to the background conceptual workings of the language. Lakoff claims we can understand another language without necessarily having the ability to translate it. As such, Lakoff also avoids the charge which is usually levied against the linguistic relativist, the linguist's fallacy.

So far, we have seen the particulars of the influence on Lakoff's relativism, noting where Lakoff has diverged. The larger question, as yet unaddressed, is whether Lakoff endorses relativism for the same reasons as Whorf.

3.3 Reasons for advancing relativism

I regard Whorf's arguments for linguistic relativism as arguments aimed at pointing

out what was, up until that point, not acknowledged by either linguists or philosophers. Whorf was intent on showing how human reason features as an important part of language, with differences in both language and reason related specifically to one's culture.[47] And yet at the same time, Whorf promoted a Kantian conception of transcendental reason, suggesting that we might overcome differences in semantics and reason by reaching this highest "level" (as he considered it) of reason. Thus, it is not apparent that Whorf was actually interested in further *promoting* relativism.

Whorf's view of transcendental reason is similar to the view that has been pervasive since Plato, but it has a notable modification. Reason, Whorf says, consists of progressive stages or levels one passes through to reach the noumenal world, with each stage actually contributing to as yet unseen complex "layering", or "pattern".[48]

Now, one's reasoning need not render an objective correct view of reality on Whorf's account. A person S_1 might employ a very different sort of reasoning than S_2, and thus have a very different - but still rational - conception of the world. This would of course mean that S_1 would have very different linguistic meanings from S_2. So, "[t]he term 'space', for instance, does not and CANNOT mean the same thing to a psychologist as to a physicist."[49] As I see it, Whorf's idea is that reason on the transcendental level (if we could reach it) can ultimately act as a Grand Unified Theory of Language: "a noumenal world -- a world of hyperspace, of higher dimensions -- awaits discovery by all the sciences, which it will unite and unify... bearing a recognizable affinity to the rich and systematic organization of

LANGUAGE....."[50]

Contra Whorf, Lakoff certainly sees no possibility of attaining any one unified conception of human reason that might unite our various perspectives on the world. In fact, he states that it is necessary for our very species' survival to maintain different ways of reasoning abut the world.[51] Lakoff's view is that "[h]uman reason is not an instantiation of transcendental reason; it grows out of the nature of the environment it lives in, the way it functions in that environment, the nature of its social functioning, and the like."[52] So on Lakoff's view, reasoning cannot function to unify conceptual schemes, and hence, meaning in language.

Lakoff's aim is to advance linguistic and conceptual relativism as a concerted reaction against objectivism; his take on reason supports this end. Whorf's thesis stresses the important influence language has on conceptual relativism, but contrary to experientialism, also points the way towards a more unified conception of the world through a transcendental notion of reason.

3.4 Conclusion

We have seen that Lakoff's relativism endorses the Whorfian view that language affects our concepts of the world. But Lakoff's main claim is that experience has a large role to play in the formation of our conceptual systems, which in turn are the basis for linguistic meaning. Lakoff also aims to promote conceptual and linguistic relativism, whereas Whorf claims that through participating in the noumenal world of transcendental reason, it is possible for conceptual systems to be unified.

Finally, Lakoff rejects a Heraclitean view of nature; carving the world up into objects does not entail metaphysical relativism, as Whorf asserts. This means Lakoff's theory digresses greatly from Whorf's, as Lakoff ultimately grounds his relativism on experience of a Real World.

Holding both realism and relativism conjointly is central to Lakoff's experientialism. That is, Lakoff does not want his relativism to entail that "anything goes", that any conceptual system is as good as any other. Even though Whorf considered the world to be in a continual state of flux, he constrained differences between the conceptual schemes of members of the same community by virtue of shared metaphysical concepts that were basic to all, intrinsically a part of their rationality. Lakoff, though, wants a "a commitment to the existence of stable knowledge of the external world", while avoiding a completely internal model of truth.[53] And Lakoff wants to make such claims while rejecting a correspondence theory of truth and meaning.

Whether or not Lakoff can succeed in this aim will be the focus of the last chapter; I will argue that positing a Real World does not succeed in limiting his relativism in the way he wants. Before delving into that issue though, it will be necessary to first turn to Putnam's notion of "internal realism", the basis behind Lakoff's claim to realism in the face of relativism.

NOTES

1. Although is may be questioned whether the theory should be referred to as a *hypothesis*; see John Cook, "Whorf's Linguistic Relativism" Philosophical Investigations (Winter 1978) p.10-13.

2.W.P. Lehmann, Language: an Introduction (New York: Random House, 1983) p. 23

3.Cited in P. Kay and W. Kempton What is the Sapir- Whorf Hypothesis? (Berkeley Cognitive Science Report No. 8, April 1983) p. 2.

4.Kay and Kempton p.2

5.Although Lakoff devotes an entire chapter to Whorf, it is unclear whether it is with the intent to show how Whorfian relativism supports Lakoff's own theory. Nevertheless, Lakoff's repeated endorsements of Whorfian relativism and arguments for his own theory from the Kay and Kempton experiments (showing support for Whorfian relativism) would suggest that Whorfian relativism somehow provides the underpinning for Lakoff's own relativism.

6. Whorf pp.59-61

7.Whorf p.213

8.Whorf p.213

9. John Cook, "Whorf's Linguistic Relativism" Philosophical Investigations (Winter 1978) p.2. Just who these other philosophers might be is left unmentioned.

10.Whorf p.212

11.Cook p. 20

12.Whorf p.259-61

13.Whorf p.259

14.The example Whorf gives is this: "The Polish word that means 'tree' also includes the meaning 'wood'; thus we cannot have fixed universal references for words (Whorf 259). Polish speakers simply have a conception of how to slice the world up into trees that does not differentiate trees from other wood objects. Still, Whorf has not shown why fixed reference should not obtain within any one language.

15.Whorf p.261

16.This is not to say that *Whorf* did not endorse convention in language. In fact, convention is the necessary means to explaining how the metaphysical views inherent in a language come to be shared: members of the community enter into a tacit agreement to speak about the world in certain ways, thus building a grammar which necessarily contains an implicit metaphysics. See for example, Whorf 238.

17.Maurice Mandelbaum "Subjective, Objective, and Conceptual Relativism" The Monist (Oct.1979 v.62 no.4.) and Max Black, "Linguistic Relativity" Philosophical Review 68, (April 1959).

18.Whorf p.214

19.ibid.

20.Kay and Kempton pp.24-5

21.Lakoff WFD p.328

22.Whorf pp.125-133.

23.Whorf pp.131-132

24.Whorf p.214

25.ibid.

26.Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme" Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation. (Oxford: Clarendon Press: 1984) p.12

27.Max Black, "Linguistic Relativity" (Philosophical Review 68 April 1959) p.232.

28.J.B. Carroll's Introduction to Whorf's Language, Thought, and Reality, p. 17 One might assume that Whorf's experience in living with the Hopi "in the field" surely made him a good interpreter of Hopi, if anyone; but in fact, Whorf spent "a short time on the Hopi reservation in Arizona", having composed the bulk of his Hopi grammar and dictionary through his contact with a single Hopi native living in New York, New York (ibid.)! So in fact, one could not appeal to the Quinean/Davidsonian notion of the field linguist translating a foreign language through pure assent and dissent -- at least, not for how the majority of Whorf's interpretations of Hopi were garnered.

29.Whorf p.252

30.Kay and Kempton p.24. The authors claim this has also been pointed out by other (unspecified) commentators on Whorf.

31.Whorf p.58. John Cook has taken Whorf's claims of approximation to mean that Whorf aims to give English *paraphrases* of foreign languages (Cook, 21). But surely this begs the question, for to paraphrase another language in English, one has to supply some sort of translation first.

32.Whorf p.211

33.Lakoff WFD pp.331-334

34.Lakoff WFD p.333. It is interesting to note that Lakoff's claims regarding cognition are derived from language: "Since communication is based on the same conceptual system in terms of which we think and act, language is an important source of evidence for what that system is like" (CM p.454). If language is what gives us information about conceptual systems, and linguistic semantics are relative to the linguistic community, then how is Lakoff to make his claims about the structures of conceptual systems of another language? He cannot assert what *their* conceptual systems are like from the point of view of their language, for his claim to conceptual relativism means translation might not even be *possible*. If translation is uncertain, then Lakoff cannot claim to be in a position to know the meanings of the other language's assertions. So, he cannot state what sorts of conceptual structures the assertions of other linguistic

communities are evidence for.

35.Although Lakoff points out that "experience does not *determine* conceptual categories, but only *motivates* them...." (WFD p.310).

36.Lakoff CS p.141

37.Whorf p.241

38.Lakoff WFD p.319. This is a claim Lakoff makes on the behalf of all linguists.

39.Lakoff WFD p.310. Lakoff points to empirical studies by Eugene Casad "Cora Locationals and Structured Imagery" PhD Diss. (San Diego: University of California, 1982). For example, the Cora have a "highly structured" concept of a basic hill shape, due to their daily experiences living in the hills of Mexico, which is "not only conceptualized, but has been conventionalized and has become part of the grammar of Cora" (ibid.).

40.Whorf states that the grammar "codifies" this agreement. This suggests that it is not simply in virtue of the influence of language that speakers share similar concepts; apart from language, there must be some other unifying feature that members of the same linguistic community share such that they will tend to carve up the world in a different way from members of other linguistic communities. Unfortunately, Whorf never directly addresses this part of his theory. And yet without an account of how people come to share similar concepts, Whorf cannot explain how languages come to have certain metaphysical concepts embedded in their grammatical patterns. This problem also appears in Lakoff's notion of linguistic relativity; it will be the basis of discussion for the last part of this thesis.

41.Lakoff CS p.135

42.Lakoff WFD p.311

43.This is a particularly relevant example, as Lakoff denies the possibility of Artificial Intelligence (see WFD pp.338-352). One reason why is that "the mind-as-machine paradigm can only provide an account of understanding in which differences in conceptual organization are eliminated" (WFD p.351). But this is impossible, says Lakoff, because differences in organization are preserved between conceptual systems; they are dependent on experience, which varies.

44.Lakoff WFD p.322

45.Lakoff WFD p.323

46.Lakoff WFD pp. 311-312

47.See, for example, Whorf's introductory paragraph of "A Linguistic Consideration of thinking in Primitive Communities", in Whorf pp.65-66.

48.Whorf p.248. Whorf's notion of progressive levels, or planes, is intimately related to the Mantra Yoga of East India, according to which different planes of consciousness are attained through meditation; the highest level of 'true consciousness' what seems to be what Whorf parallels with the noumenal world. This integration of yogic principles into Plato's notion of transcendental reason is given by Ouspensky, in his *Tertium Organum*, which Whorf cites not only in this but other essays.

49.Whorf p.246

50.Whorf pp.246-247

51.Lakoff WFD p.337

52.Lakoff WFD introduction, xv.

53.Lakoff WFD p.138

CHAPTER 4. INTERNAL REALISM

Hilary Putnam's "internal realism" is the second main philosophical influence on Lakoff's relativism. Lakoff introduces the internal realism of Putnam's Reason, Truth and History[1] with this precis: "In the place of metaphysical realism, Putnam proposes another form of realism -- internal realism -- a realism from a human point of view that accords real status to the world and to the way we function in it."[2]

According to Putnam's internalism, "*what objects does the world consist of?* is a question that only makes sense to ask *within* a theory or description."[3] Putnam equates these different theories or descriptions with different conceptual schemes. Since different conceptual schemes cut the world up into different objects, it might seem that the ontological status of the world is mind-dependent.[4] But Putnam does not deny realism in the sense that a mind- independent world can be directly perceived. Putnam's take on realism is that of "the common man", in that it takes "our familiar commonsense notion of the world" at face value.[5] The point of considering this *internal* realism is that one's commonsense picture of the world will always be coloured by whatever theory or description of the world the perceiver espouses.

Lakoff claims his experientialism shares this fundamental commonality with internal realism: our experiences of the world are themselves real and meaningful in relation to our way of viewing the Real World; because the world is mind-independent, it constrains conceptual relativism so as to avoid total relativism.

Experientialism differs from internal realism in two related ways, which Lakoff explains as follows. First, experientialism takes "meaning to be the central issue".[6] Secondly, experientialism aims to "characterize meaning in terms of *the nature and experience of the organisms doing the thinking*. Not just the nature and experience of individuals, but the nature and experience of the species and of communities." [7]

In brief, Lakoff's experientialism claims to be a branch of internal realism in that it both embraces and enlarges upon Putnam's theory. In this chapter, my aim is to explain the essential features of internal realism and point out two specific areas of tension and one fundamental difficulty experientialism encounters in incorporating internal realism.

4.1 Putnam's Theory

According to Putnam, this is the essential thesis of metaphysical realism: "the world consists of some fixed totality of mind-independent objects. There is exactly one true and complete description of 'the way the world is'."[8] Metaphysical realism, or traditional realism, is accompanied by the correspondence theory of truth; if there is only one true description of the world, then that description must correspond correctly to the world.[9] For Putnam, this view presupposes the notion of a fixed totality of objects and properties to which the words correspond. But as I see it, this must only hold if the metaphysical realist is a materialist of the strictest sort; if so, Putnam's traditional realist cannot hold that some things, like numbers, are objects.

Putnam's point is that since words refer to a fixed totality of objects and

properties on the metaphysical realist's account, it means "there is a definite totality of all possible knowledge claims, likewise fixed once and for all independently of language users or thinkers."[10] Putnam's problem with this account is that it does not allow *different* theories or interpretations to correctly 'copy' the world, as a 'ready-made' world admits of only one true description.[11] Putnam is not suggesting that descriptions actually reflect intrinsic features of the world with his notion of 'copying'. The point behind Putnam's usage of 'copy' is to avoid the charge that we *make* the world through description while also not entailing that descriptions are *mirrors* of nature. The latter is what Putnam associates with the metaphysical realist's notion of a correct copying of the world. Whether or not metaphysical realists must hold that the mind is a mirror of nature is another matter, though. Surely one can be such a realist and still believe that our descriptions of the world can be causally connected to non-veridical perceptions.

Nevertheless, Putnam wants to claim that the metaphysical realist cannot account for two different, equally accurate theories of the world. Putnam supposes that on the traditional realist's account, to say a sentence is true is just to say that the object it refers to exists and its propositions apply to the objects intrinsic properties. So if "light is a wave" is true, then there must be some intrinsic property of light such that it exists as a wave. So, it cannot also be true that "light is a particle" if the intrinsic properties of light determine that it is a *wave* (unless, of course, waves are physically identical to particles). As such, Putnam's take on traditional realism supposes that there can only be *one* correct correspondence

relation to objects in the world.

Internal realists, on the other hand, can allow multiple versions of the world to be equally good theories or descriptions. On the internal realist's account, no one correspondence can be picked as the *right* one. A sentence is true if it fits the description of the world according to a conceptual scheme as it is shared by members of a linguistic community. So, internal realism can accept as equally true the sentences "light is a wave" and "light is a particle". The question now is, how can Putnam assert this claim? Wouldn't he need to make this assertion from outside the perspective of any one conceptual scheme? But this is impossible for one who is a conceptual relativist.

At any rate, Putnam's goal is not to reject correspondence relations out of hand, but to defeat the metaphysical realist's notion of *intrinsic* correspondence with the world: "To me, believing that some correspondence intrinsically just *is* reference (not as a result of our operational and theoretical constraints, or our intentions, but as an *ultimate* metaphysical fact) amounts to a magical theory of reference."[12] Putnam argues against this from two fronts. The first is an argument against representation as reference: representations do not automatically refer to objects in the world. The second is an argument against sentence meaning: in fixing the truth conditions of a sentence fails to fix the reference of its individual terms.

4.11 Representation fixing reference

Putnam's main aim is to reject this situation: when one has a concept that one

intends to refer to a particular object in the world, that concept really does refer to that object. Putnam's beech/elm and H20/XYZ arguments for this claim are detailed in "The Meaning of 'Meaning'"[13] What I want to focus on now is the part that leads up to that view, which is this: just as one's mental *representations* (which, as we will see, Putnam distinguishes from *concepts*) do not inherently refer to objects in the world, neither do one's words. Putnam's point is they can't refer by the mere fact that we just *intend* them to refer; intentionality does not determine extensionality. Putnam's argument is that causal interaction with a real world is required. He gives this argument in three main stages.

Putnam's first argument is that representations (mental pictures) do not inherently refer to the world in that they are not intrinsically connected to what they represent. This is carried out through a series of thought experiments. Suppose the movement of an ant draws lines in the sand which look just like a picture of Winston Churchill. Putnam claims that this is not a physical representation of Churchill, as the lines in the sand have an arbitrary connection to Churchill. Similarly, mental pictures need not be intrinsically connected to the world, either. Imagine that somebody (or something) drops a picture of a tree on some isolated planet; an extraterrestrial picks it up, and forms a mental image of the picture in his head.[14] This image fails as a representation of a tree because the extraterrestrial has never seen and knows nothing about trees.

Secondly, Putnam argues that without a causal connection to the real world, our words will only *appear* to refer to objects in the world. This claim is based on

what he calls the "Turing test for reference". Suppose one's partner in conversation is a machine that speaks the same language and appears to refer to just the same objects we do; if, over time, none of us suspect this interlocutor of being anything less than one of us, then it passes Putnam's Turing Test for Reference.[15] But passing Putnam's Turing Test for Reference does not mean that the words used by the speakers have anything to do with the real world. Its sentences are just responses to other sentences -- they are not causally connected in any way to the real world. Putnam concludes that

> *If one coupled two of these machines... they would go on 'fooling' each other forever, even if the rest of the world disappeared!* There is no more reason to regard the machine's talk of apples as referring to real world apples than there is to regard the ant's 'drawing' as referring to Winston Churchill.[16]

The above thought experiments pave the way for Putnam's Brain in a Vat argument,[17] designed to show that neither representations nor words can refer without being causally connected to the world. Imagine a world that, by cosmic coincidence, is comprised solely of brains in a vat. They experience the world just like we do, but the fact of the matter is that their sense organs do not hook up with the world. It just appears that they do. In actual fact, the brains are hooked up to a complicated machine which simulates reality in every way, right down to the simulation that they are really complete functioning bodies in the real world. Now suppose even further that these brains speak Vat-English; they would still use the word 'tree' as we do, but something important is lacking: their word 'tree' was not causally related to anything in the real world. So: "In short, the brains in a vat are not thinking about real trees when they think 'there is a tree in front of me' because

there is nothing by virtue of which their thought 'tree' represents actual trees."[18]

The conclusion Putnam aims to have drawn out through the above arguments is that "one cannot refer to certain kinds of things, e.g. *trees*, if one has no causal interaction at all with them, or with things in terms of which they can be described."[19] Without causal interaction with a real world, our mental states fail to fix reference for the words we use. Intending a thought or word to correspond to a particular object won't determine meaning, not without the appropriate causal connection. Just exactly what the appropriate connection to the real world is, Putnam does not say.

4.12 Reference determining truth conditions of sentences

Putnam also argues against the claim that determining the truth condition for a sentence can fix the reference of its individual terms -- not even as a sentence of the set of all sentences true for the language. That is, "even if we have constraints of whatever nature which determine the truth-value of every sentence in a language in every possible world, still the reference of individual terms remains indeterminate."[20] Putnam proves this point as follows.

Take the sentence "A cat is on the mat". In a possible world, the word 'cat' can be interpreted as 'cherry', while 'mat' can be interpreted as 'tree'. To differentiate this world from ours, the possible world 'cat' can be called a 'cat*' and 'mat' a 'mat*'. In every possible world then, a cat is on a mat if and only if a cat* is on the mat*. The intension of the term 'cat' might be different from 'cat*', but that doesn't matter, as

'A cat is on the mat' will be true whether we intend to be speaking about cats* or cats. Consequently, "the truth conditions for 'A cat is on the mat' don't even exclude the possibility that 'cat' refers to cherries."[21]

Putnam's point is that "reference may be metaphysically singled out without being totally *determinate.*"[22] Different theories about the world can result in true sentences without any one of them being determinable as the right one. Now, it is not the case that Putnam is rejecting reference out of hand. He is instead claiming that reference within a conceptual scheme *does not determine meaning*; the notion of reference is just reducible to a tautological truth.

Since Putnam's internal realism holds that "*we* cut the world up into objects" he claims that "it is trivial to say what any word refers to within the language the word belongs to, by using the word itself. What does 'rabbit' refer to? Why, to rabbits, of course!"[23] Putnam concludes: "For me, there is little to say about what reference is within a conceptual system other than these tautologies."[24] As I understand Putnam, his claim about reference is supposed to be the preferable alternative to traditional claims of reference that hold one needs to *explain* the nature of correspondence between words and things in order to explain reference. It seems, though, that the preferable alternative simply presupposes what reference is. Putnam has not supplied any independent argumentation to justify his claim to conceptual relativism; without that, why should we accept its supposition of reference?

4.13 Internalism and warranted acceptability

If we grant Putnam's claim to reference within conceptual schemes, is he saying that any sentence about the world is true as long as it has an internal coherence with the conceptual scheme? It might appear so, especially when we realize terms 'refer' to objects we carve out of the world through an internal 'correspondence'. As Putnam explains, "[s]ince the objects *and* the signs are alike *internal* to the scheme of description, it is possible to say what matches what."[25] If this was Putnam's only requirement, then it would certainly mean truth reduces to the individual's conception of the world. But internal 'reference' alone does not determine meaning on Putnam's account; this is Putnam's main claim.

Linguistic communities share a conceptual scheme on Putnam's account, with social use determining what a term ought to correspond to: "a sign that is actually employed in a particular way by a particular community of users can correspond to particular objects *within the conceptual schemes of those users*."[26] If those users did not happen to share a similar conceptual scheme, then they would not necessarily have the same internal 'correspondence' and so they would not necessarily internally 'refer' to the same objects -- even though they could successfully use the same terms. But why should they share the same conceptual scheme? Putnam certainly does not promote the Whorfian thesis that grammatical patterns influence speaker meanings. So how else could Putnam account for publicly available meanings?

Putnam's answer is that the truth of a sentence is characterized as right assertability, in that it is identified with "being verified to a sufficient degree to

warrant acceptance under sufficiently good epistemic conditions."[27] Putnam states that 'sufficiently good epistemic conditions' is a 'world-involving' notion, in that "the degree of confirmation speakers actually assign to a sentence may simply be a function of their sensory experiences...."[28]

If it were the case that I alone could consider epistemic conditions to be 'sufficiently good', then Putnam's truth conditions would not be any less subjective. So what Putnam needs is some reason why the other members of my linguistic community should agree with me that some set of conditions are sufficiently good basis for asserting the truth of my sentence. Putnam's explanation is that rationally acceptable accounts of good epistemic conditions arise not only through shared standards of rationality, but shared values. Putnam:

> The notion of truth itself depends for its content on our standards of rational acceptability, and these in turn rest on and presuppose our values. Put schematically and too briefly, I am saying that theory of truth presupposes theory of rationality which in turn presupposes our theory of the good.[29]

Even while admitting this is somewhat programmatic, he explains the assumption of rationality as one we have to make if we are to avoid subjectivism: "[t]he position of the solipsist is indeed the one we will land in if we try to stand outside the conceptual system to which the concept of rationality belongs and simultaneously pretend to offer a more 'rational' notion of rationality!"[30] But this says nothing about *why* his characterization of rationality is justified, which is just what we want to know if we want to know why his theory avoids subjectivism.

To sum up, sharing the same notion of rationality within the linguistic community is both a presumed and necessary feature of sharing justification

conditions for what sorts of assertions about the world can be considered true statements. As Putnam states, "[a] fact is something that it is rational to believe, or, more precisely, the notion of a fact (or a true statement) is an idealization of the notion of a statement that it is rational to believe."[31] Meaning is tied in with conceptual relativism the same way, as "a speaker's grasp of the meaning of a statement... [is identified with] the speaker's possession of abilities that would enable a sufficiently rational speaker to decide whether the statement is true in sufficiently good epistemic conditions."[32] The above account also means that the statement, "we share the same notion of rationality" is justified by an appeal to a shared notion of rationality in order to be true.[33]

Given the above, it is wholly unclear why Putnam should be justified in asserting that members of the same community consider the same sentences true. Without giving an explanation as to why standards of rationality must be shared among members of a linguistic community, and without an explanation of why members of the same linguistic community should share the same conceptual scheme, the only way Putnam's internalism avoids a subjective account of meaning is through the requirement that we have a certain causal interaction with the real world in order to determine reference. But we are given no explanation as to what this causal connection is.

Since experientialism aims to incorporate internal realism, it comes as no surprise that similar problems will surface in Lakoff's attempt to justify why experientialism "avoids subjectivism". This I will explain in the next chapter. What I

want to show now is that even claiming that experientialism is a form of internal realism encounters its own difficulties.

4.2 Lakoff's experientialism

Experientialism's main aim, like that of internal realism, is to argue against metaphysical realism, or what Lakoff calls 'objectivism'. Lakoff adopts Putnam's arguments against the correspondence theory of truth as the basis for his rejection of what he calls "objectivist semantics". We recall that Putnam's problem with reference alone as determining meaning is that it could absurdly allow speakers of Vat-English and Turing-conscious robots to utter true sentences about the world, even if it no longer existed. On Putnam's account, speakers must have a causal interaction with a real world to account for social use and warranted assertability. Lakoff rephrases Putnam's idea in a somewhat more general way: what is necessary for an account of meaning and truth is "real human experience". What I want to point out here is that incorporating Putnam's internal realism not only introduces a certain degree of tension into experientialism, it actually undercuts experientialism's main thesis.

4.21 Two main tensions

Firstly, Lakoff takes 'internal realism' to lend itself towards internal *worlds*. As we saw in 2.3, Lakoff's notion of 'internal' and 'external' reality sounds perilously close to offering a Goodmanite version of relativism. But unlike Goodman, Lakoff staunchly

maintains that there is *one* real world, with individual experiences of it creating many internal worlds. Take the example of Harry, who sees one light move across a screen when really, three lights simply flashed quickly in succession. Did Harry have an illusory perception? Not according to Lakoff. Lakoff's reasoning is "[t]he space that characterizes what Harry saw is distinct from the reality space."[34] In Harry's internal reality space, one light moved; in reality space, three lights flashed in succession.[35]

But Putnam did not suggest internal realism was merely another way of talking about 'internal reality'. Rather, the point behind Putnam's internal realism is that the real world can only be accounted for in relation to an internal description or scheme. This is not to advocate an 'internal reality' as contrasted with an 'external reality'. To do so is to buy further into the dichotomy between subject and object, between thinking about the world and the world in itself. For Putnam, it does not make sense to speak of the independent existence of objects (the three lights flashing) as if they were objects independent from Harry's description or scheme (the one light moving); this point lies at the very heart of Putnam's rejection of metaphysical realism. Yet this is just the claim Lakoff's notion of internal reality supports, even while it aims to incorporate Putnam's arguments against metaphysical realism.

Experientialism encounters a second tension in claiming to incorporate internal realism, in that it cannot integrate Putnam's rational constraints on warranted assertability that are supposed to limit subjectivism. Putnam holds that conceptual relativism is not an "anything goes" relativism, because of interrelated

rationality and pragmatic constraints. That is, Putnam asserts that not all conceptual systems have equally good ways of conceiving of the world because

> If anyone really believed that, and if they were foolish enough to pick a conceptual system that told them they could fly and to act upon it by jumping out of a window, they would, if they were lucky enough to survive, see the weakness of the latter view at once.[36]

Not any subjective notion of a conceptual scheme will do; rationality must function as a constraint. As we recall, Putnam's notion of rationality ties members of a linguistic community together such that their notion of what is a true belief depends on a generally acceptable notion of sufficiently good epistemic conditions. Verifying sufficiently good epistemic conditions must involve commonly shared descriptions of the world. Without this, and without a common use of terms used to describe the world, it would be impossible to discern what statements have warranted assertability and which do not. So a statement cannot be considered true or meaningful simply because of one's subjective description of the world. Conceptual schemes must be common to a linguistic community based on a shared notion of rationality, constrained by both social use and verification conditions.

Lakoff calls on a similar way of keeping his relativism apart from subjectivism, which he wishes to accomplish through his theory of experiences of the real world: "Since bodily experience is constant experience of the real world that mostly involves successful functioning, stringent real-world constraints are placed on conceptual structure. This avoids subjectivism."[37]

Although Lakoff considers 'real world constraints' to limit relativism, he does not adopt Putnam's warranted assertability thesis; Lakoff cannot incorporate the idea

of 'sufficiently good epistemic conditions'. That is, if Harry sees a man off in the distance when really it is a woman, Harry's assertion, "Here comes a man" would be explained on the Lakoffian account like this: in Harry's 'internal space' he saw a man; but in 'reality space' the figure was that of a woman. So Harry's assertion is true and meaningful as Harry understands it in Harry-space.[38] Such an account completely obviates the warranted assertability conditions Putnam's theory demands.

On Putnam's theory, we would expect Harry's assertion not to be considered a true statement by his fellow language users; they would agree Harry made the error because of conditions such as the distance and poor light involved. Importantly, this shows that Harry's community would not consider it rationally acceptable to describe the approaching person as a woman. But Lakoff cannot accept such a rational constraint, when what happens in Harry-space is true and meaningful for Harry. Thus even though Lakoff's aim is to incorporate and expand upon internal realism, he cannot incorporate Putnam's rationality constraints.

So, we have seen two different but related areas of tension in experientialism's claim to incorporate internal realism. First, Putnam does not suggest that "internal realism" suggests "internal realities" which stand apart from a Real World[39]; to do so goes against Putnam's rejection of metaphysical realism. Secondly, Putnam demands rationality constraints both on the differences between conceptual systems and on truth conditions. But Lakoff cannot incorporate these constraints into his theory. Both these claims of experientialism lie in tension with Lakoff's assertion that experientialism incorporates and expands upon internal

realism.

4.22 The fundamental problem

Closely related to Lakoff's notion of internal realities is his claim that individuals have internal "representations", which he prefers to call "cognitive models".[40] Following Putnam, Lakoff rejects the idea that mental representations "really represent" an objectively existent world: "For a collections [sic] of symbols to constitute a *representation* of something, there must, on the objectivist view, be a natural... link of the right sort between the symbols and what the symbols "represent"."[41] Now, Lakoff's internal realities are not "representations" in the objective sense, as he explains: "A mental space is... not the kind of thing that the real world, or some part of it, could be an instance of."[42]

But when Putnam rejects representations on the basis that they have no *intrinsic* connection to the real world, he is not rejecting the notion that *concepts* or *conceptual structures* fail as representations of the real world because they lack the right causal connections to the world. Rather, on Putnam's account, a 'representation' cannot be synonymous with a 'concept' or 'conceptual structure': "Concepts are not mental presentations that intrinsically refer to external objects for the very decisive reason that they are not mental presentations at all."[43] As a concept cannot be a mental presentation in the first place, it is impossible for it to be a mental *representation*.

Lakoff seems to have supposed he could save the notion of representation by

considering it synonymous with a conceptual model. As conceptual models, representations must account for a connection to the real world on Lakoff's view. It is a necessary feature of experientialism that one's concepts are based on experience; one's concepts must ultimately be based on one's bodily interaction with the world. This shows how Lakoff's "representations" *have* a necessary and inherent connection to the real world -- the very thesis we saw Putnam reject at the beginning of this chapter.

4.3 Concluding remarks

Lakoff's theory explains conceptual relativism based on the individual's experience, as Putnam's does, but it deviates from Putnam's internal realism in several key areas. Unlike Putnam, Lakoff does not account for shared notions of rationality or of warranted assertability conditions. Contrary to internal realism, Lakoff's notion of representations means that 'internal reality' can be true and meaningful in itself. So it is not only doubtful whether experientialism can really be a type of internal realism, but whether Lakoff can supply more than a subjective, internal account of meaning.

We also recall that Lakoff has rejected Whorf's 'transcendental rationality' as the supplier of shared metaphysical concepts that link conceptual schemes of a linguistic community together. The question this leaves us with, the one that is the focus of the following chapter, is this: can Lakoff's account of truth, or his theory of meaning - either linguistic or cognitive - work to reject one's subjective description of

the world as true and meaningful in itself?

NOTES:

1.But as Putnam explains, this was neither a new position nor one wholly representative of what he took 'internal realism' to be: "in "Realism and Reason" I used the term 'internal realism' as a name for the position I held in "the Meaning of Meaning" and in my "functionalist" writings.... Even though I had modified my position in certain ways between those two essays and Reason, Truth, and History, in that work I capitulated to the fashion of calling whatever Putnam's new position happened to be "internal realism."" Putnam "Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind: the Dewey Lectures [DL] (*The Journal of Philosophy* 91 (no.9, Sept. 1994; pp.445-417) p.461. Putnam directs us to Gary Ebb's essay "Realism and Rational Inquiry" in (*Philosophical Topics*, xx, 1 Spring 1992: 1-34) for a further discussion of his usage of "internal realism".

2.Lakoff WFD 261

3.Hilary Putnam, Reason, Truth and History [RTH](Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1981) p.49.

4.Putnam, The Many Faces Of Realism. [MFR](Illinois: Open court, 1987) pp.18-20. Putnam supplies the argument for why we cannot give any one point of view from which the question "how many objects exist?" makes sense. Take the example of a world described by Carnap as opposed to the one the Polish logician Lezniewski describes. In the world *a la* Carnap, we have three objects: x, y, and z. But in the world *a la* Lezniewski, seven objects exist, not three. That is because Lezniewski counts the mereological sum of x and y as one object, and also that of y and z, x and z, and x, y, and z. We cannot call Lezniewski's and Carnap's world- versions different ways of cutting the same dough, Putnam explains, as "this 'cookie cutter' analogy founders on the question, 'What are the parts of the dough?' If the answer is that... **x1**, **x2**, **x3**, **x1+x2**, **x1+x3**, **x2+x3**, **x1+x2+x3**, are all the different 'pieces', then we have not a *neutral* description, but rather a *partisan* description - just the description of the Warsaw logician!"(ibid).

5.Putnam MFR p.17

6.Lakoff WFD p.266

7.Lakoff WFD p.266. It may be correct that Putnam is more concerned with a metaphysical thesis than a semantic one; but it would be misleading to suggest that internal realism is not fundamentally concerned with linguistic meaning. This is because Putnam's rejection of metaphysical realism is crucially linked to his rejection of the correspondence theory of truth, which holds meaning as a function of truth.

8.Putnam RTH p.49

9.The accuracy of Putnam's account of 'metaphysical realism' has been criticized on many fronts, one of which claims that Putnam is really offering *three different metaphysical realisms* that hold the following separate claims: (1) there is a fixed totality of objects; (2) there is one true and complete description of "the way the world is"; (3) truth is some sort of correspondence relation between objects in the external world and word thoughts and signs. See Hartry Field, "Realism and Relativism", *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (no.10 Oct.1982, pp.553-567). Putnam responds to this charge in "Reply to Two Realists" *Journal of Philosophy* 79 (no.10 Oct.1982, pp.575-577).

10.Putnam DL p.466. I think Putnam's point is that metaphysical realists, as materialists, cannot introduce any new objects into the world; there may be uncountably many objects in the world, but whatever number is there is, it is fixed apart from either observation or theory.

11.Putnam "Why There Isn't a Ready-Made World" [RMW] in Realism and Reason (Cambridge: Cambridge U. Press, 1983) p.211.

12.Putnam RTH p.47

13.Putnam, "the Meaning of 'Meaning'" in Mind, Language, and Reality. Philosophical Papers, vol.2. (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1975).

14.Putnam RTH p.3

15.Putnam RTH p.9

16.Putnam RTH p.10. It is hard to believe, however, that a person and a machine could successfully discourse for too long without suspicion. Surely a person would detect a problem if she said, "Is it raining outside?" and the machine answered "No" even as she turned to look at trees dripping water and puddles forming on the ground. Wouldn't we have to be just as disengaged from the world as the other machine in order for us to continually pass the machine on the test?

17.The argument is said to fall prey to this problem: it "presupposes the internalist perspective, and even this is limited, in that it only works against the hypothesis that we are all brains in a vat" (James Stephens and Lilly-Marlene Russow, "Brains in a Vat and the Internalist Perspective" Australasian Journal of Philosophy 63, no.2, June 1985, pp. 205-212; p.211). Stephens and Russow's claim is that Putnam's Brain in a Vat argument aims at providing a defence against the skeptic's rejection of internalism. The skeptic claims internalism must be false, since it would allow us to all be brains in a vat with an internally coherent set of beliefs that would allow us to utter true sentences about the world -- except they wouldn't be about the world at all. Stephens and Russow point out that if *all of us* are brains in a vat (as Putnam's argument supposes) nothing we say in Vat-English would really refer to the world. Putnam needs to show that the English sentence "We are not all brains in a vat" is true, to assuage the skeptic. But if we are all brains in a vat, the best we can say is "WE ARE NOT ALL BRAINS IN A VAT" in Vat-English. And the Vat-English sentence says nothing about the truth or falsity of the English sentence. If Putnam does want to show that if we are brains in a vat we cannot utter true sentences (because we don't have a correct description of our world) he needs to suppose the internalist perspective, "which assures us that if there is no theory or description of a situation, that situation is not and cannot be real" -- but this begs the question, as Stephens and Russow point out (p.209). And if when we say "WE ARE BRAINS IN A VAT" we can't mean this sentence to refer to just the vat sense data, or neural stimulations, because we intend to be speaking about our theory or description of the Real World situation at hand (which is just a hoax), is it supposed to show that we cannot correctly refer? If so, then it goes against Putnam's main claim that "meanings ain't in the head".

18.Putnam RTH p.13

19.Putnam RTH pp.16-17

20.Putnam RTH p.33

21.Putnam RTH p.35

22.Putnam RTH p.48

23.Putnam RTH p.52

24. ibid.

25.ibid.

26.ibid.

27.ibid.

28.Putnam DL 462

29.Putnam RTH p.215

30.Putnam RTH p.216

31.Putnam RTH 201

32.Putnam DL p.462

33.This charge of question-begging has been alleged to apply to the main claim of internal realism, namely that "The concept of, and any claim about, how things are (conceiver-independently) is unintelligible, i.e., "makes no sense"." (Paul Moser, "A Dilemma for Internal Realism" Philosophical Studies 59, May 1990: 101-106; p.102).

34. Lakoff CS p.139. Lakoff explains: "A mental space is a medium for conceptualization and thought" (WFD 282). This notion of internal space is accredited to Gilles Faucconier's Mental Spaces (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1985).

35.Lakoff CS p.139

36.Putnam RTH p.54

37.Lakoff WFD p.268

38.Lakoff's reasoning for this claim is that experience is inherently meaningful, such that one's understanding of reality true if is internally coherent (that it fits with the one's other beliefs); this issue will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

39. Looking back on his theory of 'internal realism', Putnam notes he could have just as easily referred to it as 'pragmatic realism'. See "Sense, Nonsense, and the Senses: An Inquiry into the Powers of the Human Mind: the Dewey Lectures (*The Journal of Philosophy* 91, no.9, Sept. 1994); in this work he modifies his view and calls it 'natural realism'.

40.Lakoff WFD p.343

41.Lakoff WFD p.342

42.Lakoff WFD p.341

43.Putnam RTH p.18

CHAPTER 5. SEMANTIC RELATIVISM

'Meaning' does not apply just to language on the experientialist account. Rational cognitive processes can also be meaningful, both in themselves and prior to linguistic usage. For Lakoff, this account of cognitive meaning is the basis for linguistic meaning. Such an account, in Lakoff's opinion, is the only acceptable alternative to "objectivist semantics". As we saw in the last chapter, experientialism aims to incorporate Putnam's arguments against positing correspondence relations between terms in a language and either objects in the world or representations in the head. Importantly, Lakoff takes Putnam's arguments as aimed against *any* sort of correspondence relations, although as we saw in the last chapter, Putnam is in fact rejecting reference as an *intrinsic* correspondence that *determines meaning*.

Meaning on the experientialist account is characterized as follows. Through interacting with a social and physical environment, 'preconceptual structures' are produced and these are the basis of cognitive meaning.[1] Cognitive meaning arises through relations (which Lakoff does not define) either between concepts and preconceptual structures or between concepts and other concepts. Relations between concepts form conceptual structures, or schemas, which Lakoff refers to as Idealized Cognitive Models (ICMs). These ICMs can consist of both propositional and non-propositional thought, the first of which are most often metaphorical in nature. It is through having ICMs and forming relations between ICMs that we are said to respectively have understanding and reasoning; the understanding and reasoning we

have is constitutive of cognitive meaning.

For Lakoff, cognitive meaning is needed to explain linguistic meaning[2]as he holds the following:

> Linguistic expressions get their meanings via (a) being associated directly with ICMs and (b) having the elements of the ICMs either be directly understood in terms of preconceptual structures in experience, or indirectly understood in terms of directly understood concepts plus structural relations.[3]

Since experience is 'real and meaningful' on Lakoff's view, it seems his sort of internalism *prima facie* results in an internalism about meaning which would amount to 'conceptual subjectivism', not conceptual relativism. Any person's conceptual scheme could slice the world into objects according to her individual experiences, such that any statements she makes about the world are true if they somehow 'relate to' the meaningful internal reality of her conceptual scheme. But this is just what Lakoff argues against.

Lakoff's claim is "to make semantics humanly relevant, while... not giving in to total relativism."[4] His claim is that similar experiences of a social and physical environment ought to ensure conceptual relativism, in that a linguistic community shares the same sort of conceptual scheme. But how exactly is that? It is one thing to say or even cite evidence *that* we have similarities and another to explain *why* that is so. It is the explanation of why our conceptual systems are not radically different that we want, if we are concerned with a justified account of relativistic semantics.

If Lakoff cannot explain why our experiences in the world lead to similar cognitive structures, which I argue he does not, then he will need to account for some other limiting criteria. Because Lakoff leaves out any account of expression meaning

('literal meaning'), the best explanatory account that I can attribute to Lakoff is that a social convention of use results in common speaker and hearer meanings. I will argue that even this account cannot be coherently justified within Lakoff's system.

5.1 Categories and cognitive semantics

In chapter three I outlined Whorf's linguistic relativism: the metaphysical concepts underlying a language's grammar shapes cognitive content, such that members of a linguistic community share a similar conceptual scheme. Although he wishes to incorporate this view, Lakoff's main claim is the reverse: it is in virtue of being connected with conceptual schemes that language has meaning: As he states, "[l]anguage is made meaningful because it is directly tied to meaningful thought and depends upon the nature of thought."[5] For Lakoff, concepts, not language, are what fundamentally organise the world into categories. Our categorizations of the world are our ICMs, which is just to say that our categorization of the world *is* our understanding of the world.

Now, Lakoff claims meaningful thought is not psychologistic: our concepts are based on the "preconceptual" structures arising from *bodily* experience. Still, Lakoff must admit that meaning in his conceptual models is largely based on psychological features. A conceptual model for Lakoff intimately involves imagination in the form of metaphor, metonymy, and mental imagery; it involves "gestalt" concepts, concepts which encompass more than any atomistic description can explain; and it relies upon other meaningful concepts provided by memory and

learning.[6] It is upon the basis of this model of cognition that we understand our experience in the world in terms of categories, the bases of language. So categorization is essential to both thought and language.

Lakoff explicitly rejects classical categorization in which members are defined in relation to one another by properties that meet necessary and sufficient conditions. Classical categories divide up the world based on sets of individual members, with any member of the set a good example of it. For instance, 'Russian Blue' would be just as good as an example as 'Persian' under the heading 'Domestic felines'. Lakoff's categories, on the other hand, admit of members that are good and bad examples of the set. This is based on Wittgenstein's notion of family resemblance. A familiar Wittgenstein example is that all games are called games in virtue of certain similarities each sort of game has to another, not on the basis of shared properties common to every game. This means that the category 'games' can contain members which are not good examples of the category, like solitaire.

Following up on Wittgenstein's theory with Austin's 'primary nuclear sense'[7], Lakoff develops the idea of a 'central' or 'prototypical' sense upon which categories are formed.[8] Members of a set are linked to one another through resemblance relations, with one member central to the set. So members A, B, C, and D can be linked by resemblances between A and B, between B and C, and between C and D without transitivity rendering the same resemblance between A and D. With resemblance relations, there need not be any specific shared property between all members, just a primary sense to the category. Austin claims a sense of 'healthy' is

contained in part in 'healthy body', 'healthy complexion' and 'healthy exercise', and that does not mean that a sense of 'healthy' is the same in each case.[9]

The problem with a prototype theory of classification is this: if no specific properties are necessarily shared between members of the category, then what prevents an object from being a member of any category? Plenty of objects bear a resemblance relation to a multitude of other objects. I could consider oranges to share the same category as basketballs or pumpkins, if I so desired, just as easily as I could consider them to belong to the fruit class. So, how can one establish what objects belonged to what classes on this model? Furthermore, how could Lakoff even account for how categories are formed in the first place? Without an already existent category, there can be no 'best example' of it.

Even if Lakoff's notion of categorization is problematic in itself, it is not necessarily a problem for Lakoff's theory of language. Categorization is not a *necessary* feature of language for Lakoff, since he holds that thought can be meaningful apart from language. Given this, there must be some way of having these meaningful categories in our minds without having linguistic senses of the words to refer to. So according to Lakoff, "[a]t least some categories can be *embodied*.... Colour categories, for example, are determined jointly by the external physical world, human biology, the human mind, plus cultural considerations."[10] The problem is, Lakoff leaves out an explanatory account of how colour categories are formed.

Nevertheless, colour categories provide good examples of Lakoff's "basic categories", those which arise simply out of human perceptual awareness, imaginative

capacities, and motor capabilities.[11] The formation of such conceptual categories is not supposed to rely upon mirror representations of the world in order to have meaning. Instead, relational properties between members of the category work together to form a gestalt image, the understanding of which is rooted in a person's physical and social relations with the external world.[12]

Since cognitive content is meaningful prior to language, this satisfies Lakoff's claims that meaningful language must involve "meaningful parts" -- these last items are the meaningful concepts. This model is what allows experientialism to avoid the objectivist problem of correspondence. Lakoff's summary of the objectivist problem is that it (i) falls into a vicious regress when we attempt to explain how meaning arises in virtue of reference relations; and (ii) reduces meaning to a relation between meaningless parts, which absurdly allows the meaning of the parts of a sentence to be changed significantly while not changing the meaning of the whole.[13]

However, in circumventing the above objectivist problem, Lakoff falls prey to the second objectivist problem of a regress. Lakoff states that "[m]eaning is not a thing; it involves what is meaningful to us. Nothing is meaningful in itself. Meaningfulness derives from the experience of functioning as a being of a certain sort in an environment of a certain sort."[14] So in order for concepts and hence, language, to have meaning, some sort of relations are required.

Correspondingly, we see that language is meaningful through its relation to cognitive meaning, and cognition is meaningful through relations between either other ICMs or ICMs and bodily experience. Now, bodily experience is the basis of

one's whole conceptual schema and is supposed to be 'directly' understood. For example, "[t]he prime candidates for concepts that are understood directly are the simple spatial concepts, such as UP.... Our concept UP arises out of spatial experience. We have bodies and stand erect."[15] If these sorts of concepts are 'understood directly', they must somehow be meaningful.[16] In order for this to be right, experience itself must have meaning.[17] But nothing is ever meaningful in itself, so how does experience have meaning -- unless that is through something else, and so on. In order for Lakoff to ground his claim that experience has meaning, he needs to provide independent argumentation, which he fails to do. If he did, his theory would not only encompass linguistic and cognitive semantics, but *physiological semantics* as well. At any rate, given Lakoff's view of cognitive semantics, it looks like cognitive meanings could be vast and varied so far. Since cognitive meanings are the basis for linguistic meanings, what would prevent linguistic meanings from being just as vast and varied?

5.2 Shared conceptual systems

For Lakoff, if conceptual systems share similar meanings on the basis of experience, then linguistic meaning ought to be relative to the linguistic community. Lakoff's basis for this claim is that "[s]ince bodily experience is constant experience of the real world..., stringent real-world constraints are placed on conceptual structure. This avoids subjectivism."[18] It is not clear at first how Lakoff's internalist semantics should avoid subjectivism merely on the basis that an individual interacts with a real world.

We can interact with a real world and still have an internal account of meaning, as Russell held; that is, as a relation between images of the world and the beliefs one holds towards that image in the mind.[19]

Even though Lakoff holds that what matters for meaning is the relation between one's concepts in the mind and one's understandings of those concepts, he additionally holds that members of a social and physical community should have similar linguistic meanings in virtue of similar cognitive meanings. The example we have seen is that members of a society living in a hilly community will tend to have similarly categorizations of hills, which become part of their language through conventional use.[20] Setting aside the issue of conventional use for now, it is quite puzzling as to what exactly should constrain these individuals from having vastly different internal understandings, even though they may encounter similar sorts of experience in the world.

First of all, it appears that the existence of an ontologically objective external world is actually inconsequential to cognitive meanings.[21] Our subjectively true beliefs about the world need not be revised in the face of current or previous experience, since we do not have either veridical or non-veridical experience of the external world. As we recall, it makes no sense to say that "Harry saw one light move but actually, many single lights flashed successively." One's experience of what one is immediately aware of is 'in accord with' the situation at hand just in case it matches up with one's other internal understandings.[22]

This strongly suggests that we don't need to revise our belief set in accordance

with conditions of the external world, for whatever understandings we have of it are fine if they match up with our other internal understandings. If that is so, then one could consider any belief one has about the external world to be as good as any other; so, what would prevent one person from having radically different concepts from any other person, even if the concepts are based on shared experiences? And even if Lakoff is right to assert conceptual relativism, how do we get outside of our schemes to even know if we share concepts -- or experiences?

Since Lakoff's relativism is based on Whorfian relativism, we might think the grammatical patterns of the linguistic community could constrain differences between conceptual schemes on Lakoff's account. The problem is, simply belonging to a linguistic culture will not guarantee a range of similarity in conceptual meanings in the same way for Lakoff as it does for Whorf. This we saw in Chapter 3. And as we saw in 3.2, Lakoff's claim that we share similar conceptual schemes because of an innate conceptualization capacity can't work, either.[23]

In fact, it is entirely unclear how any new concept of agent A could be similar to any of B's, on the basis that A and B use the same word in the same linguistic community, when Lakoff leaves it open as to how one acquires new concepts. Consequently, even though it is possible that linguistic use constrains conceptual relativism, why or how that works is unclear from Lakoff's account. Indeed, even he admits that he has no positive theory to offer.[24]

Nevertheless, Lakoff considers the fact that we all belong to the same species a reason for having limited conceptual differences: "There are...many basic

experiences that one can pretty reasonably take as being universal." But this will not do for an *explanatory* account of why experientialism avoids total relativism.

Even if we grant that humans cognise more similarly to each another than to other species, that does not show why cognitive differences should be limited between ourselves. In fact, it appears that Lakoff's theory suffers an internal tension between the assumption that our cognitive systems must be fundamentally similar, on the one hand, and the advocation that conceptual systems are so vastly different as to be the major source of human conflict, on the other.[25]

As a final point, the claim that humans cognise similarly to one another assumes the classical category of 'human' to which we all belong. If Lakoff's theory of categorization rejects the need for shared necessary properties among members of a category, then there is no reason why say, chimpanzees (who share a 99% similar DNA structure to us) couldn't be considered part of the same category; we humans could just be the 'best examples'. Even if we humans did share similarities in our conceptual schemes, would Lakoff want to admit chimpanzees (even if they aren't a member of our linguistic community) could share a conceptual scheme like ours?

In short, Lakoff's assertion that we share similar conceptual schemes by virtue of the fact that we have similar human experiences clearly has no solid basis, not even as members of the same physical and social community. Thus why should we suppose shared cognitive meanings are the basis for shared linguistic meanings?

5.3 Social concepts

Even though Lakoff can't justifiably assert that in virtue of shared physical and social experiences we tacitly share cognitive semantics, it is possible that he can account for shared meanings through *social concepts*. Lakoff claims that social concepts are a part of a 'collective reality'. We must have social concepts, explains Lakoff, because some concepts, like 'Tuesday', are only meaningful "defined by reference to cultural schemas."[26] But because cultural schemas are comprised of cultural concepts, such a description begs the question. And any further description of 'cultural reality' remains unsaid.[27] In any event, why should a 'cultural reality' need to be posited as part of a theory of meaning?

Lakoff's explanation is that other objectivist semantic theories fail to account for concepts which are created by minds collectively. His answer is that we ought to introduce a cultural world in relation to which such concepts and attached terms can have meaning. Such 'cultural realities' are not external realities -- they reside in human minds.[28] If social reality ultimately resides in human minds, then Lakoff's semantic theory does not become any less internal.

And since one's knowledge of a situation is true just if it fits one's own internal understandings, an individual could not even be said to know that his internal understanding matched up with one collective reality rather than another.[29] Perhaps Lakoff would even reject the idea of needing to "match up" to (any) reality, as he rejects all correspondence relations. We could even disregard knowledge claims and still see a problem: one couldn't be sure if one was a member of such a collective

reality, if the fallibility of perception applied to social reality just as much as Lakoff claims it does to external reality.[30] Since social concepts won't suffice to explain how Lakoff can account for linguistic relativism and avoid a completely internal account of truth and meaning, how else can he justify that claim?

5.4 Social division of linguistic labour

Through an account of social conventions of use, it is possible for Lakoff to justify shared meanings among members of a linguistic community. And in fact, Lakoff provides an account of conventional use based on Putnam's theory of a social division of linguistic labour. For any term, a subset of experts can be in a better position to know the features of things in the world that match up to it; in effect, they are better at recognizing what the relevant features of the world are.[31]

"Though I personally have not had any first-hand experience with molybdenum," states Lakoff, "I assume that such experts have had such experience, and I am willing to take their word for it."[32] As Putnam explains, the experts' term can be used successfully by the rest of the community, even if they do not know the meaning of the term themselves as well or at all. So even if I cannot tell the difference between an elm and a beech tree, I can still meaningfully talk about elm trees; I do not have to make such a distinction for my use of 'elm' to have meaning amongst other members of my linguistic community. And if I understand that both types of trees are deciduous, I can utter the meaningful sentence, "Elm trees lose their leaves in fall." The important point is that not only might I have a vague idea of

an elm tree as some sort of deciduous tree, I might not have any idea at all what 'elm' means; however, I can still use the word meaningfully in a sentence.

Putnam's social division of linguistic labour is central to experientialist semantics, as Lakoff claims that "much of our knowledge and understanding is of this sort, where meaningfulness to us is very indirectly based on the experience of others."[33] But there are at least two main problems with Lakoff trying to incorporate Putnam's justification for this.

Firstly, Putnam's description of social use calls for a necessary relation between a term used and the world; the experts need to be able to tell what features of the world are relevant. These features are Putnam's "criteria"(necessary and sufficient conditions). Criteria determine the extension of a word like 'tiger' such that the extension of 'tiger' is the set of all tigers.[34] It is enough to have a collective social meaning of 'molybdenum' as long as some small subclass of experts actually do know what the relevant criteria are. The rest of the linguistic community can then use the term successfully by operating on stereotypes of what the term means.[35]

Experientialism, however, cannot tell us what the expert's relevant criteria are; neither can it account for successful use within the community. Lakoff's social experts cannot be concerned with satisfying 'criteria' in the world as they relate to terms in the language, for Lakoff holds that *any* external account of truth is irrelevant. Focussing on the truth conditions of sentences is undesirable, as "[i]t ignores what is *understood*, and it ignores how concepts are organized, both internally and relatively to one another."[36] The truth or falsity of any utterances of a language

are also irrelevant apart from speaker or hearer meaning: "We understand a statement as being *true* in a given situation," explains Lakoff, "if our understanding of the statement fits our understanding of the situation closely enough for our purposes."[37] So what matters is how well one's understanding of an utterance fits internal reality, not how it is used or relates to external reality. Consequently, not even the community's experts need to worry about relating their expressions to the objective world.

Even more problematically, Lakoff readily agrees with Putnam that "meanings ain't in the head"; what is important, Lakoff states, is the *embodiment* of concepts through both direct and indirect experience.[38] But even asserting a *bodily* basis for concepts does not exempt meaningful cognition from fixing linguistic meaning. Yet this is precisely what Putnam denies when he says "meanings ain't in the head": one's concepts do not fix meaning.[39] So unless Lakoff's social conventions can be justified in some other way, what can constrain his semantics from remaining widely relative to individual internal understandings?

5.5 Schiffer's conventional use

One way we could make sense of expression meaning on Lakoff's account would be to consider meaning as supervenient on use *a la* Schiffer[40]. First of all, Lakoff and Schiffer hold similar accounts of meaning as that which is dependent upon mental content and not states of affairs in the world, while also holding that meaning is essentially dependent upon internal concepts. Schiffer holds that an utterance has

meaning just in case internal meanings are shared among speakers of a community in virtue of their shared social practices. This means for Schiffer that expression meaning is, in effect, *reducible* to the psychological; it would be senseless to actually talk of "utterance meaning" as if it were somehow separate from speaker meaning.[41] Schiffer's account of social convention explains expression meaning in this way:

> a sentence *o* means *r* in a population *G* provided there prevail in *G* conventions pertaining to the constituents of *o* such that to utter *o* in conformity with those conventions is to mean *r* in uttering *o*.[42]

So it is through uttering *o* not only conforming to, but believed to be conforming to, certain conventions, that *o* can be said to have meaning. This means that Schiffer's internalism does not entail subjectivism, for socially shared beliefs are a requirement of socially shared conventions and hence, socially shared meanings.

As nicely as this might supply the justification Lakoff's social conventions need, Lakoff maintains that meaning *cannot* reduce to the psychological. But Lakoff holds that semantics necessarily encompasses both psychological and bodily bases of understanding; this is a defining feature of experientialism. Thus, Lakoff cannot successfully incorporate social conventions on the basis of Schiffer's theory. Perhaps some other theory could justify Lakoff's notion of linguistic convention, but none so far seem as apt as Schiffer's.

To summarize thus far, Lakoff has not given a clear explanation as to why semantics ought to be relative to a linguistic community. Similar conceptual structures should arise in virtue of shared experiences, but we saw it is entirely unclear how that should occur. Because meaning is fundamentally internal to the

individual, with cognitive semantics driving linguistic semantics, Lakoff needs to supply some sort of account as to how conceptual schemes are common to the linguistic community, or else account for some notion of expression meaning. We saw that socially shared concepts among members of a linguistic community ought to give rise to socially shared cognitive meanings, but this cannot be accounted for either by positing social facts or a social division of linguistic labour. Given this internalist picture, is there any way Lakoff can account for communication?

5.6 "Meaningful in the language"?

Lakoff's complaint with traditional semantic theories is that they have focussed primarily on expression meaning, with speaker and hearer meaning as deviants from literal meaning (as is the case with implicatures).[42] According to Lakoff, either of these approaches just explains meaning from the wrong end of the stick -- cognitive meaning is really what is of central importance. But this brings us back to Lakoff's problem, that he cannot adequately account for how we share cognitive meanings. The only recourse seems to be that we just need to trust that speaker S's meaning does not vary too greatly from the hearer's meaning.

We can consider this notion of trust as based on the convention to be truthful in Lewis' sense.[43] This notion of trust would mean that when S uses a linguistic expression *o*, it is actually meaningful in the language. But we don't know if there even is a "meaningful in the language" for Lakoff -- what counts as meaningful is relative to S's understanding in Lakoff's view. So maybe the trust one needs to have

instead is both that S_1 has a similar conceptual system to S_2 , and that S_1 has a similar sort of meaning attached to *o* that S_2 does.

This sort of trust, though, would preclude the consideration of whether or not S is deviating from ordinary usage when S uses a linguistic expression. If I were to try to understand what other meaning S could possibly be attaching to *o*, it would involve too fine a tuning of my supposition of similarity between our cognitive systems. So even if S does wish to deviate from commonly understood linguistic usage (or introduce any novel sentences), I can't suppose I can relate that to my hearer meaning of her expression (my S-understanding) unless I suppose I have some uncanny method for approximating my S-understanding to her understanding.[44]

Given Lakoff's account, it seems futile to want to affect a hearer in a certain way when the hearer will simply have her own meaningful and true understanding of the utterance. But wanting to communicate just seems to mean intending to affect the hearer in a certain way, as Searle has pointed out.[45] Yet in order to have this in Lakoff's theory, it requires some account of expression meaning. This is important not only to explaining communication, but to explain *metaphor* - which is central to Lakoff's theory -- as that which deviates from literal meaning.[46]

That is, of course, unless Lakoff would want to explain metaphorical use along the lines of someone like Harold Skulsky, who maintains that "the oddity of figurative meaning is not how it is attached to language, but how it attaches people to each other."[47] For Skulsky, non-literal meaning is expressed without necessitating an account of literal expression meaning. But Skulsky's reasoning means this: "What

is of fundamental interest here isn't cognition or semantics but a special kind of cooperative rapport."[48] But cognition and semantics are essential to Lakoff's theory. So not even this approach could work for Lakoff, and he is still left in need of some sort of account of communication.

We could think that Davidson's account of a 'passing theory' might explain communication for Lakoff. Davidson defines a passing theory as the theory upon which a hearer interprets an utterance, which is contrasted against a 'prior theory', how the hearer is prepared to understand the speaker's utterance. Whatever literal meanings there are in a language are due to the coinciding of the speaker and hearer meanings of the interlocutors involved (where coinciding means S_1 intends S_2 to use passing theory T to interpret *o* and T is what S_2 does in fact use to interpret *o*).[49] Any proficiency at developing good passing theories just relies upon "wit, luck, and wisdom", and cannot be helped by rules or conventions.

Similar passing theories might serve as the best explanation for successful communication within Lakoff's theory, but only if Davidson's following claim can be disproved. Davidson holds that his account of passing theories in language means "[w]e must give up the idea of a clearly defined shared structure which language-users acquire and then apply to cases."[50] And as Davidson points out, that means we must give up the idea of a conceptual scheme -- but this is central to Lakoff's theory.

5.7 Conclusion

Lakoff has supposed that rational cognitive processes give rise to internal cognitive

meaning as the basis for linguistic meaning, with internal conditions as the only relevant criteria determining the truth or falsity of sentences. His account of bodily experience in a social and physical world is supposed to account for similarity in conceptual structure and hence obviate complete relativism in meaning, but if I am right, it has not succeeded in doing so.

The best explanation that Lakoff's theory can offer is that a linguistic community has socially shared meanings based on conventional use. However, Lakoff accounts for conventional use through Putnam's social division of linguistic labour, which cannot consistently be maintained within Lakoff's own theory. Thus it is entirely unclear as to how Lakoff avoids a completely internal theory of meaning and truth. So we have no reason to believe that his internalism does not result in subjectivism. Consequently, we are left wondering just how Lakoff's theory can account for communication.

NOTES:

1.This is a term which Lakoff really provides no exact definition of, although he supplies two sorts of examples of them. See, for example, Lakoff, Women, Fire, and Dangerous Things [WFD] (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987) p.267.

2.Lakoff also believes that conceptual structure not only explains but is found *in* language itself; the 'basic level' structure that we most often cognise in terms of (for example, 'chair' as opposed to either 'furniture' or 'beanbag') can be represented linguistically, as others have suggested to be the case with the German language definite article. This is a very limited basis upon which Lakoff rests his claim. See WFD p.200-201

3.Lakoff WFD p.291 Lakoff does not specify just what these associations between ICMs and linguistic expressions are in the case of (a), and neither does he explicate how the understanding of linguistic expressions actually occurs in (b).

4.Lakoff WFD p.247

5.Lakoff WFD p.291

6.Lakoff WFD pp. xiv-xv.

7.J.L. Austin, Philosophical Papers (Oxford: Oxford U Press, 1961), esp. pp.71-73.

8.'Prototypical sense' is the terminology of Eleanor Rosch, whose empirical studies Lakoff also incorporates into his theory.

9.This example is given by Austin. Interestingly enough, Lakoff endorses Austin's theory while arguing against classical categorization "[f]rom the time of Aristotle to the later work of Wittgenstein...." (Lakoff WFD p.6) -- but Austin's example is an Aristotelian one!

10.Lakoff WFD p.56

11.ibid.

12.These relational schemes are outlined in Lakoff's citations of anthropological and psychological studies; see Lakoff WFD pp.22-55.

13.Lakoff "Cognitive Semantics" [CS] Meaning and Mental Representation (U. Eco, M. Santambrogio, P. Violi, eds. Indianapolis: Indiana U Press, 1988), pp.127-129. Whether or not Lakoff's summary of Putnam's arguments against correspondence theories of truth is correct is a different matter. Barbara Abbott ("Models, Truth and Semantics" Linguistics and Philosophy 20: 117-138, 1997) has forcefully argued that Lakoff has offered semantic claims which are both "independent of the issues of realism and truth conditional model-theoretic semantics..." (136). As she states, "Putnam's point was the more interesting (and less obviously false) one that the meanings of words are not even determinable from the truth conditions of a very large set of sentences" (126).

14.Lakoff WFD p.293

15.Lakoff "Conceptual Metaphor in Everyday Language" [CM] *(Journal of Philosophy* vol.77 no.8 Aug.1980) p.476

16.Lakoff states that some ICMs can be *inherently meaningful;* for example, "the CONTAINER schema is inherently meaningful to people by virtue of their bodily experience." (Lakoff, CS p.141) But since this requires some relation between experience and the cognitive model, it is rather unclear as to why Lakoff should declare it an 'inherent' feature of the ICM -- unless he is aiming to suggest that just because we have a concept that has arisen from experience it is meaningful, which as it stands is a blatant supposition about meaning rather than an explanation.

17.Our understanding (and hence, the meaning) of some ICMs can also be "grounded by virtue of *systematic correlates within our experience,*" states Lakoff, CM p.477). Now, experience can be understood in terms of "preconceptual structures", but even if experience is characterized in such a way it does not avoid the problem because these preconceptual structures must exist and be understood before conceptual structures can be understood (even if it is somehow possible to be aware of a preconceptual structure before we have a concept of it).

18.Lakoff WFD 267

19.Richard Gale, "Propositions, Judgements, Sentences, and Statements"(Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol.6, 1989) p.498

20.Lakoff WFD p.310. This is not to say that experience *determines* conceptual systems, Lakoff points out; it only *motivates* them, for having similar experiences could result in different concepts (ibid.). If that is so, it severely weakens his argument that similar experiences should result in relatively similar conceptual systems. We could always have a concept anywhere in $\{C_1....C_n\}$ motivated by the same experience as someone else who in turn could have her own concept anywhere within $\{C_1....C_n\}$.

21.Lakoff's relativism clearly differs from earlier relativists such as Whorf or Joseph Church, who maintained that a concrete world of objects is needed for members of a linguistic culture to have good correspondence relations to, even if truth in the language is also assigned on the basis of that culture's linguistic conventions. (Although Church also thought language had its own reality [see Language and the Discovery of Reality (New York: Random House, 1961) esp. ch.5). Whorf's notion of transcendental reason invoked several "cosmic planes" in the noumenal world to which our concepts correspond. (See his "Language, Mind and Reality", Whorf pp.)

22.Lakoff WFD p.293. *Some* sort of account of "in accord with" is needed, as Lakoff admits; he just does not supply it.

23.Lakoff rejects Fodor's view that one has *concepts* innately present, such that when one thinks one is learning a new concept one is just 'reactivating' the already present concept (Lakoff WFD p.335).

24.In Lakoff and Kovecses (p.220) the authors state: "the study of language as a whole gives us no guide to individual variation [in conceptual systems]. We have no idea how close any individual comes to the model we have uncovered [conceptual model of anger], and we have no idea how people differ from one another [conceptually]."

25.Lakoff WFD p.336

26.Lakoff CS p.135

27.Perhaps Lakoff means this: just like mental reality exists relatively to our own perceptions and understandings, social reality exists relatively to social understandings. But without an account of what social reality could possibly be, we can't see how social understandings can occur; in a charitable vein, we could interpret Lakoff as speaking, as Church would put it, in a type of verbal shorthand to refer to

culturally defined reality gained in virtue of culturally shared perspectives (emphasis added, J. Church, p.138). Not only is it questionable that a culture could even *have* a shared consensus of reality, but such an account would require further justification to be convincing.

28.Lakoff CS p.135. If cultural reality is shared among human minds, we want to know if this is in virtue of cognition, language, or both; we also want to know how such a reality should be more precisely defined. Yet I fail to find such explications in WFD.

29.Maybe Lakoff has in mind a vision of an idealized collective reality which is akin to Kant's *noumenal world*, in which all beings are members of this world simply in virtue of their rationality. Likewise, Lakoff's individual could be a member of a collective reality simply in virtue of having shared ICMs with other members of a community. But to know if there was a collective reality under Lakoff's experiential setup, an objective observer is required. For one could never really be sure one was a member of a collective reality (or even if one existed) just from individual experience, and one could not seriously be posited solely on the basis of that experience, either. Moreover, if Lakoff really has a Kantian noumenal world in mind, it would contradict his claim that reason is not transcendental (pointed out in 3.4).

30.According to Lakoff, ICMs are "idealizations and abstractions that may not correspond to external reality well or at all." Lakoff CS p.136.

31.Hilary Putnam, "The Meaning of `Meaning'" Mind, Language and Reality v.2 (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1975). As well, for every term, there must be someone who is adept at this recognition: "We could hardly use such words as 'elm' and 'aluminum' if no one possessed a way of recognizing elm trees and aluminum metal...." says Putnam (p.227).

32.Lakoff WFD p.207

33.ibid.

34.Putnam is not completely satisfied with the extension of *x* defined simply as the set things of which *x* is true, as he states in the beginning of "the Meaning of Meaning"; but he continues to use this definition of 'extension' for his argumentation (ie. p.236), later qualifying it to also be determined in part indexically and socially -- so extension becomes 'the set of things *x* is true of in *this* place for this linguistic community.' This theory is certainly differs from Putnam's later internal realism of 1981 in which Putnam shifts his focus away from external correspondence relations, as we saw in Chapter 4.

35.Putnam pp.245-257.

36.Lakoff WFD.316. Lakoff also supports a "conception of truth that is not based on merely internal coherence." (CS p.123) This receives no further explanation; frankly, I do not see how that coheres with the overall theory, when combined with his assertions in WFD and in CS that ICMs are meaningful in virtue of bodily experience (p.141), and that "[m]eaning is based on the understanding of experience. Truth is based on understanding and meaning." (p.150) Not even social meaning is a way out, for collective reality is not external to human minds (p.135).

37.Lakoff WFD p.294

38.Lakoff WFD p.206

39.Putnam's assertion also works across possible worlds, as we know from his Twin Earth example. I can equate a concept I have with `water' here on Earth while my double on Twin Earth has the exact same concept she equates with `water'; but what `water' refers to on Earth is really 'H_2O' (the actual liquid

comprised of H_20 molecules) while what 'water' refers to on Twin Earth is 'XYZ' (the actual liquid comprised of XYZ molecules). What matters is the extension of the term as the actual substance in *this* world, and not "meanings in the head." What Putnam does *not* want to entertain is that if 'water' has different meanings for my Earth and Twin Earth selves, it is because those selves have different 'narrow' psychological states.

40.Stephen Schiffer, Meaning (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1988) 2nd ed.

41.Schiffer, Introduction, xix

42.Schiffer Introduction xxvi

43Lakoff WFD p.171. Lakoff disagrees with the distinction between sentence meaning and speaker/hearer meaning, as it segregates pragmatics off into a separate study apart from traditional semantics -- with semantics receiving higher priority.

44.David Lewis, "Languages and Language" The Philosophy of Language (A.P. Martinich, ed. Oxford: Oxford U press, 1990 2nd ed.) p.493.

45.Now, if S is an expert in my linguistic community, I ought to not even suppose the understanding I have of the word can anywhere near approximate S's understanding; I might just know that molybdenum is a metal but should I then assume that S's meaning is anything like my inexpert account if S is a metallurgist? If I don't think that, then in these sorts of cases how can I even remotely hope to get something similar to S's understanding with my S-understanding?

46.John Searle, Intentionality. (Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1983) p.165.

47.And Lakoff does assume literal meaning. For example, he states that "Harry is in the kitchen" is a non-metaphorical, literal sentence (CM pp. 477-8). So it appears that Lakoff adopts the conventional understanding of metaphorical meaning as that which deviates from literal meaning -- but this will make no sense unless he can account for what literal meaning is.

48.Harold Skulsky, "Metaphorese" in Meaning and Truth: essential readings in modern semantics (New York: Paragon House, 1991) p.582. Skulsky also refers us here to Aristotle's claim that the figurative meaning of a metaphorical term is not implied by any literal meaning (Poetics 1457a11-18).

49.ibid.

50.Donald Davidson, "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" in Linguistic Behaviour (J. Bennett, ed. Cambridge: Cambridge U Press, 1976) p.442.

51.Davidson "A Nice Derangement of Epitaphs" p.446

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSION

Lakoff has offered an internalist account of meaning and truth: what is real and meaningful for Harry is what matches up with Harry's internal world. Although his notion of internal realities entails this conclusion, Lakoff's aim has been to avoid subjectivism.

Lakoff claims that members of a linguistic community will share cognitive meanings in two ways: (i) language shapes the concepts one has in a Whorfian way; and (ii) physical and social experiences shape the cognitive meanings of members of a linguistic community, allowing them to tacitly share speaker meanings. Secondly, Lakoff claims that a social convention of use accounts for expression meaning *a la* Putnam's social division of linguistic labour. I will summarize in turn the fatal problems each of the above claims encounter.

The problem with Lakoff adopting Whorfian relativism is that (i) Whorf promotes conceptual relativism part and parcel with metaphysical *relativism* whereas Lakoff's claim is to metaphysical realism; (ii) Whorf's theory does not support Lakoff's own claims of universal cognitive and semantic similarities, for Whorf claims incommensurability between conceptual schemes; and (iii) Whorf draws in relativism through a holistic account of meaning based on *a priori* metaphysical concepts, which Lakoff cannot for -- Lakoff needs to additionally show how concepts based on the particulars of experience are shared among members of the linguistic community.

Lakoff asserts that cognitive meanings are shared among members of the

linguistic community through conceptual models ("representations") that are inherently meaningful because of shared physical and social experiences. For this, Lakoff draws heavily on Putnam's internal realism, which Lakoff takes to support internal *realities*. But Putnam's theory cannot support Lakoff's notion of meaningful internal realities.

Firstly, if "one light is moving" is meaningful in Harry's mental space, while "three lights are flashing" is true in reality-space, then this supports the dichotomy between subject and object -- which is just what Putnam's rejection of metaphysical realism is directed against.

Secondly, Lakoff's internal realities allow Harry to have warranted assertability in issuing forth the claim "one light is moving" if Harry considers himself to be experiencing sufficiently good epistemic conditions. It does not matter if the rest of Harry's linguistic community have different perceptual experiences in order for Harry's statement to be true and meaningful. But Putnam holds as a necessary condition of warranted assertability that members of the linguistic community agree on what good epistemic conditions are.

Thirdly, the basis for Lakoff's claim to shared cognitive meanings is that conceptual models, or "representations" are meaningful through a connection to the real world, but this contradicts Putnam's theory. Putnam holds representations can't even *be* concepts while neither concepts *nor* representations can have an inherent connection to the world so as to determine the meaning of the associated utterance. Consequently, Putnam's internal realism cannot be taken to support

experientialism's claim to shared conceptual models because of interaction with a real world.

Lakoff's alternative is to provide independent argumentation for why cognitive meanings are tacitly shared among members of the linguistic community, but he fails to do so. If the claim that conceptual structures share similarities through similar experiences could be adequately explained, Lakoff's theory would achieve the grounding it needs to offer a justified account of universal concepts. We recall that this account is based on the idea that similar preconceptual structures give rise to similar cognitive structures. But an explanatory account of how this works is left out. I would like to point towards this as an area worthy of further explication. With further modifications that explain this causal process, Lakoff's theory could provide a new empirical alternative to the view that similarities between conceptual systems need to be explained by common *a priori* concepts.

Still, Lakoff's theory would need to offer alternative reasoning to support the claim that public meanings of utterances (which I have called "expression meaning") are based on shared cognitive meaning, as the account of cognitive meaning supplied is infinitely regressive. Lakoff has offered an additional explanation as to how meaning is public, through a theory of social convention; but this too requires independent argumentation. That is because Lakoff's theory of social convention relies on Putnam's division of linguistic labour, which cannot feature as a part of experientialism. Unlike Putnam, Lakoff cannot say what the expert's relevant criteria are, because on Lakoff's account, none of the expert's terms used in the community

need to match up with anything in the world in order to be used successfully. But this is contrary to Putnam's account of social convention. Just what other explanation Lakoff has for a theory based on convention of use is left out; certainly, Schiffer's theory would be compatible, were it not for Lakoff's claim that meaning must be *embodied*.

Given the above, my conclusion is that Lakoff's experientialism fails to justify its claim that it avoids subjectivism. Meaning and truth remain a matter of internal coherence, while the claim that conceptual schemes are shared in relation to a linguistic community is unjustified. The conceptual scheme that decides what objects to slice the world into decides what sentences are true and meaningful. Positing a Real World cannot help this theory, as Lakoff rejects correspondence relations *tout court*.

The above conclusion should not be understood as an outright rejection of Lakoff's experientialism. I have aimed to offer an elucidative account of relativism so as to understand the basic issues and aims of this infrequently addressed area of philosophy. Even though Lakoff's claim to relativism fails, this is not to suggest that the project is not a worthy one.

Finally, I have focused my arguments against the philosophical justification for Lakoff's central claims of relativism. Lakoff's theory has impressively drawn on much research in the fields of psychology, anthropology, linguistics, and cognitive science. This research is essential to Lakoff's claim that how we reason (categorization is the primary example) is central to our understanding of the world

and language. I would like to point towards Lakoff's view of reason as that which is worthy of further examination, particularly as it incorporates imagination, metaphor, and emotion.

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