

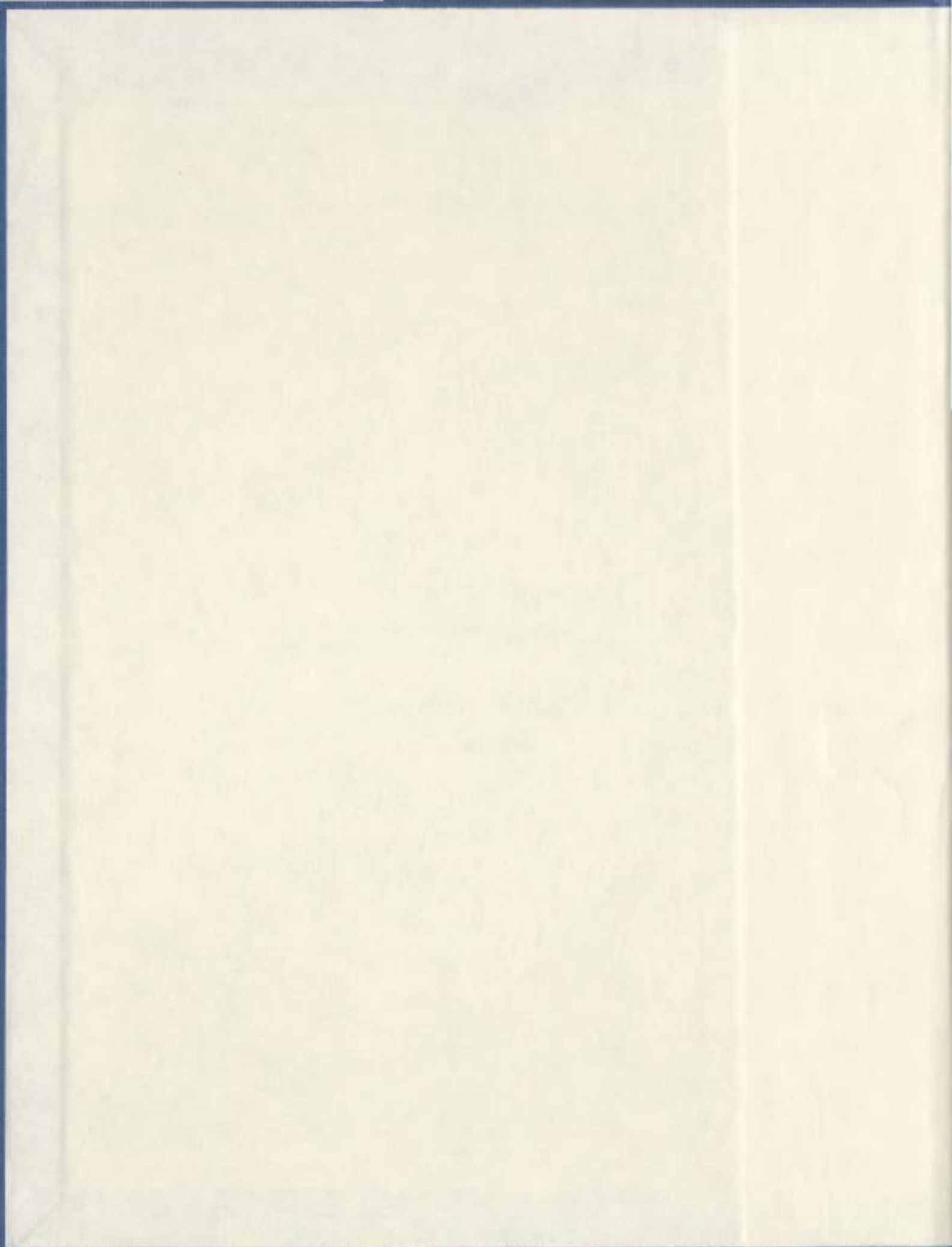
CONCEPT FORMATION

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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Concept Formation

By

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Abstract

In chapter one I present Heinrich Rickert's theory of concept formation. Influenced by Kant, Rickert develops a transcendental account of meaning and argues that while we can demarcate between various methods for forming valid concepts, all of these are scientific.

In chapter two I present W.B. Gallie's theory of essentially contested concepts. Gallie argues that meaning develops historically, or contingently, in relation to the diverse ends that structure human action. He nevertheless maintains that concepts can be theoretically justified as valid.

In chapter three I argue that Gallie's philosophy is preferable to Rickert's. First, I criticize Rickert for denying social history. Second, I praise Gallie for arguing that imagination plays an essential role in the development of valid concepts. I go on to make the original suggestion that Gallie's epistemology is based on an interpretation of Peirce's pragmatism.

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Introduction

The present writing is an attempt on the part of the author to understand the differences and similarities between scientific and historical study. Is there an essential difference in the epistemological methods used by the scientist and the historian? How is the knowledge developed in each field to be justified? Can either field grant access to the truth? These questions will here be considered by analyzing the philosophies of Heinrich Rickert and W.B. Gallie.

Heinrich Rickert crafts his epistemology from the observation that natural scientists and historians have different interests in reality. Typically, the former are interested in generating concepts that hold for a collection of particulars, while the latter are interested in conceptualizing a unique event or individual. Rickert identifies research as belonging to either field on the basis of the goal that directs the activity. He shows how these opposing goals are independently valid values that justify the research undertaken in their name. For Rickert, the idea that research lets us directly encounter reality is an illusion. Valid research conceptualizes reality relative to valid goals, (i.e. a general knowledge or knowledge of individuals), which form the proper ends of research. In this way, Rickert holds that historical study, which aims at explaining a unique, non-repeatable process, is nevertheless scientific, for it, like natural science, is ultimately directed toward knowledge of an objective value.

Because he holds that historical knowledge is ultimately directed toward knowledge of an objective entity, Rickert does not offend the traditional practice, common among philosophers, of letting one's epistemology be influenced by the assumptions of science. That there are other rational ways of studying reality without relying on notions of objectivity is an argument made by W.B. Gallie.

Gallie argues that historical explanations can be differentiated from those commonly found in science, or what he calls predictive explanations. History is concerned with the study of human action, which is, in principle, unpredictable. The agency responsible for the relations that shape historical development is not universal law but human decision. According to Gallie, historical processes are characterized by a special kind of causal relation where continuity is achieved through human agency. In a predictive explanation, the conjunction of an initial condition (the cause) and certain universal laws predictably yields a given effect. This relation constitutes an objective fact. In history, on the other hand, “the prior event is not taken in conjunction with certain universal laws, to constitute a sufficient and necessary condition of the occurrence of the subsequent event”.¹ The radical factor intervening between prior and subsequent events in the historical relation is the human actor, who is capable of directing the activity, making the resolution of a given process unpredictable and unique.

I offer Gallie’s writing as an alternative to Rickert’s view, that historical development is to be understood as a process directed by an external telos. Gallie holds that historical development is directed from within on the basis of individual actions and decisions that do not have an objective basis in independently existing values. Historical development is therefore, for Gallie, a contingent process and is, in this way, different from the processes studied in natural science.

Gallie is faced with the question of how to justify knowledge of historical events. Without an objective basis how can the unique event or entity be validly conceptualized? Historical concepts are what Gallie calls ‘essentially contested’. For Gallie, the historical event or individual to be studied is not an objective entity with a fixed identity that can be summarized in a definition. Rather it is an entity that is essentially open to multiple

¹ Gallie, “Explanations in History and the Genetic Sciences”, 167.

interpretations. It is to be expected that at any given time there will be disagreement among interpretations of an historical event or individual, depending on how one aspect is emphasized, another neglected. Of course, not just any interpretation is acceptable. To discern which interpretations are rationally valid Gallie suggests we participate in debate. This debate will limit interpretations to those that are logically valid, but will not produce an agreed upon interpretation that can be singled out as the best. The essential contestedness of a concept will remain but debate will test interpretations for their rationality. I will explain how the criteria of coherence and comprehensiveness are used to assess the validity of an interpretation.

For Gallie, historical development is a social phenomenon. This complements the generally accepted view that man is a social creature, that he is constituted in his relations with others. Here, man is understood as a subject that affects, and is affected by, his environment. Historical study follows these connections between events and individuals. Historians try to make sense out of what occurred – after the fact; they trace a path and tell a story.

I will criticize Rickert for denying this aspect of social history. Rickert focuses on the importance of the individual at the expense of understanding how his community constitutes this individual. Rickert identifies historical development with the actions of a small group of people. He does not realize that these actions would not happen in isolation but are made possible within a larger context of actors.

I will develop Gallie's philosophy to show that his theory of concept formation implies an account of human experience in general. My interpretation of Gallie's writing comes from a consideration of key terms in his philosophy, i.e. 'feeling', 'logical force' and 'contingency', that are not well defined but integral to an understanding of his intentions. Once the meaning and function of these terms is clear it becomes possible to

see in Gallie's writing an argument that our experience of reality has an essentially triadic structure. Human experience is essentially internally directed, essentially social and essentially historical. These three factors play off each other to give concepts their form. The dynamics of this relation will be explored in the last section of this paper.

Chapter 1

Introduction

Heinrich Rickert was part of the Southwest German or “Baden” school of philosophers who dedicated themselves to developing the philosophy of Immanuel Kant by taking it beyond what they saw as its inherent limitations. To quote Wilhelm Windleband, Rickert’s teacher: “The best way to understand Kant is to go beyond him”.² In Kant’s philosophy, nature is understood as reality “as far as it is determined according to universal laws”.³ Kant identifies nature on the basis of its intelligibility, that is, the fact that it operates according to law. Windleband follows Kant in searching for the conditions that make knowledge possible.

Windleband disagrees with Kant’s contention that historical knowledge, which concerns the unique and individuals elements of reality, holds only a secondary level of authenticity compared to scientific knowledge. Kant’s thought is here influenced by that of his contemporary, Isaac Newton, who argued that universal laws could be discovered to account for the action of all natural phenomena. Historical action, on the other hand, concerns the unique entity or event and cannot be assimilated to any universal law. Windleband argues that historical actions are just as real as natural processes and attempts to give historical knowledge a scientific ground. He argues that epistemology must inquire into the conditions that make historical knowledge possible if it is to be complete.

For Kant, Windleband and Rickert, the unity, or connections, between conditions of knowledge become the object of knowledge for the epistemologist rather than reality

² Rickert, The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science, ix.

³ Rickert, Science and History, 15.

as it appears in perception. For Windleband and Rickert, this includes the conditions that make historical knowledge possible. These conditions appear as laws of thought that must be upheld, if we are to form a rational understanding of reality. The free movement of the subject should be subordinated to these laws so that an understanding of reality can emerge. The question of how to justify the validity of specific norms so that we know which to subordinate our individuality to becomes the central question of knowledge theory. We must, in other words, decide which norms to value and accept. Rickert believes it is a mistake to think that a scientist can achieve knowledge through a pure observation of nature at work. It turns out that at the heart of epistemology is a question of value. Rickert wants to determine which values scientists accept so that they are able, by means of this judgment, to form valid concepts, either of general or particular phenomena.

Rickert recognizes that a judgment is made at the beginning of the activity of concept formation. If this judgment is valid then the concept formed in relation to it is also valid. Feeling allows us to recognize with certainty which values are valid. The 'feeling' that Rickert refers to has the character "of evidence, a power announces itself in this, a power to which I am bound".⁴ Because we operate in a world heavily influenced by the Humeian account of reasoning⁵, it is common to oppose feeling to reason. Feeling is often regarded as the non-cognitive element of mind. On this view, feeling is not essential for a scientific or logical understanding of reality but functions merely to affirm beliefs, which are not universally applicable like knowledge claims.

Contrary to this assumption, in Rickert's epistemology knowledge occurs on the basis of a judgment that recognizes or rejects values according to the degree of validity

⁴ Heidegger, *Towards the Definition of Philosophy*, 154

⁵ In "Belief, Reasoning and Interpretation" (unpublished), James Bradley presents and defends the thesis "that we are all Humeian beings" and demonstrates how this view shapes perspectives on reality.

they are 'felt' to have. Rickert argues that certain values have the ontological status of valid entities. Because of their inherent validity they have the power to arouse in each rational thinker an undeniable feeling, or positive valuation that justifies their submission to these values. The scientist can be differentiated from others because he has encountered one of these values and now acts in its image. He lets it color his perspective on reality and guide his investigations. Concepts formed in light of these values are rationally justified. A complete set of these valid values becomes the ultimate object of knowledge for the epistemologist. To understand reality in relation to these values is to perform the activity of concept formation. Feeling and reason are complementary in the act of concept formation described by Rickert.

The values that Rickert identifies as conditions of concept formation agree with the definition of axiological values identified by J.A. Findlay. They are "ultimately worthwhile things".⁶ Findlay goes on to make a connection between Kantianism, which Rickert closely follows, and axiology, noting that "there are many infusions of the axiological into Kantian imperativism".⁷ Though Kant argues that values are based in the rational will, he also argues that human beings exist as ultimate ends, a status that is independent of the rational will of any particular human. Later uses of the term axiological disagree with Rickert's use. Axiologists can be found "adopting different forms of realism about values".⁸ It is true that Rickert differentiates between reality and valid values, claiming that the latter are more like ideal entities. Rickert argues that unlike values that condition scientific concept formation, and possess validity independent of a particular mental act, reality immediately perceived is meaningless and only acquires meaning once it is encountered in an act of concept formation. A close inspection of

⁶ Findlay, *Axiological Values*, 1.

⁷ Findlay, *Axiological Values*, 6.

⁸ Smith and Thomas, "Axiology", 608.

Rickert's philosophy however will show the reader that the two elements, reality and valid value, are ultimately united. Rickert develops a method whereby the real and the ideal may be theoretically synthesized". With this method he gives "an axiological grounding to the results of empirical research".⁹ I will use the term axiological throughout this paper to refer to the valid values that Rickert argues condition the act of concept formation.

Forms of Scientific Research

Rickert's writing contains an investigation into the essential elements involved in concept formation. Rickert describes concept formation in its most general form, as a teleological process that is directed toward the goal of understanding reality. Concept formation is a purposive activity born out of a cognitive need to generate valid concepts to represent reality. Experience teaches that valid concepts develop most successfully in the sciences. The methodology involved in scientific research becomes the object of Rickert's study.

Rickert wants to provide a criterion for differentiating between forms of scientific research. He is not satisfied with the alternatives presented in literature on the subject. "It is still almost universally the custom in philosophy to base this difference on the material distinction between nature and spirit."¹⁰ On this view, natural science would study nature or physical reality while psychology would use a method modeled on that appropriate to natural science for studying mental or psychical reality. Rickert argues against using a material criterion for differentiating between fields of scientific research and against a dualism of mind and matter or spirit and nature. "Reality as a whole, i.e. as the sum total

⁹ Anchor, "Rickert, Heinrich", 193.

¹⁰ Rickert, Science and History, 10.

of all corporeal and psychical existence, can and in fact must be viewed as entirely uniform.”¹¹ Reality is presented in experience ‘monistically’, as a single phenomenon, which all legitimate research pursues though from differing perspectives. If a method of research succeeds in forming a concept that holds validly for experienced phenomena, then it is a rational method and the generated concept is scientific.

Rickert argues that any entity or event could be made unintelligible through use of the methods employed in scientific research. Philosophical attempts to understand science as an activity pursued because it allows for prediction and control of nature are therefore contradicted in Rickert’s writing. Scientific research is primarily directed toward the goal of generating concepts that hold validly for experienced reality, not concepts that will allow us to predict the future. This is an important point for Rickert, as it allows him to claim that historical research, traditionally conceived as the study of an individual and non-repeatable event or entity, can be described as scientific. Once we are free from the common assumption that scientists can only study repeatable phenomena and must conclude this research with the formulation of a law that holds for a collection of particulars, which Rickert claims to be the proper goal only for natural science, then we can begin considering what criteria can be used for demarcating between natural and historical science.

For Rickert, “a classification of the different individual disciplines according to differences in their material...can least of all constitute the ultimate goal of a philosophy of science”.¹² Epistemologists, Rickert, argues, are not primarily concerned with conceptual analysis or the relation between a valid concept and its specific material determinations. Concept formation does not attempt to copy or reproduce material reality

¹¹ Rickert, Science and History, 13.

¹² Rickert, Science and History, 11.

in concepts. Rickert points out that if reproducing reality in concepts were the proper goal of concept formation a mirror would be more suited to the job than we are. Unlike a mirror, researchers must use a method for creating meaning out of initial perceptions of reality. Concepts are best understood as abstractions or constructions such that all perceptions must be recast in the activity of concept formation to be understood. Rickert denies the claim made in epistemological realism that a concept must be justified by showing that it has a sense in the external experiential world. Concepts are not ultimately tools that explain reality 'in itself' but understand reality by transforming it. Concepts are not therefore ontologically grounded in perception. Rather they are justified theoretically, as having a logical validity or value that allows us to understand the reality given in experience while not being able to capture its rich character. The activity of concept formation should guarantee valid results that remain valid despite changing material conditions or analytic disagreements. A concept is not validated through its relation to empirical reality; it is validated according to the method that is used to generate it. Rickert is interested in providing an account of these methods and calls these scientific.

Rickert provides a formal instead of a material criterion for differentiating between forms of scientific research. He claims that this distinction is methodological, that a particular concept is validated as scientific if it has been formed according to a method designed to generate logically valid concepts. "In classifying the various sciences we must speak of a distinction between the method of the natural sciences and the method of history."¹³ It is the method(s) used to form valid concepts that demarcates the various scientific fields and gives each its unique perspective. That a given method has allowed us to conceive of some part of reality as an instance of a general law or as a unique individual determines that the method is valid for use in the attempt to understand

¹³ Rickert, Science and History, 15.

reality. Each subsequent use of this method can be expected to produce concepts that are also rational. The use of a method, as a rational tool to use in the construction of concepts that validly represent reality allows us to claim that the use of this method demarcates the limits of a particular scientific field from those that use alternative methods.

The Purposive Character of Research

Rickert sees an inverse relationship between a valid concept and experience: the more abstract a concept the better it promotes an understanding of reality, due to the fact that it contains the least content directly derived from experience. Rickert rejects epistemological realism and the suggestion that a concept is only valuable if it exists as an internal representation of an external state of affairs. In this case thought is optimized when it is passive, when it does not interfere with recording the data given by the senses. Rickert, on the other hand, suggests that reality cannot be understood unless thought is active. Thought must engage reality by using a method, of concept formation, which transforms what is present in perception relative to an external goal that is valued by the subject. Rickert is not claiming that reality is itself irrational, that would be saying too much. Rather he makes the more modest argument that reality cannot be understood without using a logical research method to give it meaning. All knowledge is therefore relative to the tools for conceptualizing experience. These tools or methods organize experienced reality according to the goals they are designed to meet or the purpose they are intended to fulfill. Immediate experience of reality cannot by itself provide understanding, but must first be conceptualized. Scientists do not form concepts directly from the real but must use a method for understanding this reality so that our cognition of reality is meaningful. Concept formation is always indirect. Rickert claims that epistemology has the task of discovering where pure experience ends and where the

process of concept formation begins. "A theory of science has the task of repeatedly re-examining how far we can go in the knowledge of truth with mere 'seeing' and where theorizing, which can no longer be traced back to pure intuition starts."¹⁴

Rickert argues that the activity of concept formation originates in judgment. This judgment selects which elements of reality are meaningful for research depending on the goal we have decided to pursue. It is the goal of research that provides the criteria for selecting from reality those elements that are relevant for our particular research. A "logical understanding of a science is possible only by starting from the goal it has set for itself and thence entering into the logical structure of its method."¹⁵ The guiding principle or goal of interest to those in natural science is knowledge of universal laws and general concepts, while the guiding principle for those engaged in historical research, the end which directs their interest in reality, is knowledge of individuality and uniqueness. "Reality becomes nature when we conceive it with reference to the general, it becomes history when we conceive it with reference to the individual."¹⁶ Rickert comes close to offering a pragmatic justification of the validity of scientific concepts. Pragmatists claim, "scientific thinking is only in the service of practical interests".¹⁷ However, in the final analysis of Rickert's philosophy, the principles that guide legitimate research by providing its end are logically valid rather than pragmatically justified. These principles are justified because they correspond to axiological values that are inherently valid. The scientist's interest in general knowledge is justified because it will contribute to the realization of the value 'truth', and the scientist's interest in the individual is justified because such an understanding is only possible by relating individuals to the cultural

¹⁴ Rickert, "The Theory of Definition", 193.

¹⁵ Rickert, Science and History, 56.

¹⁶ Rickert, Science and History, 57.

¹⁷ Rickert, Science and History, 44.

values under which they operate, which are, like the value truth, inherently valid. A valid concept has the double capacity for expressing something about perceived reality and contributing to the realization of valid values. Rickert describes these values as valid entities, yet it is not possible to observe them. He argues that these values are recognized theoretically and do not appear in perception.

Is this possible? There is something suspicious about the claim that there can be non-observable entities, which deserves further attention. The issue is whether or not “such expressions as ‘theoretical entity’ are, on the face of it, examples of category mistakes”.¹⁸ If we accept that there are theoretical entities, it becomes important for the realist to explain how these entities can be regarded as objects of scientific research even though they cannot be observed. Without such an explanation it would be impossible for the realist to accept certain key scientific terms or ideas. The realist would have to deny that electrons (or many other microstructures) are the proper scientific objects because they cannot be directly observed. Realists overcome this conclusion by arguing that the division between objects that can and cannot be observed is fictional. “Our drawing of the observational-theoretical line at any given point is an accident and a function of our psychological make-up, our current state of knowledge, and the instruments we happen to have available and, therefore, it has no ontological significance whatever.”¹⁹ This statement implies that every entity is potentially observable, that the identification of a theoretical object is merely a temporary description that will eventually be dropped once the tools of observation improve.

Such an argument cannot help show how the theoretical entities described by Rickert are to be understood. For Rickert, theoretical entities are in principle,

¹⁸ Van Frassen, “Arguments Concerning Scientific Realism”, 355.

¹⁹ Maxwell, “The Ontological Status of Theoretical Entities”, 348

unobservable. It is not possible for us to access these through technological advancement. Rickert claims that these values do not become the object of empirical scientific analysis. He claims that they are theoretical precisely because they are the conditions of scientific concept formation and are not ontologically grounded in perception. Observing these entities involves a conceptual absurdity, as they provide the structure of observational sense. They are therefore ontologically different than real objects. Justifying Rickert's use of theoretical entities must make use of the distinction between existence and observation. It must be assumed that there are existing entities that cannot be observed.

Rickert argues that a valuing subject rather than merely a cognitive subject is a necessary condition for the activity of concept formation. "All knowledge includes the idea of a valuing subject."²⁰ A cognitive subject becomes aware of the data given in immediate experience specifically as an infinite manifold stretching out in all directions. This perception would not have any meaning. It would be devoid of any intelligible structure. There would be nothing around to orient the subject, no way to get one's bearings. The subject must transform this bare landscape into an image of life. This requires recognition of linear movement. The subject must transform the infinite expanse of reality into an identifiable form. For Rickert, this transformation is accomplished by the intellect, as it measures the progress it achieves in science relative to certain ideal values. Science achieves a purposive advancement toward the goal of attaining certain knowledge. Scientists relate to the real through this movement. In order for reality to become meaningful the subject must participate in scientific activity by conceptualizing reality through a proper method. A proper research method is directed toward the realization of an axiological value. Because these values are not present in empirical investigation, the valuing subject is necessary to recognize these values by feeling their

²⁰ Rickert, The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science, 220.

validity and letting these guide his research. It is only by valuing such goals, recognizing their logical validity, that valid research is formed. Research must be purposive in this sense. The purpose of research is to arrive through use of a logical method at one of two logically valid goals, i.e., a general concept of reality or a concept of the individual entity or event. A particular researcher may or may not be aware of acting towards these goals, yet he may still arrive at the valid concepts for some other reason, chance or tradition for example. The goal of epistemology however, is to understand the elements that form valid concepts. A valid concept cannot be understood without recognizing that it receives validity by meeting certain goals of research, which are logically valid and therefore have a cognitive value.

The most general purpose of concept formation is to simplify the perception of reality through use of a logical method, which conceptualizes what is revealed in experience by bringing this experience into a theoretical relation with valid research goals. “Whatever content of reality can be taken up by concepts is vanishingly small compared to what remains.”²¹ This simplification of reality is necessary as it is presented in perception as an intensive and extensive infinity. Rickert considers the content of immediate experience. Immediate experience does not have a beginning or end and even in the present, there are no definite configurations of elements, but these can be arranged in an infinite number of combinations. Rickert concludes that reality is a heterogeneous continuum. There is continuity between perceptions yet each is distinctively marked. Concept formation can attain “power over the real” only by understanding it as either a continuum or an individual, both cannot be thought at once. “The continuum can be grasped only when it becomes homogeneous. The heterogeneous becomes conceptualized

²¹ Heidegger, Towards a Definition of Philosophy, 144.

as soon as the continuum is transformed into a discretum.”²² These twin goals become the proper ends of scientific research.

Concept formation originates in an act of selection, which declares that certain elements of reality are essential while leaving others aside as unessential. This selection requires keeping in mind a specific purpose. That purpose must be to understand reality either with reference to an individual element, by performing historical research; or with reference to the general, by performing natural scientific research. In order for scientific concept formation to occur we must value one of these two perspectives. Rickert argues that the values that correspond to these perspectives, i.e. truth and certain cultural values, are permanent. These values retain their existence as valid entities despite any particular judgment that is made in relation to them. Any rational thinker interested in pursuing valid research cannot doubt their validity. These values represent “a norm, a rule, a prescription which does not have to be observed but which ought to be observed, and which we recognize as binding as long as we are interested in discovering the truth”.²³ It is only in relation to these two goals that a concept can be described as rational: once a decision has been made to pursue these goals, certain aspects of reality stand out as meaningful in relation to them so that we can limit our research to these elements. The content of concepts is therefore determined in judgment. The “concept is not logically prior to judgment, but in respect of its logical content it has to be understood as the product of judgment.”²⁴ The purposive activity of concept formation relies on our interest in realizing these goals that form the proper ends of research such that through this evaluation reality appears to have meaning. Rickert denies that his theory of concept formation is voluntaristic due to the fact that these values represent imperatives for

²² Heidegger, *Towards a Definition of Philosophy*, 145.

²³ Rickert, “The Theory of Definition”, 202.

²⁴ Rickert, “The Theory of Definition”, 194.

cognition, for it is only in relation to these that valid concepts can be formed. The values that direct concept formation are not produced in a purely arbitrary will but are prior to any act of willing and inform the will of its proper object.

The Primacy of Science

Rickert argues that all rational thinking is scientific. Science represents the attempt to systematize human thought. Commenting on his doctoral dissertation '*The Theory of Definition*', forty years after it was written while preparing for a republication, Rickert tells his reader that "even now I am addressing readers who choose a scientific approach to philosophy. Where this will is lacking there is no point for logical discussion".²⁵ Rickert conceives of rational thought, philosophical thought included, as striving to determine concepts that have a place within the one system of thought and therefore characterizes it a scientific.

Rickert credits Hegel with showing how the system of human thought does not reflect a system that appears in reality but originates in human reason. Rickert agrees that the system that characterizes human thought is not found in empirical reality but disagrees with Hegel's conclusion that only what is rational is real. Rickert argues that we do have direct experience of reality in perception as an infinite manifold but that this impression does not show specific elements to be meaningful in comparison with others. The elements of reality that are deemed unessential through use of a particular method of concept formation must still be recognized as real. In a different context, guided by the pursuit of a different research goal, these may be deemed essential while the selected elements made meaningful in our research are ignored. Rickert argues that the rational is not restricted to the real and what is only real is not yet rational. He means that the values

²⁵ Rickert, "The Theory of Definition", 212.

that are pursued in scientific research are rational while they are not perceived as a part of empirical reality and that empirical reality is not itself rational until it is involved in an act of concept formation.

Rickert believes that reality presents itself for our consideration in immediate experience such that knowledge can still be regarded as analytic or scientific in character. Hegel explained how concepts were formed relative to an 'image' that reason produces of the world. "An image of the world was projected and an attempt was made to develop a conception of life on its basis".²⁶ Rickert believes that the real must be given prior to the work of reason. We can only form a concept by selecting from perceived reality which material will form its content. Reason gets its material not in relation to a projected image but rather from the immediacy of perceptual life. But reality can and must be rationally understood as having a meaning that is more than this immediate positing in perception can reveal. Rationality must use methods for understanding the reality that is posited in perception if it is to be conceived of as having a meaning. Any method that can be used to find meaning in reality by relating reality to a logical research goal is scientific. Pure analysis cannot differentiate between perceptions such that it could tell us which to focus our attention on. For this we need a principle of selection that is found in axiological values.

Values are 'non-real', but they do exist as ideal entities that have their own objectivity because they are logically valid prior to any conceptualization process. We progress in historical research as we do in any other scientific field by advancing the system of human thought. To do this we must show that a particular concept is determined as having a place in 'logical' so therefore objective reality. The method of research appropriate for understanding historical events is scientific because it allows is

²⁶ Rickert, The Limits of Concept Formation in Natural Science, 20.

to understand some aspect of experienced reality in relation to an objectively valid, because logically valuable, research goal. The most general of these goals is knowledge of the individual. Rickert's methodology is designed to let us recognize a fit between some aspects of our perceptual experience that we are interested in and the axiological values we recognize as logically existing entities. This fit is known as the content of a concept. We know reality only as instances of these values; outside of this reality is meaningless.

Rickert recognizes that we cannot understand an individual by subsuming this individual under a general law of development, as is the goal on natural scientific research. The fact that we have an interest in understanding the individual in its uniqueness proves that the method appropriate in natural scientific research cannot be the only valid method of scientific concept formation. We are interested in a historical individual not because it appeared as an instance of a general law or concept but because it has a relation to a specific cultural value. He shows that historical concepts are valid because they are formed in relation to cultural values that are themselves validated in relation to axiological and objective values, even though these are not perceived to have a place in empirical reality. Just as laws are valid in natural science because they allow us to realize the axiological value 'truth', which does not appear in empirical reality, so too are there axiological values that can only be realized by historical research, which studies the individual in relation to cultural values rather than as an instance of a law. In relation to these values historical research generates concepts about individuality that can be justified as having a place within the system of human thought. Historical concepts are therefore scientific. All science has this systematization as its goal. All logical thinking is science, so all rational thought must serve to reveal concepts that have a place or objective sense in this system. It is in unifying these two elements, by finding that an

entity or event given in empirical reality also has a sense within the system of human thought that cognition succeeds in understanding reality.

Chapter Two

Introduction

In Gallie's philosophy, concept formation is argued to be "a teleologically guided form of attention with the peculiarity that the end toward which it is directed is essentially open" - open, that is, to interpretation.²⁷ Each process of concept formation works toward a unique end, or conclusion that reflects the interests of the participants who take part in this process. Human interest is the decisive factor that directs the activity of concept formation, projecting a conclusion that is eventually reached. The acceptance of a conclusion is recognized to be a provisional act. The conclusion must be continually re-evaluated in the activity of concept formation such that a real objective conclusion does not appear. Gallie is interested in history as a field of enquiry because he believes it to exemplify these aspects of concept formation, which are often overlooked in science.

Scientific and Historical Understanding

Having recognized that science cannot be defined by the realist contention that the field is unified in its capacity to tell us what there really is, scientists often claim that their research is scientific in virtue of the fact that it provides explanations. Explanations are applied to reality yet they are tested indirectly by the cognitive subject who decides if an explanation is valid, based on whether or not the explanation given actually answers the questions that have been asked. There is no need to go outside of this question and answer process to justify a concept's validity. In order to claim that scientific

²⁷ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 38.

explanations are valid, or valuable as more than a resolution to a particular curiosity, researchers usually accept explanations as scientific only when they are proven to be universal. That is, only when the explanations can be accepted by any subject who earnestly asks the same question. Such an explanation is said to be conclusive in that no rational objections can be raised against it.

Take a question like “why are trees green?” for example. The reply, “Because God wanted us to enjoy the beauty of his creation, he picked green as the appropriate color for the trees as it compliments the blue of the sky”, is obviously not a scientific explanation of why trees are green. This explanation is valid on the basis of certain religious presuppositions, which make the answer acceptable to only a limited number of people. Science however, can explain why the trees are green without any such presuppositions. Scientists point to the existence of chlorophyll and the activity of photosynthesis. Light wanes of red. Purple and blue are used by the trees rather than green, which is then reflected and therefore seen by us as the coloring agent of trees. This explanation, they argue, should be universally acceptable, as it is based on proofs and reasoning which have also been validated according to the scientific method. If one were to object to this explanation, the evidence that could be presented to him would make his objection relatively powerless.

Scientists then, are generally interested in providing a certain kind of explanation that is justified if it can be proven to be universally compelling. Gallie asks whether this criterion of justification characterizes concept formation in general. He answers no. There is another kind of explanation that cannot be described as an attempt to develop universally acceptable explanations. In the second form of concept formation, instead of understanding an activity through use of a generalizing explanation, one is interested in understanding an activity by actually ‘following’ the development of this particular

activity. In this case, we are willing to wait and see what the conclusion is without attempting to predict this by relying on a universal law.

Gallie argues that there are two distinct modes or moments of concept formation. With a scientific explanation, knowledge of the questioned material involves comprehending it as a case operating according to a specific rule or law. The activity of following allows us to go outside of the question and answer process appropriate in and act of scientific explanation to access reality directly. In following a particular activity we get a first hand experience of the reality we are interested in instead of understanding this reality by using a third person description.

To make this distinction between 'following' and 'explaining' clearer, I will present one of Gallie's own examples, that of playing a game. There are two ways that we can understand a game. If we ask in a scientific frame of reference "what is a game?" we are likely to get an explanation predicting what a game looks like based on repetitive patterns that characterize it. Such an explanation would include a reference to competition, teams, special equipment and other factors that give the game an identity compared to others. Such an explanation could go on indefinitely until the person enquiring about the game is satisfied that he understands it. Gallie argues that a game can only be partially understood by such an explanation. A proper understanding of a game can only arise by actually following the play of a particular game.

Gallie argues that the understanding generated in an act of following a game is richer than that given in a scientific explanation, however exhaustive the latter may be. The main element that Gallie associates with an act of following, and not with the scientific explanation is the presence of feeling. In following a game, Gallie argues, a spectator's experience is comprised of contrasting, distinctive feelings: anticipation of the winner, disappointment when a favorite team fumbles and conversely joy upon the

making of a good play. Feeling responds to the contingent factors of the game's development. Gallie argues that these contingent moments, while being an integral part of the development of any actual game, cannot be understood for what they are through an explanation. One must become involved in an actual game to understand its particular development. It is the feelings accompanying the contingent events that pull us along toward the conclusion of the game, which is unpredictable from the standpoint of the spectator. These feelings, Gallie, points out, could not be sustained if we were able to predict what the outcome of the game would be. Whereas a scientific explanation does not have to reference a specific game to be understood, the act of following cannot be accomplished without focusing on an individual event and letting this guide us to an unknown conclusion, one that is open to determination depending on the contingencies to which it is subject. Gallie argues that this reliance on an individual event makes the understanding that is arrived at through use of the method of following an historical understanding.

Essentially Contested Concepts

In Gallie's philosophy, concepts can occur as a result of either of two activities, following or explaining. The concepts arrived at in each case are different.

Concepts arrived at through scientific explanation are conclusive. They carry with them definite evidence of their validity, which can be referred to in circumstances of doubt. Generating conclusive concepts is an important cognitive function. There is a need for a universalizable, general knowledge base, which is met through scientific explanation. Yet there is an important sense in which this function of concept formation is secondary to that of following. I will present the reason for this later; right now, I will

focus on the type of concept arrived at through the activity of following, a concept that Gallie calls “essentially contested”.

Essentially contested concepts “can fulfill their proper philosophical function only as long as they continue to be the subjects of apparently endless philosophical conflicts and debates.”²⁸ There are a number of logically valid ways to understand the meaning of an essentially contested concept. Since these alternatives need not complement each other nor do they fit together to form a completed whole, it is rather likely that some will directly contradict others. Rational argument and logical proofs can support each contesting alternative yet they can be doubted by the same mechanism. Some seemingly valid alternatives may eventually be dropped from the discussion altogether. Essentially contested concepts dominate in philosophy, aesthetics, religion, morality and justice. Given their ubiquity, it is important that we begin to investigate the nature of these concepts, which have been pushed aside in our search for certainty.

Essentially contested concepts are complex and are comprised of a number of descriptions. Yet there must be a limit to the descriptions which can be contained within the one concept. Although essentially contested concepts are not predictable, they nevertheless must be continuous. The interpretations are not necessarily continuous with each other but are often contradictory; therefore the designation of the concept as essentially contested. Yet all interpretations do have one thing in common, however unilluminating it is with regard to the positive content of the interpretations themselves, certainly this commonality would not allow one to predict what interpretations may be. However diverse the interpretations contained in a given concept may be, they must all be logical possibilities given the historical context of the concept in question. There are certain regulative principles that govern the development of any given debate and these

²⁸ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 9.

must be respected by the interpretations that compete in a concept that is essentially contested.

This still does not answer the question of how to choose which interpretations to support. Is each interpretation logically valid then how does one know which to appraise as the best? The appraisal of one interpretation over others is based in contingent decision. In a contingent decision the subject comes up against the unknown, he is presented with a collection of possibilities that are logically valid, but there is not a general reason for judging one as better than others, there is no overriding law or imperative to direct one's choice toward the proper alternatives. Gallie argues that a participant in debate will feel the 'logical force' of an interpretation as it is compared with others. This feeling, which is unique to the subject himself, provides a rational reason for his selection. A closer examination of what Gallie means by these terms, 'feeling'; 'contingency' and 'logical force', which he only vaguely defines, will be explored in the next chapter.

An essentially contested concept is always on the move and is unable to be pinned down in a single explanation or brought to an ultimate conclusion. It is essentially historical. Gallie argues that an understanding of an essentially contested concept must include a study of its development.

For example, if one had a desire to understand what philosophy is it would not suffice to read any particular text. Philosophy is the interaction of texts; it is not a single work but the responses called forth by a particular work and its relation to others. Only by studying this development can one understand the concept 'philosophy'. Even then, the work of the student is not complete. He becomes responsible for offering his own interpretation of what philosophy is, inviting new critiques and forming new relations, and adding another stage to the development he have studied. Likewise, an essentially

contested concept can therefore be described as perpetually open to new determinations, as long as there is interest in it.

Throughout the development of an essentially contested concept there are many 'interim ends' or satisfactory moments of understanding. These are to be subjected to refinement and critique through dialogue. There is no expectation of completion. The acceptance of a particular end as satisfactory to our particular interest is a feature of experience, but the essentially contested concept is the result of an activity that is not a personal act and has no conclusion. An essentially contested concept develops through critical dialogue, a public act. Notice that a concept is constituted in dialogue. For Gallie, our thinking is essentially dialogical. The concept belongs to a collection of people, who contribute based on their own interest in the concept is question. A concept is not generated in a private conscious act.

In this sense the act of concept formation is like the act of producing works of art. Gallie argues that these are rarely, as 19th century idealist philosophers would have maintained, products of a single mental act. On such a view, a work of art is understood because the artist and spectator share the same 'internal picture', each individual experiencing the "one act of Imagination that... gives (the artwork) its individual meaning and value".²⁹ Against these 'ideal acts', Gallie maintains that a piece of artwork is not only appreciated but also created through many separate and diverse acts of mind, many of which share distant temporal positions. "Much of the very greatest art is not of this kind at all - not the work of one sustained effort or of one man or even a generation of men: for instance some of the great works of architecture"³⁰, i.e. Cologne Cathedral. Like works of art, concepts are always the products of multiple acts. Concepts, like great

²⁹ Gallie, "The Function of Philosophical Aesthetics", 19.

³⁰ Gallie, "The Function of Philosophical Aesthetics", 21.

works of art, have the power to traverse historical distance with their value in tact. They absorb a collection of conflicting views without becoming assimilated to any one.

Essentially contested concepts allow for the possibility of sharing a concept, while developing our own particular understanding of it. That which satisfies my interest, the part that makes the whole intelligible for me and which I therefore value above others, may not be the part that makes the whole intelligible for you. You may be interested in a different part that makes the whole appear differently from your perspective. An essentially contested concept will contain both of our interpretations. It will give a space for the engagement of one with the other, and many others, depending on how much interest there is in it.

Gallie argues that our recognition of essentially contested concepts has been stalled by a philosophical tradition “that from its beginnings in ancient Greece has been almost exclusively concerned with our knowledge of universal truths that can be arranged in a system and are known to hold irrespective of any place and time”.³¹ The Greeks, he argues, operating at the dawn of philosophical thinking, did not have an adequate grasp of the importance of historical knowledge to the project of understanding reality. This puts the historian in the awkward position of having to justify the knowledge they generate as valid. Traditionally, they have attempted to do this by focusing attention on the similarities between the historical method of concept formation and the scientific: showing that both concepts are arrived at through a necessary process that is universally acceptable to rational beings. Gallie sets himself the task of deciding “whether conformity to this condition - the possibility of universal agreement - provides a necessary criterion of the genuineness of arguments and disputes of all kinds”.³²

³¹ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 13.

³² Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 183.

One way of justifying historical concepts that gives them a universal validity is offered by the realist who argues that “every characteristically human action involves a tacit reference to some general social or institutional fact”. In other words, historical action could be understood as “what any person answering to a given description would do or think with regard to the action in question”.³³ To understand this claim Gallie presents an example offered by C.S. Peirce.

If A is to give an object Z to B, it is not enough that A should part with Z and B takes it up.

If A throws his date stone (Z) out the window and B looks up and receives it in the eye, A hasn't given his stone to B. For an act of giving to take place, it is necessary that A shall regard Z as from now on B's property in all respects and will take reasonable steps as and when necessary to see that other people shall so regard it. Without society and its institutions, without the organization and expectation of certain attitudes in society, we should have no gifts and no insults.³⁴

According to this view, we understand historical actions in virtue of our ability to pick out certain patterns in social life to which they conform. Gallie criticizes this method of understanding historical action as it relies on the scientific model of understanding natural phenomena in terms of the laws that animate them. Gallie argues that “Descartes, Locke, Leibniz and Kant, Mill and Peirce, Poincare and Russell, are all impressed with real and important features of scientific discourse and scientific proof” but warns that the “passion for intellectual unity and simplicity which is a familiar and when properly checked wholly legitimate feature of scientific minds”³⁵ may not have a primary role to play in the historical understanding. Historical understanding is directed onto what is, in

³³ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 80.

³⁴ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 81.

³⁵ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 194.

the nature of things, unrepeatable and unique. History studies the individual in its difference rather than its unity.

If the activity of concept formation is ultimately directed toward the telos of universal knowledge, essentially contested concepts, and the disputes they give rise to, are not valid. Misunderstandings or the inability to resolve conceptual conflicts should filter out of the process of understanding in such a way that the end we attain is universally accepted. The ideal structure of universal agreement, if it should ever be realized, gives concepts a repetitive value, as they can be used in explanations to people who enquire into a particular area, but a concept would not have any potential for creating new knowledge. Universally accepted concepts do not open up new avenues for thought to move into as they represent a conclusion to our questions. Gallie rejects the notion of universal agreement because of the unnatural closure it brings to the development of thought.

Gallie's theory of essentially contested concepts agrees with the realist argument that we make discoveries instead of inventions. The novel knowledge generated in a discovery refers to an existent, or previously existing, phenomenon. With an invention, there is a novel creation of a phenomenon that did not previously exist. For Gallie, a novel and valid interpretation in concept formation does refer back to the real phenomenon under investigation, however, in Gallie's view, these interpretations are adequate for understanding reality rather than true. An interpretation may reveal a new perspective that did not previously exist, which allows us to view the object in a creative way, but this interpretation must be a possibility of the object in the first place. It may be no more 'true' than previous interpretations but it nonetheless adds a dimension of understanding to the concept of the object which did not previously exist. Discoveries represent "a point of transition in men's habits of thought and action" where "this effect

cannot be predicted beforehand". When there is a discovery we come face to face with the unpredictability of history. A discovery cannot be planned for or predicted. The effects of a discovery are only experientially realized. Discoveries open history to new possibilities that could not have previously occurred.

Gallie argues that our "philosophical imagination" is our best defense against the habit of justifying only those concepts that promote a unified understanding of reality. Such an imagination would see that a concept does not have a "simple single basis" but issues out of many "original independent tendencies".³⁶ Concepts begin through our individual interest in the one 'historical exemplar'. This exemplar is originally open to many interpretations and an optimal understanding will reflect this plurality. Such an understanding results in an essentially contested concept, which is able to comprehend any aspect of the historical exemplar depending on its use. The use one makes of a concept is historically conditioned. But we are not locked into our historical norms. As we engage in debate we are able to use our imagination to understand the concept from another person's perspective. We can, for example, feel that a historically accepted interpretation was logically justified while recognizing that the current use of this interpretation would not be legitimate. We will begin to value all rational interpretations, as collectively representing the place in which the concept may flourish. This is why we can study philosophies that are obviously mistaken or appreciate the genius of music that we may not choose to listen to in our personal space.

In order for conceptual progress to be possible an individual must not only value all interpretations but must also appraise one as the best and support it. The activity of

³⁶ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 195.

concept formation can again be understood through a comparison to a sporting event.³⁷ In order to be a successful sportsman, Gallie argues, a participant must be capable of self-initiated action. A goal or other successful contribution to the game must ultimately depend on an individual's performance. But this type of initiative can only be successful if it is based on a keen appreciation of one's teammates, of what is happening around one at any given time. Likewise a participant in debate, while appreciating the strengths of each interpretation, must individually evaluate which one to appraise as the best. She must put her support behind a single interpretation and continue the debate by strengthening or offering new arguments and examples, which add to its logical force. The logical force of an interpretation can only be discerned in debate, it emerges in comparison with competing alternatives. An alternative's performance in debate provides a rational basis for forming a feeling of its validity. While this logical force should be apparent to everyone participating in debate, it will not necessarily function to create a majority of supporters for a given interpretation. Many interpretations will have logical force. Which one is judged to be the best depends on one's historical background, one's interest, and a host of other facts that differentiate one participant from another. Conceptual conversions can be expected in concept formation as new arguments are presented for an alternative. We are responsible for continually defending and critiquing any interpretation we choose to appraise as the best. Gallie argues that such conversions are "justifiable - not simply in light of certain sociological or psychological laws".³⁸ In order to decide if a conversion is rationally justified we must question the individual and find out the reasons why the conversion was made, we must find out about their history

³⁷ For a discussion of why sporting events are an essential element of a well rounded education and how such events can be used as tools for teaching ideas and practices that are usually thought to be un-teachable in traditional systems of schooling, for example, morality, see Gallie W.B., An English School.

³⁸ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 195.

etc. and decide of from their perspective the new interpretation is justified. The convert has the responsibility for discussing why he has made the conversion, “the notion of discussion is of far greater importance for the definition of rationality and the rational will, than is the notion of demonstrative proof”.³⁹ Even though the audience may not be so converted, the logical force of his argument can still be felt and respected.

Gallie has made an interesting claim. He argues that while essentially contested concepts are rationally justified they are justified in dialogue where the logical force of a concept is accepted. The logical force of an interpretation is itself contingent on the others it is related to. It appears strong or weak only in relation to its contemporaries. These change, so the logical force of our chosen interpretation may change as well. We are not able to predict this change; it is not under our control. Not only our particular choice, but the concept is itself contingent on a collection of people showing sustained interest in it. Gallie recognizes the peculiarity of justifying concept thought contingent factors. “To traditional ways of thinking there is something paradoxical about the juxtaposition of the terms contingent and acceptable.”⁴⁰ Gallie argues that philosophers have attempted to work with a narrow conception of rationality that will only be satisfied with conclusions if they were shown to be determined necessarily or universally such that once the relevant proofs have been given the conclusion can not be rejected. Gallie argues that this is a feature of scientific explanations but not of the activity of following that characterizes historical understanding.

According to Gallie, conventional knowledge offers only a starting point, one that we are responsible for overcoming in the process of concept formation. Conventional knowledge represents the “conformist element” in concept formation. Alongside this

³⁹ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 207.

⁴⁰ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 30.

there is a “melioristic element” which allow “the ideas of obedience, conformity, contribution to the maintenance of the established order to unite with the idea of a wholesale betterment of society - under the inspiration of an altogether superior vision of life”.⁴¹ History is not only aimed at the negative goal of critique but also at the positive goal of offering through discovery “a constructive settlement of some important conflict”.⁴² Such an event requires “initiative, original thought and sustained effort”.⁴³ All of these are contingent in our interest, which directs us toward an end of our choosing. Acceptable results for one person may not be so for another. Those with a philosophical imagination know that the end they find satisfactory may be taken up and improved by another. Essentially contested concepts allow for the possibility of matching rationally acceptable results with a method for forming concepts that recognizes the contingency and uncertainty involved in knowledge claims.

Historical Understanding and the Narrative

Gallie argues that the act of following, which allows for historical concept formation, can be understood by comparing it to the act of following a story. “The following of any and every great story” is “due to the peculiar set and structure of our basic interhuman feelings.” In order for there to be a conclusion in a story it must be recognized “not simply as the goal of our following and understanding, it must also be from the point of view of our emotional responses, some kind of culmination”.⁴⁴ The conclusion of a story is meant to resolve the interest that pulled us along to the end. An author will attempt to engage our attention by presenting us with situations that are

⁴¹ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 197.

⁴² Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 99.

⁴³ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 98.

⁴⁴ Gallie, Philosophy and the Hisotircal Understanding, 47.

“calculated to call out our interest, and this interest is always based on our strongest and most elemental feelings of sympathy for our fellows”.⁴⁵ Gallie argues that we think of other people effectively only in so far as they interest us. Interest, he argues, is a necessary condition of concept formation in general. In scientific research it acts as the cause of our question asking and ends with a universal explanation, while in historical research interest occasions an act of following which ends in feeling. Even the best authors can only elicit an interest contingently as we must first possess a certain level of knowledge so that we can understand the sometimes technical, sometimes poetic, use of language that characters use.

Following and Explaining

Gallie views scientific explanations as secondary to the activity of following. In Gallie’s philosophy, explanations allow us to follow the activity of a system when this following has been interrupted. Explanations “have the effect of enabling one to see when one’s vision was becoming blurred or one’s credulity taxed”.⁴⁶ Explanations are made necessary only when the primary attitude of following an activity to its conclusion is no longer possible. Explanations do not ultimately function to allow us to understand the reality of a particular event. We must move outside of the activity itself, to receive an explanation, just as a spectator must stop watching the game to ask a question about it.

Gallie argues that we do not properly understand a particular entity by relating it to a general class or collection that share similar characteristics which is the practice of science. Understanding a particular is not accomplished by identifying it as a member of a group to which it belongs. A richer understanding of the individual is possible in

⁴⁵ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 45.

⁴⁶ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 105.

historical research. In history, the whole is not to be thought of as a unity that allows for only one correct understanding. Gallie argues that “there is not -and cannot conceivably be- any criterion for deciding when a story or any kind of performance has been ideally followed”.⁴⁷ We gain knowledge of the whole only through a selective interest in some of its parts. We want to see how it will work out for these parts in the end. Our interest allows us to select which parts of the whole are important from our perspective. There is recognition that this part would not be what it is if not for many background parts in the same narrative. From a different perspective, say if the parts were involved in another narrative, it may seem completely different. In Gallie’s philosophy when we understand how a part functions in relation to a whole we are not making an identity claim concerning the part involved. The identity of any part in a narrative makes sense of the part only as it figures into the conclusion. Such a concept “cannot be tested or confirmed with reference to parallel cases”.⁴⁸

Sometimes our feeling that we are not following effectively blocks the activity of following. We feel that some entity or event that should have had a meaning for us does not. Once a proper explanation of the event in question is given we feel we can go on following directly without the intrusion of any more explanations. The fundamental aim of cognition in Gallie’s philosophy is to follow the activity of a system by taking a selective interest in some parts therein. Explanations are useful when this activity is interrupted. “Explanations in history, like the kinds of explanations we ask for or volunteer to fellow spectators at a game are in the nature of intrusions, they are not what we primarily came for - the play, that is the basic thing”.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 35.

⁴⁸ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 124.

⁴⁹ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 10.

An essentially contested concept, such as art, does not only have one material embodiment but several. Each of these may be the subject of a particular debate. A poem may be classified as art on the basis of different criteria than are used to judge whether or not a painting is art. Rather than succumbing to the 'tenacious and seductive' doctrine of essentialism and suggesting that each of these material embodiments have something in common which allows us to refer to them as art, Gallie suggests that these entities form a group "between whose every member and at least two others there hold two different relations of likeness".⁵⁰ Essentially contested concepts refer to a collection that share what modern logic calls 'family resemblance', a relation Gallie also refers to as 'play'.

⁵⁰ Gallie, "The Function of Philosophical Aesthetics", 16.

Chapter Three

Introduction

The first two sections of this chapter, “The Rational Will” and “Methodology”, will compare and contrast Rickert’s and Gallie’s views on the topics indicated. The third section contains a criticism of Rickert’s epistemology, followed by a section that offers positive reasons for why Gallie’s theory of concept formation is preferable. Next follows my own interpretations of Gallie’s metaphysics. I will argue that his theory of concept formation can be elaborated to show that in it he expounds a triadic theory of human experience in general. Here I will make the original suggestion that Gallie’s theory of essentially contested concepts is an interpretation and application of Peirce’s metaphysics to the field of concept formation.

The Rational Will

That Gallie and Rickert develop different explanations of concept formation reflects an underlying difference in the way they approach the field of epistemology. That they give different answers to the question “How are concepts formed?” can be partially explained by the fact that they ask this question in different contexts created through the acceptance of divergent presuppositions concerning the nature of the rational will.

For Rickert, certainty, gained through the possession of valid concepts, satisfies the rational will. Gallie, on the other hand, argues that the rational will reaches fulfillment through a certain form of activity - open-ended dialogue, where no certain conclusions are reached.

Based on his assumption that some thinking results in certain knowledge while other thinking does not, Rickert concerns himself with demarcating between the corresponding fields of enquiry. “What is generally accepted today is a distinction between natural science and cultural or social sciences. That distinction comes in part, from Windleband and Rickert.”⁵¹

Rickert accepts Kant’s distinction between theoretical and practical knowledge. For Kant, practical knowledge conditions our ability to interact with the world around us, to act successfully in response to circumstantial facts. Yet this kind of understanding cannot satisfy the rational will. For Rickert, the rational will is only satisfied when action is undertaken relative to concepts that have a logical validity. Such concepts are conclusive and provide universally compelling justifications for action. Proper action is not contextually defined but arrived at rationally. The rational will can only be satisfied with the certainty that comes from theoretical study.

Where does the validity of theoretical knowledge come from? In Rickert’s philosophy, a subject recognizes certain values, during the activity of concept formation, that “enjoy the ontological mode of validity as distinct from the ontological mode of existence”.⁵² These values surpass practical desires or inclinations and express a duty such that the agent’s actions are justified when he acts in the name of their realization. In Rickert’s view, human action cannot be justified if its antecedent condition is a decision made independently by the subject. In order for human activity to be justified, the subject must be compelled to act by external values. These values provide an ‘objective’ antecedent condition for human action.

⁵¹ Bakker, “The Life World, Greif and Individual Uniqueness”.

⁵² Ollig, “Neo-Kantianism”, 785-7.

Consider, for example, the value 'truth'. Rickert understands actions undertaken in the name of truth as belonging to the field of natural science. According to Rickert, a rational thinker could not deny the worthiness of this pursuit. Because truth is an objective value, the acts of natural science, which contribute to its realization, are justified. The realization of this value takes the form of a natural law. A natural law represents the union in thought of a valid value with the content of experience. The validity independently possessed by the value is transferred to thought and a valid concept is formed. The fit between our experiences and a valid value is an automatic one, either there is a fit or there is not. The rational agent will recognize the necessity of this relation and the rational will is satisfied that it has reached a certain conclusion.

Whereas Rickert holds that some concepts can be held with certainty, Gallie holds that forming such concepts is impossible. Instead, he focuses on the possibility of justifying concepts that are formed under conditions of uncertainty. Gallie, like Rickert, describes a rational method for validating concepts but he does not think that this method can be used to generate indubitable knowledge.

In Gallie's theory of essentially contested concepts, concepts are essentially open to revision and development. A concept is not proved acceptable based on a single criterion, rather its validity, its success, is based on its performance in debate. Assessing the validity of a concept by participating in debate is accomplished on the basis of an activity called following. To understand how following can provide a rational basis for accepting a concept as valid, and thereby satisfy the rational will, I think it is necessary to step back and consider the present debate between Gallie and Rickert in its historical sense. I will do this by relating the writings under discussion to the tradition of idealist speculative metaphysics, as such was a prevalent school of thought in the time of their writing, undoubtedly influencing the arguments here discussed.

Idealist speculative metaphysics can be described as the attempt to develop a systematized body of knowledge that accurately characterizes the whole of reality. For present purposes it is important to note that this project includes the assumption that it is possible to understand concrete particularity. It is assumed that from this basis, it is possible to abstract to the general and universal elements and processes that animate reality. Here, thinkers start with some access to real individuals. Imbedded in idealist speculative metaphysics is the idea that reality is to some extent 'given' as a meaningful object of study, and that it is possible to develop theories of greater and greater complexity into a system which would exhaustively define universal being.

Kant is not therefore a speculative metaphysician in the traditional sense. Kant's Copernican turn consists in showing that objects must conform to knowledge instead of knowledge conforming to objects. Rickert, following Kant, denies that reality is given as a meaningful object of study. It is rather by a conceptualizing transformation of the 'non-real, meaningless, flow of immediate experience that we begin to form an idea of reality. For Rickert, as well as for Kant, the presence that provides the raw material for thought remains unintelligible.⁵³ Like the traditional metaphysicians, however, Rickert means to develop a system capable of encompassing the whole collection of valid concepts, "a system of principles according to which every possible fact might be identified",⁵⁴ but he attempts to do so while holding the Kantian thesis that reality is, in itself, unintelligible. Whereas idealist speculative metaphysicians argue that the particularity inherent in the real is understandable, Rickert holds that historical understanding, the appropriate type of reasoning to afford an understanding of the individual, can only go so far in its project

⁵³ Kant viewed the immediate sensation of reality as a confrontation with the 'thing-in-itself'. The thing in itself denotes a presence that thought cannot penetrate and therefore provides the limit of human reason.

⁵⁴ Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 25.

and can never reveal the true nature of particular being. To understand particular being we must go beyond it to see it in its relation to ideal values.

Gallie is also sensitive to the idealist speculative tradition but in a different manner. Gallie tweaks the tools employed in the tradition and uses these in his own theory. He holds that the verification of historical theories is “very commonly of the kind which defenders of the coherence theory of truth have labored to define”.⁵⁵

Commonly, in speculative philosophy, the validity of a given concept is tested using the criteria of coherence and comprehensiveness. F.H. Bradley expresses the basic insight of these thinkers. “Truth is an ideal expression of the Universe, at once coherent and comprehensive.”⁵⁶ Coherence and comprehensiveness become the criteria for determining whether or not a concept is rationally acceptable. The first of these criteria requires that a concept not be accepted as valid if it does not cohere with previously accepted concepts. If the resulting coherent concept is also comprehensive, it will include within its purview all previous knowledge plus the additional bit. In this way, concepts will complement each other and one can build up a conceptual base, comprised of many concepts, which will eventually reach completion. It is assumed that valid concepts are not mutually exclusive. Like the reality under investigation, which is considered to be a particular or single individual, the understanding aspired to in this theory is represented as a whole, completed structure, or system, each part of which coheres with others.

As shown above, Gallie argues that concept formation can never reach completion. Concepts are essentially historical, and open to revision. Likewise, reality is itself essentially open to interpretation. Multiple interpretations can hold validly for reality but none is true in the sense of providing a secure foundation on which to erect a universal

⁵⁵ Gallie, “Explanations in History and the Genetic Sciences”, 175.

⁵⁶ Rescher, The Coherence Theory of Truth, 31.

body of knowledge. Not all valid interpretations will complement each other. Clashes between concepts give a sense to debate and the formation of concepts that are essentially contested. But in the context of contestability how does one determine which interpretation to accept? If there is no certainty in knowledge then what salvation is there from possessing only arbitrary knowledge? How does one account for the possibility of validating a concept as reliable or logically valid so that it can be accepted, provisionally, over other and competing interpretations?

Gallie uses the criteria employed in the tradition of idealist speculative metaphysics to determine which interpretations of an essentially contested concept are valid. A participant in debate must appraise one interpretation as the best. This is the essence of debate. The rational way to make this selection is to designate as the best the most coherent or comprehensive, in the sense that on its basis more of the reality under investigation can be understood. The interpretation that succeeds in debate and therefore emerges as valid will answer the objections raised against others while incorporating their strengths and explaining the phenomenon under investigation more fully than those it contests. This decision is made however, from a particular perspective, and is informed by one's historical context and interests. Another interpretation explains the phenomenon better from a second perspective. Therefore, an interpretation accepted by one participant as best may be legitimately rejected by a second. One interpretation may cohere with previously held beliefs and acquire a force of persuasion felt to be strongest from this standpoint, one will therefore be justified in accepting it. A different interpretation might legitimately appear to be more coherent and comprehensive according to a second participant's background and expectations. On the basis of this fit a participant is logically justified in appraising this other interpretation as the best. Each interpretation agrees with one's experience of the reality under investigating. It is a valid understanding

of some particular entity or event given in experience, while no interpretation will have the power to exhaustively define this entity.

Gallie's theory of concept formation shows how a particular interpretation can be logically defended as a valid interpretation if it has been tested according to the criteria of coherence and comprehensiveness, while still being regarded as contingently selected based on one's historical position. He shows that a valid understanding is possible without this understanding having to be universally acceptable or irrefutable.

Gallie questions the certainty that appears to be granted through the formulation of scientific law. He reminds us that in any area of human endeavor there are bound to be surprises. Long neglected by rationalizing philosophers, surprises shape the way we see the world, often forcing a reorientation of thinking or refocusing of attention on some previously overlooked phenomenon. Researchers cannot exclude the possibility of surprise from their predictions about future behavior. "Even where known physical laws enable us to forecast with a quite unusual degree of specificity what a certain outcome will be, there must remain some respects in which that outcome will remain unspecified and therefore unpredicted."⁵⁷

The presence of surprises in epistemological progress shows that this progress is always steeped in contingency. The knowledge that has gone before is not an indestructible foundation for what comes next. At any point a surprise may forcefully intervene in our experience, upsetting expectations and causing a re-evaluation of some belief that we had validly held.

Gallie argues that no particular proposition can be held with certainty. Knowledge is essentially open to doubt. There are always competing interpretations that vie for one's support. Because we are not forced, based on demonstrative proof, to hold any view in

⁵⁷ Gallie, "Uncertainty as a Philosophical Problem: 1", 7.

particular, because many views may be rationally justified, we must make a decision over which view to accept. This decision has consequence for subsequent action.⁵⁸ The decision maker is therefore uniquely responsible for the decision he makes. He must provide reasons for his decision, as these are not immediately given in virtue of his appeal to reason. Accepting a view not only means affirming it based on reasons that appear compelling, but creating, to one's own satisfaction, a foundation of reasons why this view, relative to others, is to be chosen, above others. Such a foundation must withstand the test of public debate but not the test of time, as inevitably, it will be surpassed by a more coherent and comprehensive alternative.

Methodology

Rickert and Gallie present different explanations of the method used to form concepts. Whereas Rickert assumes that concepts can be formed on the basis of an individual act, Gallie argues that concept formation is an activity that relies on the participation of a plurality of people.

Rickert criticizes epistemologies based on representation. He is not satisfied with the idea that knowledge consists in accurately representing to oneself the reality present in perception. Where is the subject in this account? The subject would be present as a transparent filter, enabled to successfully form concepts by copying. Rickert argues that the subject must act as a mediator between immediate perception and concepts. The subject cannot simply be present to reality but must actively reflect on immediate perception and affirm that it is meaningful if there is to be knowledge. This affirmation

⁵⁸ Contrast this to Rickert's view in which the activity of concept formation does not have the power to change reality as it does not 'touch down' in reality. Reality is independent from concept formation. It is meaningless in itself. The transformation that occurs in concept formation does not imbue reality with meaning but allows meaning where there is none.

represents a valuation. Rickert argues that concepts cannot be formed through simple representation. The subject must be an active participant in concept formation, one who is capable of recognizing and affirming meaning. “[N]atural or historical concept formation [is] the meaning conferring act.”⁵⁹

What exactly does the subject recognize and affirm as meaningful in an act of concept formation? For Rickert reality does not, in itself, contain a rational order. If meaning only becomes apparent in relation to the subject and is without any objective grounding then the method of concept formation turns out to be purely subjective. How can meaning be objective? Rickert answers that the valuation that affirms meaning is directed toward an independently objective value, a value that grants objectivity to the act of affirmation. Meaning is not a part of immediately perceived reality; neither does the subject place it there arbitrarily. Meaning is given in the act of concept formation as we encounter an objective value, i.e. an ideal that is apprehended as ought, an obligation demanding recognition and the positive valuation of regions of reality that stand in relation to this value.

According to Rickert, concepts are formed in an individual mental act. Concepts are universal because the act of concept formation itself has the character of a universal obligation given to each consciousness in virtue of its rationality. Rickert agrees with the belief, common among axiologists, that “the penetration to valid mandatory values is in some manner really possible” and attempts to discover “how this is the case”.⁶⁰ His answer is that these values are accessed in the act of concept formation by providing an end to direct the activity. Like Kant, Rickert holds that consciousness finds reality to be meaningful in an individual mental act, but unlike Kant, Rickert does not believe that this

⁵⁹ Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Understanding, p.105.

⁶⁰ Findlay, Axiological Ethics, 14.

act is independent or self-causing. Reason is not an end in itself but finds an end in axiological values. The activity of concept formation is possible only in virtue of these values that direct it.

Contradicting this view, Gallie's philosophy of concept formation can only be accomplished in public discourse. Gallie's concepts are constructions. The valid understanding of a concept requires that an individual enter into the act of concept formation by offering his own favored interpretation in debate. This means that concepts are open to testing by public contest. One tests one's interpretation by comparing it to others that are competing for support. The subject is responsible for assessing the performance of his chosen interpretation and for contributing to its success by offering rational reasons for its superiority relative to others offered. A rational subject recognizes that an interpretation is founded upon and must be given up relative to others that are more comprehensive and coherent. The concept includes all interpretations and will refer to any or all strands of its development depending on its use. The meaning of a concept therefore is determined socially, as many interpretations will come together to comprise it, but the mechanism of the selection of these interpretations is the historical individual, who acts out of a particular context.

Prior to any particular act of concept formation there must be a valuation by the subject who must hold that the whole enterprise of concept formation is valuable and that he wants to become involved in it. The individual must invest himself in the debate, and not debate from rhetorical pleasure. The subject must value learning to be willing to offer his interpretations in debate and be ready to give it up if it is shown to be inadequate. The subject who doesn't hold these values may well remain satisfied with his initial interpretation, finding comfort in its familiarity.

The original valuation, which conditions concept formation, is not made relative to any overarching value. There is no assumed entity or axiological value, such as truth, for example, which stands out above all others and demands recognition. Gallie is more likely to say, following C.S. Peirce, who was the subject of his first philosophical book, that this original valuation, which initiates the development of valid concepts, is based on a habitual tendency of the subject and cannot be explained with reference to anything other than historical being. Peirce argues that “if we probe back in an attempt to understand any particular thought, we should find prior thoughts giving place to habitual and in the end to purely instinctive responses, adapted to the course of experience by means that are entirely beyond intelligent control”.⁶¹ Following this account, “it may be impossible in principle - not simply because of our lack of observational or experimental or imaginative skill - to pinpoint the origins of thought, or of intellectual life, in any given individual”. Gallie argues that this suggestion agrees with common sense: a rational person would not attempt to designate “the exact moment at which a child can have been said to have begun to talk or to have become able to follow a story”.⁶²

I believe that Gallie revisits his analysis of Peirce in many ways in the development of his own philosophy. In addition to his reliance on Peirce’s theory of habit to explain participation in a structured debate as a method to develop concepts, rather than being satisfied to stay shrouded in our own solipsism, his account of meaning is similar to that found in Peirce’s philosophy. In Gallie’s philosophy, an interpretation is not part of a concept until it is offered in debate. No matter how much it is valued by the interpreter pre-debate, even if it is a suitable interpretation of the concept in question, an interpretation has no meaning relative to the public act of concept formation until it

⁶¹ Gallie, Peirce and Pragmatism, 73.

⁶² Gallie, Peirce and Pragmatism, 72.

becomes part of that concept's public development. Only in comparison with other interpretations offered in debate does the meaning of any particular interpretation become apparent. The meaning of any interpretation is therefore relative to other interpretations that attempt to explain the concept in question. Only in a historical relation is its value apparent. Similarly, in Peirce's philosophy, the meaning of a given sign is only accessible through its relation to other signs. "The meaning of any sign can be understood only in virtue of the ways certain other related signs point to, represent, or more generally bear on, the object of the original sign."⁶³

Gallie's method of concept formation has much in common with Peirce's pragmatism, despite the criticisms he made in relation to it which were presented in the last chapter. The full nature of this relation is too deep to do justice to in these pages. Briefly however, I would like to note that Peirce's pragmatism recognizes the meaning of a sign or proposition in the course of experience based on responses or effects that it generates. Therefore the sign has the form of a hypothesis: the use of a sign is an experiment designed to show its meaning. Gallie likewise presents an epistemology in which an interpretation is tentatively offered, whose value is justified only subsequently by its performance in debate. The effect that one's interpretation ultimately has on the concept's development, how other participant's react to it, either acting to support it or devising more sophisticated interpretations to combat it, is not predictable in advance. The value of any interpretation is therefore only experientially, or as Gallie, would say, historically realized. Much of Gallie's epistemology is based on a careful reading of Peirce's pragmatism.

Criticism

⁶³ Gallie, Peirce and Pragmatism, 137.

The main criticism I present against Rickert's philosophy is that he advances a mistaken view of history that encourages a view of history as a process marked by the actions of a select group of people. These people are supposedly powerful enough to siphon true value through the veil of subjectivity, to affect historical development, while others remain powerless to take up occupancy on the historical stage. In Rickert's philosophy, historically essential individuals, as opposed to other individuals (the masses), who are not essential to a valid historical understanding. The former deserve to have texts written about them and be the subject of classroom education while the latter are meaningless from the standpoint of historical study. These historically essential individuals function to express values that Rickert describes as valid and that characterize their particular culture.

Rickert conceives of history as a rising and falling of prevalent cultures. These cultures can be identified by the values esteemed in each. The values that occupy a given culture, that define its history, belong to a timeless set of values that Rickert defines as independently valid. It does not matter which of these a culture esteems as the most important, as long as they value one from this set they can be identified on its basis. A collection of these values may be esteemed in the one culture; they are not mutually exclusive but complementary. The values that a historically distant culture esteems can be understood by the historian even though these are not the values presently esteemed in his own culture due to the independent validity they possess which causes them to remain theoretically, if not historically present.

Rickert argues that to understand an individual as historically meaningful, he must necessarily be a historically essential individual, that is, he must have a direct relation to one of the values esteemed in his culture. What is the nature of the relation the historian recognizes between certain individuals and universal values? Rickert says that the

historically essential individual acts as an instance of the value in operation. The historically essential individual is therefore an expression of the ideal and yet he is real. The historically meaningful individual is one who is capable of uniting the ideal and the real, letting his action be an example of the ideal in reality. Such is a historically essential individual, according to Rickert. The individual who acts as a vehicle of this union deserves to be credited as historically meaningful. History will consist in keeping a continuous record of these historically essential individuals. By studying these and the values they represent, we can get an idea of the culture in which they were embedded. Rickert further holds that there is one line of historical development which can be traced out by identifying which individuals were historically meaningful and which were not. For example, he says, "Friedrich Wilhelm IV's refusal of the German Imperial Crown is historically essential, while the tailor who made his coats, while just as real, is historically insignificant."⁶⁴

By restricting historical meaning to those few people who do something outstanding Rickert denies social history. Rickert does not seem to recognize that people, however, powerful, do not act in isolation. Like an actor in a movie, the historically essential actor can only stand in the spotlight if there are a host of other background actors who provide his context, supporting him, opposing him, etc. These people get no credit in Rickert's thought. Rickert understands the individual only to the extent that the individual manifests a typical value. Instead of viewing the individual on the basis of his particular choices and experiences, Rickert understands him on the basis of values that are the common object of appraisal in his culture. Heidegger was Rickert's student and credits Rickert with shaping his early philosophy, even as he turned against him. He argues that philosophers of Rickert's time "employed a kind of type construction in their

⁶⁴ Rickert, Science and History, 91.

theories of history”.⁶⁵ In Rickert’s case there was an assumption that “transcendent values presupposed typification of relative human values in relation to an alleged absolute source”.⁶⁶ The axiological values Rickert discusses provide historical coherence and are the objects around which individuals of the same period are united and can be studied in a scientific manner or generality.

In Rickert’s writing there is an underlying support of heroism, a perspective that credits certain individuals with extraordinary powers. A small number of people are considered to be exceptional and stand out from the run of the mill citizen such that they are worthy of public recognition and praise.

The practice of assuming the heroic is prevalent in contemporary culture. With the rising individualism and assumption that many decisions are subjective and beyond public discourse comes the desire for communal experiences to bind oneself to one’s community. For example the Olympics is highly regarded because it presents an opportunity for bringing many people together in a common desire for national recognition. Olympians who succeed are cheered in popular press and presented as outstanding citizens who children should look up to. Again, heroes emerge from tragedy when there is a need to find comfort in others. For example in the wake of the September eleventh terrorist attacks heroes were made and paraded in front of the emotionally fragile population, bringing a feeling of community to a group of people suffering from the wrenching personal experience of losing a loved one. But this way of uniting a community, by offering up a hero to become a celebrated object, is not the only way. In fact, our earliest ancestors operated differently according to David Suzuki.

⁶⁵ Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Understanding, 123.

⁶⁶ Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Understanding, 131.

Suzuki is referring to nomadic groups of hunters and gatherers who live in harmonious groups where “heroes are avoided -individual needs are looked after but individual accomplishments are consciously downplayed”.⁶⁷ Presumably, group survival is more important than the exploits of any individual. No individual is therefore more significant than any other; both responsibility and reward are shared equally. Each individual is essential to the survival of community regardless of the particular role they play.

Whereas Rickert presents an epistemology in which certain individuals are historically meaningful and concept formation is an individual act, Gallie argues that concepts are formed only by a collection of people who come together in the interest of ensuring conceptual validity and progress. For Gallie, meaning is only possible in a community of thinkers. In such a community debate will flourish and in this competition the unique strength of an interpretation will emerge along with its weaknesses. While discoveries are possible and great thinkers offer interesting and powerful theses that are to be appreciated for their originality, there is an underlying recognition that it is the field of inquiry that is most important. Each contribution to this, not only the ‘most significant’ must be celebrated.

Imagination

A second way in which Gallie’s philosophy is preferable to Rickert’s is that he is able to explain the use of imagination as a powerful cognitive tool, one that receives no attention in Rickert’s methodology. Imagination is often credited for spawning celebrated works of the human mind: visual arts, stories, or as Gallie argues, history. Gallie argues that historical concepts are rationally valid even though imagination is used as a tool in

⁶⁷ Suzuki, *A Planet for the Taking*.

forming them. He opens the door to the claim that we can have rational discussions about aesthetic concepts, usually thought to be subjective and not open to rational debate. Even though a disagreement may not in principle be resolvable by hard evidence, it may yield important insights unavailable outside such discourse. Debate provides space for engaging with the other. The discourse that ensues allows one to exceed subjective limitations and understand issues from another's perspective. But, in order for this to occur one must use 'philosophical imagination'. For Gallie, imagination is not a separate faculty of mind apart from reason, but is a cognitive tool essential to historical study.

Understanding history is not just a matter of recoding events. To do history we must also understand the relations between events and how one entails another. From any one event many alternatives are possible. The ability to see why any particular event was realized from others in a given situation is not afforded by virtue of knowledge of a law, i.e. of temporal succession, to which it conforms. Historical events are unique. They cannot be understood from law. In order to understand why one possibility was actualized, Gallie says, we must use our imagination.

A particular historical event depends for its actualization on human agency, i.e. judgment. Judgment is at least partially dependent on one's historical position. To understand why an event happened it is necessary to understand the historical position of the individual(s) involved in its realization. This understanding would not be possible if we were locked into our historical norms. In Gallie's philosophy, imagination is the key to overcoming historical limitations.

Imagination allows one to put oneself in the position of another. To understand how this is possible, consider the activity of debate. In order to be successful in debate, Gallie argues, a participant must have sensitivity to rival interpretations. He must know an interpretation's strengths and weaknesses in order to successfully support his own

avored interpretation against it. This knowledge is most successfully gained, Gallie argues, by employing one's imagination. A participant in debate must appraise a rival's position and discern reasons why their favored interpretation exceeds that of a rival. All participants in debate may have rational reasons for accepting the interpretation that they accept. These reasons are contingent but logically compelling in the case of the individual under investigation. Understanding the numerous reasons why a particular interpretation appears to be the best from another's perspective puts one in a better position to defend his favored interpretation and participate in debate.

Just as in debate where we can understand the validity of accepting a rival interpretation by considering things from a different person's perspective, so too can we put ourselves in a historical position that is not our own. We can overcome our own historical existence by using imagination to recreate the circumstances in which a particular outdated interpretation appeared to be the most accurate. By means of this recreation we can understand why an interpretation that is now easily seen to be inadequate relative to contemporary standards was accepted in the past. Although we are not thereby forced to accept it, we can feel the validity of the judgment to accept it relative to its own historical locale. We are able to understand the history of a concept by using imagination to bracket off our own expectations to recreate distant historical perspectives. In this way, we are able to feel the logical force of interpretations that are outdated and find them valid while not accepting them as the best interpretation.

Imagination is not to be thought of as a separate faculty with mystical powers that allows us to view a reality that is not immediately present. Gallie argues that we use our imagination often and suggests that we understand how it operates by focusing again on the familiar event of following a narrative. We find a narrative meaningful by becoming emotionally involved in the life of the characters. This is accomplished by putting

ourselves in their position. We are then able to feel the effect of the occurrences in the story as the character is imagined to feel them. Depending on the author's talents we may find ourselves cheering on a character we would not champion in real life. The narrative engages our imagination in such a way that we are able to understand things from a different perspective. This is what the researcher must do to escape the confines of her own context to understand a historically distant individual.

Historical Relativity and Subjectivity: A Defense

For Gallie, all knowledge is built from judgments that are conditioned by one's historical situation. Every "judgment or assertion or endeavor must somehow be pegged to a certain on-going pattern of life."⁶⁸ Gallie might be charged with developing a theory of concept formation that cannot free itself from the problem of 'historicism'; a term Rickert was one of the first to use to describe knowledge that is merely historically relative. Saying that knowledge is historically relative means that it is influenced so strongly by one's historical position that it could not be validated outside of the time period in which it originated.⁶⁹ R.G. Collingwood, a philosopher of history greatly admired by Gallie, developed an explanation of historical knowledge that is susceptible to this criticism.

Collingwood attempted to give historical knowledge a firm grounding by showing that it was based on absolute presuppositions that were not themselves the answer to any particular question but were primary in our intellectual development. "Absolute presuppositions provide the basic framework within which, and only within which, all questions of a particular period or civilization can be significantly put."⁷⁰ These

⁶⁸ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 196.

⁶⁹ Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Understanding, 32.

⁷⁰ Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 213.

presuppositions could not be doubted but were held with certainty by those who acted in relation to them. They did, however, change from one historical epoch to another.

Because we cannot question the constellation of presuppositions that structure our own historical epoch without falling into irrationality, we cannot form concepts of historically distant events, which are dependent on a different constellation of presupposition. Any knowledge was therefore historically relative; it lost its validity outside of the framework created by acceptance of certain absolute presuppositions.

Traditionally, knowledge was thought to be valuable because it was not historically relative. Knowledge supposedly could be passed on from one generation to the next without losing its value. It was a form of security. People who came from a tradition of fishing, for example, had an expertise in the field that was built from many generations of work. Knowledge would be shared, thus ensuring future success. We are now living in a society which views wealth as the primary commodity that can be transmitted from one generation to the next without losing its value. Most people accept that knowledge is a temporary expression of a view that will eventually be shown inadequate and lose its value relative to new demands and technological advancement. I agree with Gallie that it is important to establish that our knowledge claims are valuable beyond the context of any particular enquiry without going to the extreme of demanding that these be regarded as certain.

Gallie argues that concepts are essentially historical. Therefore, if we are able to understand a concept it is necessary to understand something of its historical development. A concept is not valuable based on its ability to act as a means to a given end, in which case its history would be irrelevant. A concept is made up of all of the interpretations that have been appraised as the best for understanding it. While this appraisal changes, the interpretations remain a part of the concept. We are able to get a

comprehensive understanding of a concept because we are able to use imagination to see how it was relevant in situations different from our own. Recognizing that imagination has this use allows Gallie to show what Collingwood could not, that is, how we can access and understand knowledge that is not acceptable within the basic framework that characterizes our particular historical area. In Gallie's philosophy, this knowledge is still valuable to understanding of the concept in question as it provides the space in which the concept has flourished. An important part of developing one's own interpretation is to secure it against the inadequacies inherent in its historical counterparts, to do this we must be familiar with the concepts' history.

Gallie's philosophy can also be criticized for being purely subjective. He argues that the judgments that condition concept formation must be justified relative to the individual subject rather than an external reality. Only by enquiring into why a particular person made the judgment that he did can we comment on its rationality. Person A might judge that X is a better alternative than Y, while person B might judge that Y is better than X. Neither judgment is necessarily wrong. Depending on the context of the judgment, both judgments can be considered valid.

Gallie adheres to a non-cognitivist theory of judgment. Non-cognitivism is the position that moral judgments do not correspond to a reality that could prove them right or wrong. Consequently they cannot be described as true or false. The historical 'object' to which Gallie refers is originally open to multiple interpretations. A single interpretation could not exhaust its being. Therefore one's own judgment over which interpretation to support cannot be said to be true or false. No interpretation can be true in the sense that it exhaustively represents the reality under investigation. Each interpretation includes an evaluation in which the subject appraises what part of the reality under investigation is most important to him. These evaluations are not made in relation to a value with

“impersonal validity” as Rickert suggests; rather Gallie agrees with the non-cognitivists in asserting that value is “something of which the individuals are the ultimate arbiters.”⁷¹

Gallie argues that we can test the rationality of judgments even if they are ‘subjective’ in the sense indicated. To do this Gallie argues that we must replace “the idea of rational proof or justification by the idea of the habit of discussion as the hall-mark of the rational will”.⁷² If a person can and will logically discuss his chosen interpretation in debate, providing rational arguments and examples to show its validity, and if this person is open to changing his view relative to this dialogue, then we must agree that he is acting rationally. His judgment to support a given alternative is valid. Gallie argues that this decision is objective because the historian, once he looks at the reasons for the particular person’s decision, will also arrive at the decision made by him. A historian can use imagination to recreate the circumstances in which a particular decision is made, and understand the reasons for it, affirming its rationality.

Metaphysics

Rickert’s philosophy stands or falls with the existence of a domain of valid values separate and independent from historical existence. His interpretation of the meaning of life is grounded on these values. Rickert “insists upon what he calls a complete reversal of the usual way of understanding values, which is by means of an analysis of the subject or person”, rather the “ meaning of the subject and its acts can be grasped only on the basis of an analysis of values”.⁷³ Valid values give a structure to human existence and a direction to human action by appearing as the ultimate end for human reason. It is in communion with these valid values that we are able to transcend the status of ordinary

⁷¹ Lovibond, Realism and Imagination in Ethics, 2.

⁷² Gallie, Philosophy and the Historical Understanding, 209.

⁷³ Oakes, Weber and Rickert, 98.

existence and enjoy the finer virtues of valid knowledge. It is in virtue of these values that life has meaning.

One might ask from whence these values come? Why do they appear to the human subject? How do they come to possess the power of independent validity? It seems that the values that are supposed to provide an end to our intellectual endeavors actually open up a whole new set of unanswered questions. Rickert is unclear about the status of these values. It is fair, because he follows in the Kantian tradition, for the reader to assume that they are transcendental entities. Gallie was right, when he briefly discusses Rickert in his writing, to claim that this theory of historical concept formation went off course due to his being “humorlessly absorbed in the task of hitching history to its transcendental star” with the result that he “ignores our everyday experience”.⁷⁴ Rickert assumes the existence of a set of overarching general values due to his “theoretical faith in the existence of transcendental meaning”.⁷⁵ In response to the idea that meaning must have a transcendental source, Gallie presents his own writings. Gallie shows how meaning appears on the basis of features present in our everyday experience.

Gallie’s epistemology agrees with the principle commonly known as Ockam’s razor: that entities are not to be multiplied beyond necessity. His theory of concept formation does not rely on the existence of entities situated outside the regular flow of historical experience. Concepts are formed relative to the judgments of a collection of people. These judgments are based in one’s historical position and interest. They are not justified in relation to anything that transcends these.

This raises the question of whether or not Gallie’s epistemology can be rightfully understood as having a metaphysical basis. Following C.D. Broad, depending on his

⁷⁴ Gallie, Philosophy and the Problem of Historical Meaning, 17.

⁷⁵ Barash, Martin Heidegger and the Problem of Historical Understanding, 32.

interest in history, it is possible to classify a metaphysician into two main groups. Philosophers of history may be critical or speculative.⁷⁶ Rickert adheres to this division but uses the terms formal and materialist to refer to philosophers of history instead, of critical and speculative. Rickert claims that he belongs to the formal class of philosophers and is critical of the latter,

Formal or critical philosophers of history attempt to discern the limits of historical study. These philosophers “consider the problem of the “objectivity of historical knowledge”, “the relations between historical knowledge and other forms of knowledge” and the value of a study of the past”.⁷⁷ Materialist or speculative philosophers of history are harder to unite around common themes, but they do share a desire to uncover “the most basic factor operative within history” or “some meaning within the whole of man’s historical experience”.⁷⁸ The materialist philosopher is said to have two ways of proceeding. He may attempt to uncover “a law of history, which serves as an explanation of the ultimate direction of historical change”, or he may make use of “some explanatory concept... applicable to every crucial event and... capable of affording a basis for grasping the meaning of the (historical) process”.⁷⁹

The latter strategies employed in the materialist tradition can be criticized for undermining the purpose of historical study, which is to understand the individual entity or event in its uniqueness. Ultimately these achieve understanding by uniting particular events or entities through an abstraction that focuses on some common feature of their being or showing the event or entity to be a case of a general law or concept, rather than

⁷⁶ Mandlebaum, Philosophy, History and the Sciences, 73.

⁷⁷ Mandlebaum, Philosophy, History and the Sciences, 73-4.

⁷⁸ Mandlebaum, Philosophy, History and the Sciences, 74.

⁷⁹ Mandlebaum, Philosophy, History and the Sciences, 74-75.

explaining what makes these unique. This charge I will argue cannot be made against the materialist (speculative) philosophy offered by W.B. Gallie.

While Gallie does not explicitly claim to be a speculative metaphysician, I argue that he can be rightly understood as belonging to this field. He stays away from words like 'ultimate principle' because of the tendency to interpret this term as indicating a way of uniting particular beings by pointing toward some shared feature of their existence. Despite his reluctance however, I think that he does base his epistemology on certain metaphysical suppositions. In particular, I suggest that underlying Gallie's theory of concept formation is his own interpretation of Peirce's doctrine of universal categories; Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness. Peirce argues "that there are three modes of being" and that "we can directly observe them in elements of whatever is at any time before the mind in any way".⁸⁰ A discussion of these categories will shed light on the metaphysical basis of Gallie's theory of essentially contested concepts.

For Peirce the category of Firstness refers to the spontaneous quality of reality. It refers to the possibility of complete independence or self-positing. Firstness is "the mode of being which consists in its subject's being positively such as it is regardless of all else".⁸¹ For example, firstness may consist in hearing an isolated musical note as a single sound independent of its placement in a melody or scale. Firstness is that form of consciousness that is simple sensation and is not yet knowledge, here one is not yet conscious of hearing sound but only hears it. Firstness, therefore, is possibility, not yet realized as actual fact. Peirce refers to this awareness as feeling or "immediate consciousness...which involved no analysis, comparison or any process whatsoever...and

⁸⁰ Peirce, "Principles of Phenomenology", 75.

⁸¹ Peirce, "Principles of Phenomenology", 76.

which is of itself all that it is... an instance of that sort of element of consciousness which is all that it is positively, in itself, regardless of anything else”.⁸²

“The second category... is the element of struggle.” Here an instance of firstness is forcefully interrupted so that we become conscious of a change or relation between this first instance and a second. In secondness, consciousness is not of an independent quality but of the “mutual action between two things, regardless of any sort of third or medium”.⁸³ This relation constitutes a fact “so much as it belongs to a particular time and place”.⁸⁴ Secondness brings our attention to the sensation of a single entity by interrupting its being and thereby causing a reflection on this element through a comparison with what was initially present. As “putting your shoulder against a door and trying to force it open against an unseen, silent and unknown resistance. We have a two-sided consciousness of effort and resistance”. An element is thus known in its difference from that other to which it is compared. Secondness is a “mode of being of one thing which consists in how a second object is”.⁸⁵

“Continuity represents Thirdness almost to perfection.” Thirdness refers to the “medium or connecting bond”⁸⁶ between events or entities. Thirdness is a general mode of being that orders particular relations. “It is that which is in virtue of imparting a quality to relations in the future”, it is a mode of being that “moulds reactions to itself.”⁸⁷ It therefore unifies diverse beings by (partially) legislating their being. Thirdness is the mode of being that encourages the development of habitual action and grants the intellect legitimacy to conceive of action as governed by law. Thirdness allows one to soften the

⁸² Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology”, 81-2.

⁸³ Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology”, 89.

⁸⁴ Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology”, 77.

⁸⁵ Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology”, 76.

⁸⁶ Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology”, 80.

⁸⁷ Peirce, “Principles of Phenomenology”, 91.

blow of fact on one's inner world of fancy by making the future predictable, therefore allowing one to modify existing habits enough to resist this intrusion. It therefore can be thought of as mediation between the individual awareness attained in the first mode of being and the factual reality experienced in the second.

Of course there is much more to be said about Peirce's categories and threefold analysis of reality. Enough has been said however to defend the thesis that I put forward, that Gallie's epistemology is based in an interpretation of Peirce's metaphysics. There is in Gallie's theory of concept formation an argument that each experience is composed of three irreducible elements. Experience is for Gallie, internally directed, social and historical. Experience is internally directed and without determination by an external telos or imperative. It is social because experience comes to have meaning only in a competitive relation with others. It is historical because it is a continuous process, tied to a past and open to a future. Once these three elements of experience are understood, within them, the echo of Peirce's categories is easily heard.

For Gallie, the original, unrefined source of relation between man and reality, the faculty that accommodates the givenness of reality prior to relation with any tools of conceptualization, is feeling. Feeling is an agent's unique response to a posited entity. In concept formation, feeling provokes the initial unreflective acceptance of one possible interpretation of reality that is present to the agent on the basis of his historical being. There is not external telos or imperative that makes this acceptance necessary. This acceptance is without reason other than the actual feeling of its presence. Feeling is unique to the individual and cannot be shared linguistically as understanding or explanations can. Feeling signifies the acceptance of an interpretation or a possible way of understanding but cannot yet justify this interpretation as actually valid relative to the public act of concept formation. In order to validate an interpretation to show that it is

actually a source of understanding, the agent must emerge out of his own internal perceptions and participate in the public act of debate.

In debate the actual meaning of an interpretation, initially given as a possible source of understanding in feeling, is realized. The context needed here is one of competition and struggle as it is in this competitive relation that the validity of one's own interpretation will become apparent. The interpretation will become known in its difference from others. Its particularity will become apparent as it is confronted with other interpretations. An interpretation may only withstand the assaults made on it if it has its own resources, its own logical strengths and weaknesses, to resist the pressures paced on it by others.

This relation of interpretations to one another occurs in a particular time and place. The triumph of a particular alternative in a discrete round of debate is a fact, but cannot ensure its continuity as the best interpretations possible. Understanding is therefore historically realized: it is tied to a past and opened to a future. The validation of a particular interpretation as the best is only a provisional act and must be reassessed when new interpretations come along, or improvements are made in others. The debate is continuous such that the interpretation that is accepted as the best today is best relative to those interpretations supported in the past, and it shapes the form the interpretations in the future must take by presenting challenges that they must meet if they are to win support. It therefore partially controls the future by setting standards that any new interpretation must meet if it is to be the best. The historical nature of debate mediates and unifies interpretations that have once been the best but have been replaced by new interpretations.

In Gallie's philosophy, continuity is not achieved by generating certain knowledge that holds universally, but rather locally, in each historical relation as the

present influences the future. While Gallie argues that exhaustive prediction is impossible, the future can only occur within the boundaries specified by the previous moment. This previous moment must have some provision in it for the next. There must be a logical continuity between these. The particular source of this continuity is specified locally, within particular historical relations, rather than existing as an overarching principle. The resolution of a given moment is therefore determined contingently by human agency within a range of logically possible alternatives. There is therefore, real change in history. The direction of the future is contingent on the development of the present. This development will rarely be straightforward but can be analyzed from varying perspectives to reveal the existence of diverse reasons for a particular occurrence. It is expected then, that concept formation will reflect this divergence. There will be disagreements about what is the ultimate reason for something that has occurred. A situation of essential contestability emerges. Gallie suggests that while it is necessary to appraise a single interpretation as the best relative to one's own interest, it is to one's advantage to understand the strengths of each interpretation, as this multifarious understanding will best reflect the complex reality under investigation.

To recap the argument of this section, I have suggested that Gallie's account of concept formation is an interpretation of the threefold nature of reality present in the metaphysics of C.S. Peirce. Gallie uses Peirce's categories of Firstness, Secondness and Thirdness to develop his own account of human experience. For Gallie, experience originally responds through feeling to the qualities that Peirce describes as spontaneous and original, comprising the first mode of consciousness. In order for this immediate positing of phenomenon to be understood there must be a relation in which competition causes the inherent forcefulness of each to emerge. This is the second mode of consciousness. Third, each relation must be understood as part of a continuous

development. Peirce refers to this continuity by various names, i.e. law, sympathy habit, love. For Gallie, this continuity is historical development.

It is important to note that Gallie's understanding of history is much different than the common understanding of time. Time is colloquially considered a continuous extension quantified by discrete moments through the adoption of a unit of measurement. The unit repeats infinitely, allowing us to understand time advancing from one moment to the next. This conception of time will not help to understand what Gallie means by history. The foregoing analysis is possible only by assuming a subject- object dichotomy in which the subject observes time from a point external to it, objectifying temporal movement by agreeing to view it as a structure of fixed intervals. The subject observes that experience happens in time while assuming that identity is secured against such. Identity has a static being unaffected by temporal change. History, on the other hand, connotes presence of time in the self; that is, the claim that experience is historical amounts to the assertion that temporal experience constitutes that self. The self is not situated somewhere outside of time but is completely present in the individual's unique life experiences and relations. An individual is constituted by his history. Unlike the abstract concept of universal time, history offers or posits something that constitutes the subject: it gives something with which the individual must content. What is this gift?

Philosophers have frequently lamented the passage of time. Time is usually thought of as a negative force, having the power to frustrate human creativity and ingenuity by robbing it of any permanence. In time, the products of one's life inevitably crumble. Gallie's concept of history shows how the passing of time is a positive force. Gallie, who accepts that knowledge is essentially fallible, flips the question around by asking what time offers the cognitive subject.

In Gallie's writing, historical development is a contingent process. Contingency gives the gift of freedom. In a contingent process there is room for directing, within a range of alternatives, how one event leads into another. While certain perspectives conceive of this relation as governed by law, this outlook is only afforded through a structuring discourse that invents strict rules for interpreting the process under investigation. In other fields, where there are no hard and fast rules, their absence allows for more freedom in interpretation. The particular discourse one is involved in determines how much freedom there is in interpreting how one event leads into another one.

If time progressed in a uniform fashion, i.e., if the passage from one moment to the next were exhaustively predictable based on natural laws or patterns, then we would be faced with a mechanistic action in which we could not intervene. The presence of contingency ensures that we are able to influence the course of the future from within the present. History is the free movement of experience, in which actors take advantage of the contingent moment to collectively shape the direction the future will take, Gallie understands history to be a continuous production of diversity.

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