The Dogma of Cultural Relativity: A Critique of the Foundations of the Social Sciences

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1. The social sciences often presuppose a theory of knowledge and belief that takes the name cultural relativism or historicism. Anthropology and sociology in particular will judge the truth of normative and sometimes even descriptive knowledge as temporally determined social constructs that stand no chance of being any more true than claims of those in other times and cultures. When the foundations of the social sciences or the particular underlying methodology of many of the social sciences rests on such a presupposition, it seems only fair to justify the merits of such an axiological methodology.

The topic I wish to address is the possibility of overcoming an historically coherentist theory of justified knowledge for a metaphysically anti-naturalistic, conceptually rational, indirectly real, epistemological foundation of justified knowledge. Such a foundation for justified knowledge holds the key for grounding the social sciences in an epistemology from which truth claims are based on inductive probability and logical consistency with the rest of the social science's claims. The implicit goal, therefore, is to transcend the problems of historicism and the relativity of descriptive and normative knowledge and show that although truth can never be reached with absolute certainty in the sciences; that a justified foundation for making the claims that the social sciences make can be ascertained in a way made impossible by historicism. The naïve objective relativity of historicism that denies the possibility of truth will be exchanged for a more sophisticated objective relativity that grounds the basic foundations of how social scientific knowledge is justified, while allowing for the possibility that the doxastic ascent from first person experience to third person realist truth claims about the world of the social sciences can be erroneous without undermining the highly probabilistically true social scientific claims and withstanding the discovery of an erroneous fact. Whereas historicism has no foundations and threatens to make social scientific knowledge arbitrary, the foundations for justification in our theory, even with the relativity of knowledge, make the social sciences probabilistically more true to a greater degree than historicism ever could. The epistemological foundation I wish to investigate is the

conceptual pragmatism of Clarence Irving Lewis, and to inquire as to whether historical relativism rests on a mistaken epistemology that can be replaced with the notion of the *pragmatic a priori*.

Now the basic tenet of historicism seems undeniable, that each and every one of us exists in a particular cultural-historical context. Particularly since the time of Hegel, the historically relative realization of being bound to a specific time and anthropological environment has been crucial to any theory of knowledge. No one would deny that historicism must now be accounted for. What does not follow from the discovery of historicism, however, is the way in which most philosophers and social scientists wish to define the concept. Historicism becomes a matter of historical meaning trumping both logical and psychological considerations. The fact that each and every person is temporal and exists in a particular cultural-historical context does not logically infer that all knowledge, descriptive or normative, is arbitrary. Conceptual pragmatism wishes to argue that logical meaning is still primordial and that both the historical and psychological components of knowledge are explained vis-à-vis rational means, through conceptual methods that are themselves what make historical and psychological understanding possible. *In historicism the historical content of the cultural context trumps the power of the a priori methodological approach that opens up that historical content in the first place, whereas in conceptual pragmatism the methodology that makes objects of knowledge accessible is primary.* In other words, we have in epistemology the ability to either prioritize the content of our experience or the methods of justification and our method that distinguishes the characteristics of our experience. The first we call prioritizing the content of our experience, the second we call prioritizing the methodism of our experience. Historicism privileges the content, whereas we shall prioritize the method. The priority of epistemological methodism is assumption one.

Historicism and logical psychologism are metaphysically naturalistic and our theory is metaphysically anti-naturalistic. If logical psychologism is correct, this means that all our knowledge can be reduced to the physical phenomena in our brains. Likewise, if historicism is true, this means that all our interactions with the world and our body of inferences can be reduced to our naturally pre-determined existence in the world. This would mean that all the facts about the world are temporally determined in relation

to history and historical influence as the primordial grounds of human knowledge. Metaphysical anti-naturalism is assumption two.

Historicism dictates that the corresponding truth of reality cannot be known because the content of what constitutes truth and falsity change over time and place depending on cultural-historical factors. We must live with agreeing to disagree. Furthermore, historicism not only makes truth relative but relativizes the justification people use in order to arrive at purported truth claims. Therefore, the arbitrariness of historicism, fundamentally, is an epistemological position of subjectivity, either a type of simple subjectivity or *cultural-historical* "inter-subjectivity".[1] Most at issue is whether our propositions possess any sort of shared justification.

To ward off the arbitrary relativism of an epistemological position of historicism, there must be a consideration of the theories of knowledge and belief underlying the supposition that either history or apriorism is foundational (*presupposing a foundation exists*). The thesis of this paper, therefore, is to put forth the conceptual pragmatism of Clarence Irving Lewis as an epistemological theory that provides the means for overcoming the problems historicism has traditionally plagued philosophy with (viz. arbitrary relativism, skepticism, nihilism). Through a theory of conceptual pragmatism

[1] To classify only two types of subjective may appear to be overly reductive. Simple subjectivity can take many forms (phenomenalism, certain forms of idealism, et cetera) as can inter-subjectivity (cultural relativism, universal subjectivity of human psychology/human nature, et cetera). Inter-subjectivity is generally taken to be the standard of objectivity, but I find this deceiving, insofar as it is not justified to consider all types of inter-subjectivity to be on equal foundational levels. If all A's are B's and all B's are C's, then all A's are C's. There is a sort of inter-subjective agreement about this in logic, but to consider this sort of inter-subjective agreement to be the same thing as two Babylonians believing in the god Ba'al are not foundationally the same inter-subjective agreement. I therefore want to differentiate historical foundational inter-subjective agreement from logical and connotative inter-subjective agreement as an entirely different foundation, for the first is a sort of coherentism of justification, whereas the second is a true foundation. This interpretation is true to Lewis' own insights, as shall be seen later on. In the broadest sense of the term, any inter-subjective understanding is a second order conceptual agreement, insofar as there is shared "objective" meaning between two minds, at such a point where the status of truth value of the concept is bracketed. But the problem with the sort of historicism which is being critiqued is that the differentiation between objectivity and corresponding truth is not being made, where other philosophers could easily make the distinction. The language of objectivity and corresponding truth are often interchangeable terminology, and therefore to proceed in the framework from which historicism sees things, I have chosen to adopt their perspective. Otherwise, I would make the distinction between objectivity and truth as correspondence, and say objectivity can be merely second order and conceptual in nature and therefore all forms of inter-subjectivity would be classified as objective. Since the issue here is the truth as such, this distinction is not made, and that is why I have lumped simple subjectivity and inter-subjectivity together. Hopefully this is clear with the next sentence when I begin talking about "objective truth". For the only way the problem of historicism arises is through a doctrine of realism., which generally takes on the form of truth as correspondence.

we can arrive at a *logical*, instead of a merely historical, theory of meaning that epistemologically explicates and justifies the nature of historical difference without leading to radical conclusions. This will allow for objectivity through the phenomenon of inter-subjective agreement through logical meaning and semantic connotation of an a priori methodology; hence, overcoming arbitrary relativity of historical content. The inter-subjectivity of epistemologically naturalistic history is exchanged for the inter-subjectivity of pragmatic apriorism.

The structure of this paper is as follows: section 2 is an inquiry of the basic nature and structure of historicism, section 3 is an inquiry into the basic nature and structure of conceptual pragmatism, section 4 is an inquiry into meta-ethical (epistemological) relativism, section 5 is an inquiry into descriptive relativism, section 6 is an inquiry into normative relativism of the notion of progress, and finally section 7 is concluding remarks and a report on contemporary work in the late 1990's that could affect the theory of conceptual pragmatism. There is also an appendix that explicates in detail the historicism that the paper is critiquing, namely the Nietzschean-Foucaultian tradition.

2. Before we address the epistemological position of conceptual pragmatism, a working understanding of historicism, particularly its epistemological criteria, is necessary. To re-iterate, historicism, in its broadest form, is the rather uncontroversial proposition that we are all existing in a particular cultural-historical context. I am a 21st century American living in the Midwestern region of the United States. The current events of my time, the socialization into the American culture through my adaptation of social norms and mores, and the social institutions (religious, political, economic, et cetera) all comprise my web of beliefs. My web is also affected by the relative technological advancement of my ambiance, the suppositions of the scientific community that I have adopted, and the linguistic, logic, and semantic rules by which I am self-governed. Historicism wishes to point out that the fundamental postulates with which humans live have changed significantly throughout history. The best and most used example of this is the adoption of Riemannian and Lobachevskian non-Euclidean geometry. Other oft-used examples include scientific ones such as the Copernican revolution, axiomatic set theory, Einsteinian general relativity, plate tectonics; along with the historical instances of cannibalism, slavery, genocide, and extremist periods such as

the Nazis. The fact that historical difference exists and the fact that we are all in a cultural-historical context with certain presuppositions are two points that we shall grant without opposition.

But historicism wishes to go much further, drawing upon these facts to generate further inferences about epistemology. All of these examples are used, from the perspective of historical relativism, to reveal that we are in a continually unsettled state of affairs that, in the midst of the historical context we find ourselves in, are blind to the biases that comprise our own era. The underlying presupposition here, obviously, is that every historically situated person wishes to *correspond* to the true state of affairs, but cannot achieve such a goal because of their proximity to their own era, making them unable to see the error in their own web. The next logical step for the historicist—a point of contention—is to deny any notion of progress or truth through means of sound justification. Since all historical eras have their own shortcomings, since all historical eras have different cohering conceptual frameworks in how they understand reality, then the existence of such disagreement and error in-and-of-itself marks any sort of historical progression of knowledge or objective morality as impossible. In other words, the existence of historical difference is used to self-evidently dictate that no theory of correspondence is successful by taking effects and treating them as causes. Since there is no way to escape historical difference, the historicist argues that interpretation must be either subjective to the individual or sociologically subjective to socialized biases. In the latter case, inter-subjectivity exists, but the proponent of historicism appeals epistemologically to the content of our knowledge to show how varied it is over time. Thus, even inter-subjective historicism undermines any justification criteria by saying that different types of justification have been used over time and there is not indication or methodology that will allow us to say what is more accurate of the real world.

To re-iterate, the potency of historicism arises out of its skeptical critique of theories of knowledge and belief through an appeal to the contradicting nature of the truth claims of different historical peoples. There are two (and only two) major types of critique that will arise from this notion of historicism: simple subjectivity and a sort of inter-subjective cultural relativism. Early Sartre, Nietzsche, and Foucault are good

examples of simple subjectivists, and their historicism reflects this position.[2] All truth (and objectivity) is egocentrically relative to the whims and fancies of the existentially free individual. The choices are truly one's own choices and no other ego will be in the position of judging decisions of others because of the nature and structure of simple subjectivity.[3] Likewise, scientific and other such human inquires fail in empirically corresponding to reality, because the methods of the scientist all have built-in biases as well as implicitly relying on our experiences in ways that make truth impossible to ever find with certainty (though this is by no means only the simple subjectivist's position). On the other hand, we could have the historicism that admits of inter-subjectivity, that is, the agreement of certain propositions of knowledge and valuation, but from a purely anthropological, sociological, or sometimes historical position. That Eskimos, the Roman Empire, Babylonians, or Tutsis historically behaved and interacted in a certain way is derived from the cultural-historical context. *The theory of knowledge and meaning here is primordially historical*. Valuation and knowledge are dependent upon historical factors over and above psychological or rational considerations. In other words, the epistemological foundation of knowledge and valuation for the historicist, of this kind, is the historical meaning. For instance, that the mathematical intuitionists reject the law of the excluded middle would be interpreted as an example of historical meaning trumping rational meaning. Rational (more broadly: logical intension and semantic connotation), in this version of historicism, is not the epistemological foundation of truth or knowledge, but is an historical consequence of certain cultural factors. Both the simple subjectivist and inter-subjectivist version of historicism are to be critiqued. Since the inter-subjectivist version is strongest and most reasonable, this will be our object of interest.

The logical consequence of any epistemological theory foundationally dependent on historical factors, in this particular mode, is that the historical considerations are themselves arbitrary and inventive. By inventive, we mean an ontological status of knowledge that assumes knowledge to be invented instead of discovered. But versions of

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[2] Including Nietzsche in this group is particularly controversial for reasons not worth exploring or defending. Many, however, interpret Nietzsche in this category and therefore serves as a helpful pedagogical device for anyone trying to relate to this line of thinking.

[3] This is not a straw man argument; this is really the simple subjectivist position. If it looks like I am making this position weak, I am not; the position is really just that stupid.

historicism that deal with the historical consciousness in a non-arbitrary way, such as Gadamer's hermeneutical method or Heideggerian phenomenology, are, therefore, not a danger—and are therefore comprehensively in a different category of historical meaning. This is the difference between historicity and historicism, where Gadamer and Heidegger are doing historicity and not the arbitrary relativity of knowledge that undermines philosophy in the way of Foucault or Nietzsche. Perhaps the greatest underlying difference is that historicity is anti-naturalistic and historicism is epistemologically naturalistic. Unfortunately, this paper must presuppose this dichotomy, for there is no time to adequately defend and justify such a complicated issue. But to save difficulties in this paper, I would like to take the luxury of defining historicism narrowly to the confines of which have been heretofore discussed; thus separating it from historicity and those doing historicity.

Even when a culture of people more or less has the same outlook on reality, the underlying presupposition is that this agreement is dependent on a shared system of historically sensitive relations that serves as the coherence of our justification of knowledge claims about the world. Such a coherent system of relations is dependent upon those factors listed above (scientific assumptions, technological level, mores and norms, et cetera). Since we cannot escape the historical situation that comprises our worldview or appeal to any past knowledge that can escape the same problem, historicism tells us that we are doomed to arbitrary relativism. We cannot judge the Japanese samurais of the nineteenth century for brutalizing the peasantry because it was a different time period with different assumptions and prejudices. So, too, people cannot objectively say that in one hundred years if a society thinks eating meat is barbaric that such an ethical proposition is eternally and correspondingly true with reality. We are, therefore, left with the relativity of knowledge, both descriptively (in the case of science, for instance) and normatively (all valuation). Epistemologically, such a position, carried out to its logical conclusion, is the end of truth in the corresponding externalist sense.

3. If we are to introduce conceptual pragmatism and put it into dialogue with historicism, we must first address the essential features of conceptual pragmatism. Clarence Irving Lewis proposed the theory as a neo-Kantian "middle position" between idealism and realism. The hope was to avoid the pitfalls of idealism (that thought can be

done in a vacuum) and the realists' (and historicists') susceptibility to skepticism (viz. bridging the subject with the object) through a pragmatic conception of the a priori.[4] The major thesis of conceptual pragmatism is to think through two epistemological criteria: the "given" of our experience; and secondly, the pure concept of our mind, the conceptual interpretation that the mind logically adopts in order to classify and define the "given" content of our experience. It is this second component—the constructive, interpretative element—that Lewis labels the pragmatic a priori. The nature of the a priori will be explained after an introduction to the given and to the pure concept. What Lewis means by the relationality of knowledge is also necessary to explain antecedently to the pragmatic a priori.

The "given" of our experience is the raw content, and as such, it is the immediate data of our senses. Any attempt at understanding what is sensibly given to the mind requires construction. As Lewis states:

> "While we can isolate the element of the given by these criteria of its unalterability and its characters as sensuous feel or quality, we cannot describe any particular given *as such*, because in describing it, in whatever fashion, we qualify it by describing it, in whatever fashion, we qualify it by bringing it under some category or other, select from it, emphasize aspects of it, and relate it in particular and avoidable ways."[5]

We can see the Kantianism in such a dichotomy here. The sensuality of the given of experience is similar to Kant's constitution of the sensibility, whereas the pure concept is in some ways similar to the constitution of the understanding as reflected in the Table of Logical Judgments. The fact that Lewis refers to conceptualization as categories is no coincidence. Lewis says that we qualify all experiences by bringing them into "some category or other", as quoted above. However, these categories are not synthetic a priori for Lewis. Likewise, space and time have independent existence. But such ontological independence is not the case for Kant. The given, therefore, is not the same type of Kantian intuitionism that a neophyte reader of Lewis might heretofore assume. We should not, therefore, reduce Lewis' position to the Kantian, since there are more differences than similarities. Comparisons to Kant will not be part of our explication of

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[4] This is an obvious, though at this point necessary, simplification of a very sophisticated epistemological theory of knowledge. Lewis draws out a more detailed and formal differentiation between his two mentors, Royce and Pierce, than I have no time to go into. Likewise, Lewis has a very sophisticated "middle" position between naturalism and anti-naturalism that is tied to his "middle position" between idealism and realism, reflected in Lewis' modal realism that he brings to modal logic. This must be left to another paper.

[5] C. I. Lewis, Mind and the World-Order. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1929). 52.

conceptual pragmatism, even though neo-Kantian positions permeate this theory of knowledge. There are better means of explicating the theory.

Instead, we wish to point out a different direction in our presentation of the intuitively given experiences. Lewis calls the given "qualia" (quale when plural), that is, the quality of the experience. Such quale are unequivocally intuitive, as there can be no error in the given since the given is tautologically that which presents itself. On the surface, Lewis' position on this point is almost phenomenological, though the difference is that Lewis denies that the given is getting at the "thing-in-itself". This is very important to keep in mind as to avoid confusion. For the conceptual pragmatist, the given, as the immediate of experience, is not in error because the given as the given does not in-itself make any judgment or claim about reality:

> "Apprehension of the presented quale, being immediate, stands in no need of verification; it is impossible to be mistaken about it. Awareness of it is not judgment in which 'knowledge' connotes the opposite of error."[6]

Whether what is presented to the observer is "illusion" or "reality" is a matter of judgment placed upon the given, but is not the given as such. The given and reality are, for Lewis, two quite separate notions. This is why Lewis can avoid contradiction by saying that the quale are purely subjective and can still maintain, later on, that the conception of reality is itself entirely objective[7].

To give an example of what Lewis means when he differentiates the given from reality is to take an object. Any object that we take that is in our immediate sense-perception, such as a book or a chair, has already moved past the point of being immediately given, because we have already called out the object as an object. Lewis gives the example of an apple:

> "An object such as an apple is never given; between the real apple in all its complexity and this fragmentary presentation, lies that interval which only interpretation can bridge. The 'objectivity' of this experience means the *verifiability of a further possible experience which is attributed by this interpretation*."[8]

What needs to be kept in perspective is that Lewis believes that "knowledge *always* transcends the immediately given".[9] Since the immediacy of our intuiting sense-

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[6] *Ibid*. 125.
[7] We will define objectivity as inter-subjective agreement of a logical meaning or semantic connotation between more than one mind. This is also Lewis' definition of objectivity (see page 11).
[8] Lewis, Mind and the World-Order. 120.

perception is always, by definition, immediate, the ability to classify and define the given is a matter of appealing to past experience, the prior referential totality of relationships of experience to experience, object to object; the pragmatic coherence of a systematic way of understanding. The relevance and conceptualization of objects is determined pragmatically, taking into account the behaviors, needs, and other such considerations of the interpreter.

For instance, if a chef walks into a kitchen the first thing she is likely to notice is the utensils hanging on the wall. Now if an engineer walks into the same kitchen the first thing this engineer could potentially find relevant is the integrity of the walls, the condition of the ceiling, and perhaps the spackling. It is more than likely that the chef will enter the kitchen one hundred times and never once notice the spackling. But one could never say that one interpretation is more correct than the other in this situation, nor could one say that there is anything subjectively arbitrary about what each individual in this example finds to be relevant. Objects simply appear to the observer based upon the disposition of the interpreter that must interpret the given. The disposition of the interpreter reflects tangible purposes dependent upon the interpreter's constitution. By constitution, I mean what the individual finds relevant and the underlying reasons for this relevance, such as one's societal role (e.g. chef, plumber, professor), age, marital status, emotional state-of-mind (e.g. Heideggerian attunement), or a plethora of other constituting factors. The pragmatic disposition, as well as the interpretation, exists as formal constructs, the logical meaning of which is objective, as we shall now explicate.[10]

4. The example of the chef and the engineer provides a good transition into considerations of the second component of conceptual pragmatism, which is the pure concept (referred to henceforth as "concept" for the sake of brevity). The concept is the pragmatic a priori and the heart of the epistemological position of conceptual pragmatism; and as such will also provide the major crux of our argumentation against historicism. Lewis tells us that the concept follows a pragmatically coherent theory of truth, insofar as *the standard for objective truth* is that of inter-subjective agreement:

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[9] *Ibid*. 118.
[10] This entire scenario is inspired by Charles Guignon, the originator of this example.

> "Because it is our main interest here to isolate that element in knowledge which we can with certainty maintain to be objective and impersonal, we shall define the pure concept as 'that meaning which must be common to two minds when they understand each other by the use of a substantive or its equivalent."[11]

Inter-subjectivity means something quite different from that of historicism's understanding of inter-subjectivity. The inter-subjectivity of conceptual pragmatism is metaphysically anti-naturalistic and relies upon the notion of the pragmatic a priori. *Meanings here take on the abstract philosophical notion of something akin to mathematics*. The pragmatic a priori will be explicated in section six. Epistemologically this excerpt is crucial if we are to understand conceptual pragmatism. Concepts are those formal interpretations and constructions that are commonly shared between individuals. Lewis informs us that there are three types of meaning for the word concept: psychological, historical, and logical (epistemically rational). Lewis' major position, in regards to a theory of truth, is to provide an epistemology that conceptually relates meaning inter-subjectively through "logic", the rationality of the conceptually pragmatic a priori. The psychological and historical meanings are themselves primordially derived from this "logical" meaning. By "logical" meaning, I am indicating the "logical intension or connotation of a term" as exemplified through the semantic holism of the person's vernacular.[12]

One of the keys to understanding Lewis is his status as *the founder of modal logic*, a type of logic that categorizes propositions into categories of necessity, contingency, actuality, and possibility. But modal logic in and of itself should not indicate that Lewis' epistemological foundation is one of logical deduction or formal logic over and against rationality. Lewis is not in the camp of the early 20th century moral epistemologists that said we either have logical deduction, emotivism, or ethical intuitionism. Lewis follows Stuart Hampshire in desiring a rationalistic model, that is, what G.E. Moore calls the complex approach to moral epistemology. Perhaps, as shall be investigated, one should see modal logic as the *language* of rational thinking, the formal way in which to state the categories and procedures that provide the possible ways for persons to think. This is the conceptual component of Lewis' epistemology. It is conceptual insofar as Lewis is

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[11] *Ibid*. 70.
[12] *Ibid*. 67.

basing his rational epistemology off of the categorial[13] ways the human can understand; what he calls the rational imperatives elsewhere, in regards to valuation.

The pragmatic aspect of this conceptualization arises insofar as the objectivity of the categories is "subjectively" lived, meaning they are lived by the person—internalism. This is subjective only as relationality, the way R. B. Perry defines subjectivity as a subject's relation to the object. This relationality is subjective insofar as a subject is necessary but the relationship of S to O is an objective relationship. What is important, pragmatically, is that the subject is responsible for self-governance, to own up to certain decisions, to always *be* in decisions. These decisions are the ways in which one chooses to think and therefore to take hold of certain principles and categories. Decisions and choices are categorial modal possibilities. The pragmatic part of the conceptualization lies in making choices from the perspective of the individual. This is why Lewis says: "The root of logic itself lies in the fact of decision, and decision as constraint upon future attitude."[14] Decisions are inescapable. Lewis follows Pascal in saying that a decision to make no decision is itself a decision. *The inescapable realization that decision and rational logic are ubiquitous is the pragmatic assertion that these characteristics define human behavior to the core, which in turn is the basis for knowledge and valuation.*

In other words, the conceptual component is metaphysically anti-naturalistic and the pragmatism of our experience and how we conceptualize is epistemologically naturalistic. We are aiming for the best of both possible worlds here. By naturalizing how we justify the objects of our world, we are appealing to the real world and not the abstract realm detached from sense-experience. Pragmatic decisions are our real world interests and reflect our evolutionary biology, our social context, our roles in the world, our desires, our emotions—our overall disposition towards the world. But far from being arbitrary, these pragmatic dispositions determine in a meaningful and objective way our justification and interaction with the world and what counts as real and unreal. Context of these dispositions provides the ground for our a priori conceptualizations. By a priori we do not mean the traditional notion of the Kantian a priori, whereby certain laws or

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[13] Lewis says "categorial" instead of "categorical" in order to move away from the connotations of unequivocal rightness associated with the word. This wording has been adopted for the same reason.
[14] C.I. Lewis, "The Rational Imperatives"; Steven Cahn, Joram Haber, Twentieth Century Moral Philosophy, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1995). 265.

categories are internally and infallibly eternally true. The pragmatic a priori is seen in how certain metaphysically anti-naturalistic concepts and ideas arise out of certain natural and pragmatic approaches to the given. This is what we mean by foundational. [This is the most important paragraph in the paper. Read it again.]

Metaphysical anti-naturalism can be hard to get one's mind around because this is the philosophical position that math, logic, and other forms of knowledge are not reducible to the physical world, that these objects exist independently of the human brain and of the human situation. Concepts are not physically existing Platonic forms, nor are they created by a higher being, but are simply other than us in an abstract, logical way. This is what is meant by "pure" concept and is the basis for the pragmatic a priori. The fact that pragmatic dispositions open up certain conceptual ways of understanding the given of our experience is the foundation of knowledge and what we use to infer the truth of the real world. Likewise, objectivity exists insofar as there is justification in one's logical consistency of such a conceptual construction. This is not a novel concept of coherentist forms of justification or truth, but is shared by all epistemological theories, including our foundationalist account.

To be in agreement over the meaning of something is to be related to the object consistently in regards to the relationship itself. This is not true only of the descriptive but also of the normative. Logical consistency is derived from the way of thinking that engages the world, that is, the form of method one uses in order to understand the empirical. Recognizing the implicit multiplicity of different possible methods in human thinking is the goal of Lewis' conceptualization. This is why nothing in Lewis' system is obligated to be eternally true. Lewis recognizes that humans evolve, that social context changes, and that what counts as real and unreal depends. But what Lewis *is* arguing is that this change is not arbitrary like what history says it is. Lewis says there are ways to judge differences and to infer truths of the world. To do so is to be making decisions, to and be pragmatically involved. Therefore, Lewis is able to argue that many logics exist, each of which is chosen as a rational way of thinking depending on the pragmatic and axiological circumstances of the subject.

For instance, to take the relativity of mathematics instead of the social sciences, one can use Whitehead and Russell's form of logic presented in the *Principia*

Mathematica as the logically consistent system it is.[15] But whether or not one chooses this method of thinking comes down to pragmatic circumstances of the individual. In fact, in his article, *The Structure of Logic and Its Relation to Other Systems*, Lewis argues that there are three overriding systems of logic. Traditional logic, "modern" logic, and mathematical logic are three systematic ways of understanding formal logic.[16] But the fact that different systems of logic co-exist means that no single one can be ontologically foundational (i.e. realism) to some ideal way that the universe intrinsically exists as. For Lewis, mathematical logic *cannot* be self-evident, because the self-evidence is only self-evident within the principle assumptions of the assumed theories permeating the particular system of logic. As Lewis states: "It is as much the assumptions which are verified by the theorems as the reverse."[17] So the fact that on page 83 of the *Principia Mathematica* Russell and Whitehead can proclaim that m + n = n + m is assuming that the "axiom of reducibility" is in fact the case, which Lewis argues is not self-evident by any means.[18]

In fact, absolutely no rule of logic is self-evident. There is no such thing as a foundational corresponding system of logic that speaks to the true inherent reality and proper way of perceiving empirical data. The pragmatist must accept a plethora of logics as long as they are internally consistent, recognizing that objectivity is a matter of relativity (relationality) within the assumed system of logic, rational imperative, or conceptualization. This is as true of systems of logic as it is for ethical decisions of rational imperatives. As Lewis develops in his later thinking, he applies the descriptive epistemology of *Mind and the World-Order* to the realm of valuation, particularly in his book *Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*. Therefore, the conceptual pragmatic rationality applies to all categories, not just the "anti-naturalistic" ones. For this reason Lewis leans towards *epistemological* naturalism and metaphysical anti-naturalism. This is why Lewis says that: "What we have hoped for is that [ethics] might illuminate problems of the moral to compare this category of the right with others and with the right

[15] C. I. Lewis, "A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori," The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 20 (1923). 224.
[16] C. I. Lewis. "The Structure of Logic and Its Relation to Other Systems," The Journal of Philosophy, Vol. 19 (1921), 505.
[17] *Ibid*. 506.
[18] *Ibid*. 506.

in general."[19] When we talk about ethics there is a particular discussion of particular categories, in this case rights, justice, good, et cetera. *With these categories come an understanding of rational imperatives and the procedures in which one must make pragmatic decisions to rationally conceive and operate in the empirical world. These decisions do not have to be eternally true even though the justification and understanding is eternally true on an abstract level.*

If conceptualistic pragmatism (as well as Lewis' modal realism) proposes that logic and the presuppositions of any system of relations is not self-evident, then is conceptualistic pragmatism in much disagreement with historicism? Though it is true both theories forsake notions of self-evidence of knowledge, the theories are in fundamental disagreement over a theory of meaning (history vs. conceptual apriorism of our pragmatic interaction with the world) and a theory of truth. Fundamentally, what constitutes as the arbitrary relativity of knowledge is antithetical in a conceptual pragmatic theory. *The relationship of interpretation to object, and the possibilities that these relationships manifest, is both a priori and eternally true*. Since historicism denies eternal truth of what constitutes the justification of knowledge, there could not be a more antithetical position here.

As we shall see, conceptual pragmatism rests on a type of indirect realism of the conceptual rationalism type (opposed to the conceptual rationalism of Hume or Locke) and takes the givenness of our first person experience as the foundation by which to ascend from our justified rational conceptions of the world into a probabilistic-based claim of the truth of our objects as corresponding to the real world. Ultimately these higher order beliefs should cohere, but not in a vicious circle, because they are justified out of our conceptually pragmatic foundation rooted in the given. Since historicism relies on coherence and conceptual pragmatism on a sort of impure foundationalism for epistemological justification, this is the major point of disagreement between the two approaches. This will be explored in the next section.

5. The rather obvious point that needs to be explicated is: How do we tie the epistemological theory that conceptual pragmatism offers with the epistemological problems that historicism manifests? We will need to apply the pragmatic a priori

[19] Lewis, "The Rational Imperatives". 264.

through the co-original application of the "given" of our experience and the pure conceptualization of the mind's relation to objects.

Let us start by taking the underlying presuppositions of historicism. Historicism attempts to explain that historical difference necessitates an unbridgeable relativism among competing coherent sets. But there are really two positions that the historicist is appealing: the first is that we can never relate to another historical time period, the second is the more difficult assertion that we can not determine the criterion for justification and objectivity even if we can relate to another time period. The difference being drawn here is that if one can relate to another system vis-à-vis logical consistency, then to relate to another system of coherence is not to know that anything within that system is "really" true (correspondingly) even if the entire web of knowledge is in agreement with itself. This is because a theory of coherence and most coherentist justification theories are a second order account of the world that are perfectly fine leaving behind a correspondence theory of truth. In other words, we have a first person understanding of the world without any mind-independent claims of what the real world exists as independently of our interpretations. An underlying difference between conceptual pragmatism and historicism is that we agree that all facts of the world are based upon interpretations, but we argue that these interpretations are justified through the given and our natural disposition towards the given provide us the ground to make inductive claims and secure the probability of the truth of our claims by appealing to the overall background contextual relationships of all of our beliefs instead of a never-ending vicious circle like the historicism proponent will rely upon.

Pointing out that historical difference exists is to state that different persons in different time periods reach different assertive conclusions about the normative and descriptive state of affairs of reality. However, historical difference does not by itself go any further. Historical difference fails to methodically inquire as to *how and why* there are differences. Historicism does try to justify historical difference by saying its existence in-and-of-itself discounts anything eternally true about the world. But we are not just interested in truth as epistemologists, we are interested in justification. Therefore, conceptual pragmatism has a different solution to explaining the existence of historical difference, one that attempts to get at the very origin of how differences

occur—the causes—instead of simply making judgments upon the existence of historical difference.

Historical difference is primordially caused by different accounts of facts in the social sciences, either depending on time or culture. As Heidegger tells us, the meaning of an object is always a meaning only in relation to the other objects of one's experience. When the desk-chair is "presently-at-hand" the object has meaning in relation to the "for-the-sake-of-which" it exists for Dasein. The "for-the-sake-of-which", in other words, is the pragmatic purpose that the object serves in relation to Dasein. This "what-for" of the desk-chair is understandable in its relation to the classroom, the chalkboard, the school, and the ontic role of being a student. One of Heidegger's traditional examples in *Being and Time* is the car signal. When a car is making a left turn, then the left blinker lights up on the back of the automobile. This state of affairs will only make sense to the observer if they have been socialized to categorially classify this information of a left blinking light on the back of a car as *formally indicating* that the automobile will soon be turning off the road to the left. This is an enclosed logical system of relation, where the meanings all depend on one another and the pragmatic utility that is served. But coherence is not the only phenomenon here present, though historicism would interpret this process as only cohering, that the justification for the car signal is circularly justified by the surrounding objects. Insofar as the system of relations wishes to make its propositions correspond to reality would be lacking, because historicism says such claims of truth as well as justification will fail in regards to the reality of things. The coherence of historicism may explain this process to a degree (and we shall see where it is lacking as theory of knowledge), but it does not capture the Heideggerian process of meaning as well as conceptual pragmatism does.

Conceptual pragmatism relies on indirect realism. This is the notion that the correctness of our beliefs is rooted in our relationality to them. This relationship, for Lewis, is taking the given that we are directly aware of; then, the quality of this experience and our judgments of the experience serve as the ultimate foundation of our knowledge. "I am experiencing pain" becomes an incorrigible statement. One may doubt that my leg hurts, but it is nonsensical to deny the first person experience itself. The given of this experience is infallible. The given of such experiences is a basic belief

and serves as the basis for constructing an understanding of the world, and forming judgments. Such an active means of classification is the method in which we construct our understanding of the world, through the categories that are a priori available for us to rationalize our experiences. *These categories have independent reality*. This is what it means to be the pragmatic a priori:

> "If the real object can be known at all, it can be known only in **relation** to a mind; and if the mind were different the nature of the object as known might well be different. Nevertheless the description of the object as known is true description of an independent reality….But that the only character which can be attributed to anything real is a character described in relative terms—**relative to some experience**—does not deny to it an independent nature, and does not deny that this nature can be known. On the contrary, **true knowledge is absolute because it conveys an absolute truth, though it can convey such truth only in relative terms**."[20] [my emphasis]

Much is being said here. In fact, this is the major point we wish to make against grounding an epistemology foundationally in historical difference and historical meaning. Historicism overlooks the very fact that we *can* relate objectively to other cultures and time periods, that we can justify our knowledge claims differently and that these differences exist because of pragmatic disposition (i.e. differences instead of mere historical arbitrary flux.) For instance, many scholars today will say that Marx was "biased" because of his cultural-historical context. People such as Mill, Marx, and Bentham grew up in the Industrial Revolution of Europe and saw people living and working in horrific conditions. Marxian economics was a reaction to this wretched state of the common person; therefore, Marx's thinking did not correspond with reality because he was too "biased" by the specificity of what was occurring in his own era that certainly did not occur in the same way futurally for other generations.

But the historicist has erred in such examples. Far from being "biased", Marx is taking his experiences and thinking through them. Marx is taking the "given" of his experience and applying certain categories of understanding—such as Compassion, Economic Equality, et cetera—that all persons can objectively relate to Marx's theory. These categories are pragmatic a priori, all minds can relate to the underlying logical intension that such concepts connote. What makes something objective is this ability of the rational mind to objectively understand a certain relation that is absolutely and eternally true as a relation. The following remark should drive the point home:

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[20] Lewis, Mind and the World-Order. 155 and 167.

> "To put this matter in general terms: If relative to R, A is X, and relative to S, A is Y, neither X nor Y is an absolute predicate of A. But 'A is X relative to R' and 'A is Y relative to S', are absolute truths."[21]

This applies both to the justification of a claim about A and the truth of A. What we can do is apply this to history and show that at the very least we can understand other cultures and other time periods if we understand their internal relationships to objects. All that we know of past historical differences in terms of how people thought, of how people engaged the world, of past religious and metaphysical assumptions; all these ways of perceiving the world are interpretations. Every worldview is comprised of a plethora of interpretations; the human cannot help but interpret. These interpretations are all absolutely true and absolutely objective in a second order sense because of their nature as relational predications of particular objects. Whether we ourselves agree with past historical conclusions is altogether a different first order issue. The primary assertion here being presented is that whether we can or cannot agree with the proposition that the sun is the god Ra, that the elderly shall be left in the wild to die if there is not enough food to feed everyone, that Sir Issac Newton was correct to put to death ten people for counterfeiting money—all these ways of classifying and ordering experience rest on a sophisticated interrelationship of many categories. There is nothing arbitrary or relative here. *The only thing relative is if we mean by relativity some sort of relation of some sort of logical meaning to an object. But all such relations of this nature are objective.*

So, taking the example of the Sun God Ra, we can derive the objective and eternally true relations that will derive this object of our information. If A is the system of relations of the Egyptians and B is the system of relations of the American 21st century Midwesterner, then B needs to be altered in such a way as to account for the system A. A direct overlap is not essential, B does not have to equal the whole system of A. What is necessary is to open up the relationships of A that generate the object we wish to understand. So if we take object Z (being the proposition that the Sun is the God Ra), then we can take the set of relations/other propositions that lead in system A to the conclusion that object Z is true. Let us say relation T, S, U, and V are the pertinent relations within system A that conclude with object Z. If we adopt, as hypotheticals,

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[21] *Ibid*. 168.

relation T, S, U, and V into system B, then object Z will appear in the same way as in system A.

What makes historicism so enticing is that we generally do not know all the historical facts; we do not always have the calculus of relations at hand. Original intentions are lost, and all we have are texts and documents. We cannot be certain that our aggregate of past historical eras is the whole picture of a previous system of relations. But a couple points need to be brought to our attention with such a position. Firstly, we must recognize that life and understanding are ongoing processes. If we follow the main thesis of historicism, that is, knowing that humans are temporal and in the midst of a particular cultural-historical context, then historicism should realize that human nature, as temporal and anthropologically involved, is always learning new things. We are constantly modifying and re-organizing our worldview. Interpretations change depending on how our experiences unfold. This is pragmatic. As Lewis states: "Neither human experience nor the human mind has a character which is universal, fixed, and absolute."[22] The fact that our knowledge of historical facts changes is no different than the fact that our individual knowledge of a-historical facts change (of course, most versions of historicism would deny that such facts exist—which is why most versions of historicism are unfalsifiable—except for those versions that desire to draw a distinction between the normative and descriptive). It is simply in the nature of experience and human temporality and finitude that we are constantly modifying our understanding, but to say that any such modification is arbitrary is to misunderstand the human mind altogether. But more importantly, it is the case that if differences do occur, it is not because of historicism's explanations, it is the fact that our quality of experience is different. And since the quality of an experience is the foundation for our conceptual understanding of what is real and unreal, this is non-arbitrary and offers a legitimate explanation for historical difference without resorting to skepticism or nihilism or any other outdated French novelty.

This pragmatic notion is exemplified by Lewis in the following excerpt:

> "At the bottom of all science and all knowledge are categories and definitive concepts which represent fundamental habits of thought and deep-lying attitudes which the human mind has taken in the light of its total experience. But a new and wider experience may bring about some

[22] Lewis. "A Pragmatic Conception of the A Priori". 227.

> alteration of these attitudes, even though by themselves the dictate nothing as to the content of the experience, and no experience can conceivably prove them invalid."[23]

This is the second point to counter historicism. The fact that science, mathematics, medicine, and even logic have changed over time does not make them historically arbitrary. If historicism wishes to say that these fields are relative to a time period, then this point we can grant without epistemologically conceding anything to historicism. The logical categories are the closest thing to being foundational, to being certain. As Lewis points out, to challenge or change a logical postulate would disrupt the entire web of beliefs, our entire coherence to a system of relations. But such a disruption only comes about by new experiences, new postulates, new proofs. Euclidean geometry was not challenged on a whim. Euclidean geometry was challenged because one of its fundamental "axioms" turned out not to be self-evident and furthermore to be incorrect according to non-Euclidean geometry, which gave precise and reasoned answers for why. Often these changes require a certain level of technology, such as in the realm of science. The technological level is one important consideration of a historical context. Far from making science arbitrary, the technological level is what empirically opens up the possibilities of new discovery. If we isolate the technological level with the assumptions of the scientists of the time, it is quite easy for a person in the future to relate back to these past scientists. In such cases there is nothing at all arbitrary. Likewise, there is nothing arbitrary to what scientists or other thinkers are doing today, for the same reason.

6. We have certainly made the first point, that historicism errs in saying that one time period cannot relate to another. If we follow a model of coherence we can jump from one system of relations to another as long as knowledge of that system is accessible. Therefore, any lack of empathy or understanding to other systems infers that certain experiences of other time periods are not accessible to the individual judging those periods. But to justify the idea that there is such a thing as historical progress is an entirely different matter from relating one system of relations to another. What historical progress would have us believe deals with corresponding to a corresponding truth.

Progress exists insofar as there is a movement towards a greater and greater unfolding of recorded experience. The social sciences are, therefore, progressive. This

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[23] *Ibid*. 226.

aggregate allows for a higher probability of the rightness based on the categorial assertions applied to a greater amount of experience. But no reality is fully revealed; there will always be more data. What is orderly about reality is that with the accumulation of experience our categories continue to be tested. Epistemology, like the hard sciences, will continue to go about its work unimpeded by these attacks. The same epistemological process applies here as it did against the first counter-argument to historicism. As Lewis states:

> "Concerning the a priori there need be neither universal agreement nor complete historical continuity. Conceptions, such as those of logic, which are least likely to be affected by the opening of new ranges of experience, represent the most stable of our categories; but none of them is beyond the possibility of alteration."[24]

Leaving the door open to changing something as fundamental as these logical laws means that the best we can do is to have a high probability of how our categories correspond to reality. The goal is always to correspond, even in the midst of coherence, this is why our coherence theories change with new experiences. Otherwise coherence is just a free-floating system that cannot explain the new ideas of a genius or other such problems—though this is a paper unto itself.

The position here is similar to that of the Heideggerian hermeneutical circle. Taking into account the factical fore-structure of fore-having, fore-sight, and fore-conception, the fore-structure is the interpretation and re-interpretation of the factical givenness of experience. As new experiences are continually added to the always already existing totality, re-interpretation must accommodate the new experiences to be in logical consistency. [Here we get a hint of where historicity and historicism diverge, insofar as the Heideggerian model incorporates the importance of historical situatedness and temporality without abandoning a constructive theory of knowledge.] But by the nature of knowledge and the human mind, what the hermeneutical circle purports to be true is not taken only as coherence but as correspondence. But this is never done with certainty but through the probability that the continuous re-interpretation of a proliferating aggregate of knowledge is more and more likely to report the actual state of affairs of its objects as being the case. But whether or not the objects ontologically match reality, the

[24] *Ibid*. 227.

relations that justify the objects are objective and eternal. What is at issue is the nature of the object, the thing-in-itself.

Finally, what must be remarked here is that David Hume's epistemological skepticism remains a problem for any theory of knowledge. Conceptualistic pragmatism desires to drive a wedge between the need for Cartesian epistemological certainty and Cartesian absolute doubt. Hume's assertion that all knowledge can ever attain as its basis is the constant conjunction of habituation is a psychological thesis that leaves no room for epistemology. Such a psychological foundation to a theory of knowledge presents the same sort of problems that an historically foundational theory, such as historical relativism, presents to an epistemological theory. For conceptualistic pragmatism, or any theory of epistemology whatsoever, to be successful, a theory of knowledge must overcome both historical and psychological foundational critiques. But when epistemology tries to ultimately overcome the last historical problems, the historicist will frantically appeal to the skepticism of the psychological. *For a correspondence theory of knowledge to ultimately be successful, no epistemological criteria can ever be justified higher than that of higher and higher probability*. The days of certainty are but a pleasant memory. We must settle for indirect realism. Such indirect realism is not antirealism, for we are admitting that although there is no absolute certainty in realism, there are second order experiential and referential certainties that give us sound justification for making probabilistic truth claims about the external reality. It is such a foundation that we suggest for the social sciences and that we suggest for the explanation of the existence of historical difference without resorting to subjectivism.

7. Fundamentally, the major two goals of this paper have been to bring into doubt historicism's claims: (1) that the justification and truth of knowledge is arbitrarily relative and (2) the notion that haphazard historical factors (instead of conceptual rationalism) is epistemologically foundational to knowledge.

We attempted to make the case against both of these postulates by introducing the conceptual pragmatism of Clarence Irving Lewis. His epistemological position that indirectly real, conceptual rationalism is the foundation of knowledge and valuation depends upon his views of modal logic (the pure concept metaphysically anti-naturalistic component) and the pragmatic disposition of people in the world (the pragmatic

epistemologically naturalistic component). That no one system of logical construction is anymore foundational is absolutely crucial. Lewis is able to put forth his notion of the pragmatic a priori—that all knowledge is built on the logical categories of certain logical postulates that, when taken as an aggregate, will reveal absolute truths about certain logical relationships of a predicated meaning to a particular object. These logical relationships have an independent and eternal truth in the second order realm of knowledge. Though the truth of such relations can only be approached through a temporal mind, the logical and ontological structure of reason provides the certainty of our conceptions. The corresponding truth of such logical relations must come into question with every new experience, challenging, modifying, and re-configuring our views of the real world in an objectively scientifically inductive non-arbitrary way. *Lewis' position, therefore, requires that we attempt to correspond to that actual state of reality through the logical consistency of the way in which we pragmatically classify, define, and order our aggregate of experiences.*

To defend the underlying postulates of conceptual pragmatism would simply be beyond the scope of this paper. Particularly troubling is contemporary work in philosophy, such as that of Simon Blackburn's *Ruling Passions*. Blackburn's naturalized ethics that combines expressivism and functionalism creates a new synthesis in the philosophy of mind that can account for non-rational factors in the ethical decision making process. For conceptual pragmatism to be successful, an adequate defense of the rationalist model must be given. But this is not possible in this paper. However, it is important for me to mention here contemporary work in philosophy, because it problematizes certain foundational claims of conceptual pragmatism that must be accounted for. Although other difficulties exist, this is by far the most imperative, for it brings into question the whole notion of the "rational person" standard. I would argue that conceptual pragmatism could ultimately meet Blackburn's challenge in a way that does not refute Blackburn, but incorporates his points. However, doing so is beyond the scope of this paper.

What we wished to attempt, solely, is to provide a feasible alternative to historicism. The feasibility of this alternative, ultimately, would require a comprehensive defense of conceptual pragmatism. What we wished to do in this paper is simply to bring

into question the two major tenets of historicism that we find epistemologically problematic. To do this we have provided another epistemological foundation to the categorization of meaning and truth other than that of historical chance. I would argue the theory of conceptual pragmatism provides a feasible alternative to the skepticism and nihilism of historicism. If this was accomplished, then the limited goal of this paper stands.

Appendix A: Historicism Explicated

Implicit in our critique of historicism was the epistemological position of persons such as Early Sartre, Foucault, and Nietzsche. Other persons appeal to historicism as well, such as John Mackie's "A Refutation of Morals". But in the case of Mackie, this is not his major motif; he simply uses historical difference as evidence for a whole other category of relativity, that of psychologism. Of all the texts that I have come across, it is amazing how little positive work there is on historicism. Unfortunately, those philosophers who adhere to the position often take their thesis for granted, and only tear down philosophy through the appeal to historical difference instead of ever anthropologically backing up their position in detail. Michelle Moody-Adams, in her contemporary work on relativism, addresses some of these concerns in her book *Fieldwork in Familiar Places*. As someone tearing down historicism, she is perhaps most successful at defending relativity than any of the relativists themselves.

I have chosen Foucault's "Genealogy, Nietzsche, History" work as the most successful and comprehensive philosophical position on historicism. The reasons are twofold: firstly, Foucault is the epitome of an historical relativist, and more work of his than any other noteworthy philosopher is relativistic; secondly, because this particular work attacks the basis of logic, placing Foucault in direct confrontation to Lewis' major foundational claim for a theory of knowledge makes sense. Therefore, Foucault's piece provides the best counter-argument.

The Foucault piece is a reflection and explication of Nietzsche's work in the Genealogy. What Foucault is most interested in is refuting the notion of historical progress, the idea that civilization as a whole is improving. Foucault is also critiquing a universal theory of meaning. Both these criteria, essentially, are critiquing the Hegelian-Marxian-Fukuyama tradition of adhering to an evolutionary development of history that can be universally reduced to particular motif, such as Geist, autonomy, or respectability. In theory, such a motif is supposed to explain universally the underlying movement of history and consequently a theory of human nature. What Foucault (and Nietzsche) are reacting to are these sorts of conceptions of history.

However, in order to critique the Hegelian-Marxian-Fukuyama tradition, it is necessary for Foucault (and Nietzsche) to attack the traditional notion of history and the theory of knowledge that underlies history. It is this move that puts Foucault and Nietzsche in direct opposition to Clarence Irving Lewis, and, more generally, philosophy as a whole.

Foucault paints a picture of the either/or. Either there is meaning and purpose that is provided by a metaphysical justification or metaphysics is a sham and there is not meaning or purpose to things:

> "Why does Nietzsche challenge the pursuit of the origin, at least on those occasions when he is truly a genealogist? First, because it is an attempt to capture the exact essence of things, their purest possibilities, and their carefully protected identities; because this search assumes the existence of immobile forms that precede the external world of accident and succession."[25]

If we follow this exclusive disjunction, Foucault believes that if he refutes the fundamentals of old metaphysics, then he has disproved the possibility for truth and purpose in an objective way. Without the metaphysical justification that the idea of essences once enjoyed, objects and ideas would no longer have the predication of eternity and immobility that they had in the idealistic days of philosophy. Therefore, the refutation of idealism undermines the Hegelian notion of an end of history and evolution, but it also refutes objectivity in general. Of course, the whole purpose of my paper was to provide a sufficient and necessary theory of knowledge that provides a middle way to Foucault's proposed exclusive disjunction. But if we accept Foucault's premises, we can certainly see that he arrives at a logically valid conclusion. Accepting the exclusive disjunction and the refutation of old metaphysics would indeed lead to relativity.

Foucault drives his theory of historicism home by attacking the "rationality" of philosophy through an epistemological foundation of historical consideration. It is here that Foucault provides the best counter argument to an objective theory of knowledge:

> "Examining the history of reason [one] learns that it was born in an altogether 'reasonable' fashion—from chance; devotion to truth and the precision of scientific method arose from the passion of scholars, their reciprocal hatred, their fanatical and unending discussions, and their spirit of competition—the personal conflicts that slowly forged the weapons of reason."[26]

Foucault argues that logic, reason, and science are but historically contingent, an amalgamation of haphazard factors that just happened to come together. Far from being

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[25] Stabinow, Paul. The Foucault Reader. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984). 78
[26] *Ibid*. 80

progress, philosophy and science are but one of many possible ways of looking at the word. To say that there is a privileged position or more corresponding accuracy in either of these fields is, for Foucault, an absurdity. The "weapons of reason" are blind to what they are covering over. Reason is but an illusion, a tool of the current historical time, growing out of the historical factors of the last several centuries. As Foucault says, history is the "recording of accidents".[27] Obviously, this is also a very Nietzschean position.

What is important to end on is that C.I. Lewis has no position on the end of history of the evolutionary characteristic of historical events from a normative perspective. Clearly this is not important to his epistemological theory. However, Lewis would dispute Foucault's descriptive relativism, arguing that science has indeed been successful in its growth and that reason is not some passing historical trend but shows real, substantial progress in the human race. Foucault objects to this approach on as many grounds as philosophically possible. It is Foucault's contention that historical accidents determine the causal outcomes of historical events. There is no rhyme or reason to the future, but an ongoing state of fluctuation. Foucault further backs this up with anthropological considerations of sexuality, insanity, and other phenomena that have undergone a change in normative response to these things. The end result is an unfalsifiable presentation, where any and all objects of knowledge and valuation can be interpreted through a historical filter, explained any in much the same way as psychological egoism accomplishes its task in regards to normative claims.

The debate here is an important one. On the one hand we have Lewis' position in the defense of objectivity and philosophy. On the other we have Foucault's post-modernism and the rush into the destruction of the traditional presuppositions of the contemporary world of science and academics. Historicism wishes to decimate objectivity. Whether or not historicism is successful is a matter of much debate, but what is important is to recognize that it is this debate that this paper intends to be part of. What is most important is to problematize historicism, and not to allow this theory to go unchallenged. With so many everyday people adhering to some naïve version of this

[27] *Ibid*. 82

epistemological theory, it is ever so important not to let it go unchallenged. Hopefully, that is what this paper accomplished.

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