

THE LOCUS OF COHERENCE

The events of the world necessarily cohere, in the elementary sense that whatever is actual is possible and whatever is co-occurrent is compossible. But their occurrence need not seem coherent, in the equally elementary sense that we may be unable to provide a coherent history or explanation or description of their occurrence. It is only among creatures that speak a language, therefore, that problems of incoherence or non-coherence arise: that is, among creatures that can report or state what they believe, what they take to be the case, what they conjecture or claim accounts for matters of fact, or justifies or recommends policies or commitments or actions, or forms the continuous career or history of some life or persistent entity or system, or fits a practice or the like. This is why the consistent or self-consistent is said to be the coherent or at least a necessary but minimal condition of the coherent – though that claim must be clarified. But it is fair to say that only speech is coherent, or thought linguistically rendered, or behavior relative to speech or thought, or behavior informed by the capacity to speak, or the plans, projects, representations, theories, work, activity, intentions, beliefs, and the like of creatures capable of speech. Incoherence is a disorder among creatures capable of speech, since speech is the *sine qua non* of coherence. A man babbling out of fright is said to be utterly incoherent, being unable to speak at all. More seriously, incoherence is a relative discrepancy of some sort in the speech, thought, behavior, or work of human beings (contingently: human beings only), both in terms of their productive activity and, *derivatively*, of what they produce or perform or enact or simply do (*their* products or acts or deeds).

But even reflecting impressionistically about coherence, it seems that mere inconsistency or contradiction cannot always be a mark or form of incoherence. One may for example coherently illustrate what an inconsistency or contradiction is; and one can even deliberately construct a formally valid argument based on inconsistent premisses. There is, therefore, something not quite accurate about a recent proposal of Richard Rudner's. Rudner says, in a pertinent account, that he will "use the term incoherence to cover, in general, various dissonance relations ranging from logical incompatibility through nomological incompatibility and beyond".¹ The weakness of Rudner's proposal is an important one, not a mere quibble at all. It cannot be a mere inconsistency, contradiction, or incompatibility

that marks an incoherence; it must be an inadvertent or unintended inconsistency, or one that, for an appropriate reason, some human agent would want or would have wanted to avoid. In short, incoherence cannot be a merely formal property of sentences or statements or suitable surrogates or analogous elements detached from the human activity by which they are generated; it must be linked to the intentions and purposive life of some human being or human beings. There is nothing incoherent in the intentionally contradictory clues that a jokester drops for his unwitting victim. It is also often conceded that every human being must, at any given time, hold a set of beliefs among which some, doubtless, are incompatible (though unspecified): it would hardly do to hold that we are all therefore incoherent; and it would be pointless to insist that such inconsistency bears as yet on coherence, where the offending beliefs have never been brought to bear in a relevant way on actual reflection or action. It is much more normal to suppose that, faced with a palpable inconsistency in belief or putative knowledge, a *rational* agent – an agent bent on preserving coherence – would move to resolve the logical “dissonance”.² What this very conveniently shows is that coherence is a function of the rationality of one’s thought and behavior rather than of the mere consistency among a set of symbols of any kind – though, of course, it is a normal part of the rational purpose of a speaking creature to favor and pursue consistency, to avoid formal inconsistency, incompatibility, contradiction (as well as other more attenuated “dissonances”) where such phenomena threaten or interfere with that creature’s otherwise rational purposes. But in that case, incoherence cannot, as Rudner in effect suggests, be marked off simply by some formal or quasi-formal breach of an extensional system; it may be marked, rather, only by reference to the intentional organization of a life of a suitable complexity – in particular, only by reference to the species-specific, culturally groomed, and idiosyncratic forms of rationality rightly ascribed to linguistically competent human beings. This is perhaps why the *non sequitur*, the *reductio ad absurdum*, the *petitio principii*, the *ignoratio elenchi* are forms of incoherence or absurdity: they concern consistency, implication, entailment not merely in the context of a formal argument but primarily (*extra dictionem*) in the context of a rational purpose that a putatively valid argument is or may be meant to support. The apparent structure of an argument posited is hardly decisive without attention to the use to which it may be supposed to be put; retreat to purely formal considerations, therefore, is probably an ellipsis under the assumption of a rational intent to adhere to such formal constraints – or, more positively, of the irrationality of not thus intending. But in that case, the apparent lack of such conformity – in an argument detached from its governing purpose – is

hardly evidence of an incongruity or dissonance between such a purpose and the rational need to adhere to the formal canons of argument. In short, coherence is, in the classical sense, more a matter of rhetoric than of logic. Robbe-Grillet, for instance, deliberately introduces into his novels elements that, for unguarded and conventional readers, will appear incoherent. In this way, he obliges his readers to attend to his having deliberately constructed a set of sentences that cannot be made to yield a certain familiar sort of coherent story: he produces a text that, at one and the same time, exploits and shocks habituated expectations of coherence. But Proust, in the *Recherche*, permits Marcel, on several occasions, to have information accessible only to an omniscient author (perhaps it is an inadvertence, though it is unlikely); but the effect is not incoherence, only a complication about how to understand the constraints on the notion of Marcel's recollections.

To press the point one step further, Rudner here follows Nelson Goodman's theories³ in a number of ways, particularly in recognizing that coherence need not center solely on truth or compatibility in terms of truth, that the more "tenuous 'compatibility' relations" might be such that

at least one of the *relata* might be, not a set of *assertions*, but rather a system of regulations or laws, or, perhaps, a grammatically mood-neutral symbolic system like a musical score. . . or a system which is a deliberate fiction like a short-story, or even such a non-verbal system of symbols as a painting or a diagram.⁴

Still, this suggests both that, relative to assertions or systems in which truth is the appropriate "appropriateness" relation (to use Goodman's own term⁵), a straightforward application of criteria of consistency is an adequate criterion of coherence and that the weaker alternative systems may be construed more or less congruently with what obtains there. On the view being developed here, consistency and compatibility among sentences or alternative symbolic inscriptions can provide at best only an impoverished account of coherence. (Consider, for instance, that Ray Bradbury has written a coherent story, 'A Sound of Thunder', intentionally made to depend on a character's satisfying the contradictory conditions of being both elected and not elected President in 2055.⁶) Replying to Rudner, Goodman himself strengthens the impression – both with respect to Rudner's work and with respect to his own. For he emphasizes, against Rudner, that he has

taken almost the opposite course. Rather [he says] than assimilating scores, descriptions, and pictures to statements, I treat them all as non-declarative. . . but since non-declarative versions of referential symbols have no truth-value, we must start from scratch in investigating the nature and standards of rightness and wrongness of such versions. Instead of appealing to truth, we must seek a more general notion of rightness that may sometimes subsume and sometimes compete with truth.⁷

As we shall see, this failure to accommodate the distinctive feature of coherence as opposed to truth (or even to any larger notion of “fit”) affects Goodman’s theories in a fundamental way.⁸ Still, the reason for mentioning Rudner’s and Goodman’s views here was primarily to orient us in a decisively different way from theirs.

We began impressionistically, and we may continue by positing a number of clear candidates of incoherence among philosophical theories. These should be instructive, in the sense that they may show *how* inconsistency or contradiction comes to count as incoherence. One example is drawn from P. F. Strawson’s original effort to recover metaphysics; another, from W. V. Quine’s well-known effort to link the fortunes of ontology to a rigorous analysis of natural languages. If valid, they cannot fail to show, therefore, how easily incoherence may appear in a part of the life of even the most brilliant and most coherent thinkers – even in the very heart of their best efforts. Both are quite straightforward examples. Several more difficult specimens may then be added, in order to round out a short catalogue as well as to lay the ground for certain additional distinctions.

In *Individuals*, Strawson maintains that “particular-identification in general rests ultimately on the possibility of locating the particular things we speak of in a single unified spatio-temporal system”.⁹ Furthermore, each particular must be capable of being uniquely identified or placed within that unified system. As Strawson says:

the reidentification of places is not something quite different from, and independent of, the reidentification of things... the identification and distinction of places turn on the identification and distinction of things; and the identification and distinction of things turn, in part, on the identification of places.¹⁰

But such a system requires a set of “basic particulars”, that is,

a class or category of particulars such that, as things are, it would not be possible to make all the identifying references which we do make to particulars of other classes, unless we made identifying references to particulars of that class, whereas it would be possible to make all the identifying references we do make to particulars of that class without making identifying references to particulars of other classes.¹¹

It turns out that, for Strawson, physical bodies and persons prove to be basic particulars. But, on the theory of basic particulars (on pain of contradiction), bodies are not proper parts of persons, in spite of the fact that persons possess both physical and psychological or personal attributes – in fact, persons possess just the physical properties that may be ascribed to physical bodies.¹² But if so, then the theory of basic particulars (required for the identificatory system to work as it does) is incompatible with the theory of particular-identification (which requires unique location within a “single

unified spatio-temporal system”). That is, in effect, on Strawson’s view, contrary to the requirements of particular-identification, persons and physical bodies must, though they are distinct (and irreducible) particulars, be able to occupy the same place at the same time. Here, the contradiction constitutes a deep incoherence because it utterly undermines the very point of constructing the theory. It makes the uniqueness of particular-identification impossible to achieve, but it does so by way of the very conditions intended to facilitate it.

In ‘Two Dogmas of Empiricism’, Quine maintains that “it is misleading to speak of the empirical content off an individual statement”; in fact, “it is nonsense, and the root of much nonsense, to speak of a linguistic component and a factual component in the truth of any individual statement”. “The unit of empirical significance”, he holds, “is the whole of science”.¹³ Hence,

it becomes folly to seek a boundary between synthetic statements, which hold contingently on experience, and analytic statements, which hold come what may. Any statement can be held true come what may, if we make drastic enough adjustments elsewhere in the system. . . . Conversely, . . . no statement is immune to revision.¹⁴

Nevertheless, Quine is bound to try to explain his natural metaphor about “the event of recalcitrant experience”, testing the whole of science in terms “of varying distances from a sensory periphery”, urging that “The edge of the system of science must be kept squared with experience; the rest, with all its elaborate myths or fictions, has as its objective the simplicity of laws”.¹⁵ The notion of recalcitrant experience suggests that there *is*, however inchoate, a distinction to be drawn (and required) between the analytic and the synthetic; and the notion that the whole of science can be tested (before “the tribunal of sense experience”¹⁶) suggests that contingent empirical statements can be formulated relatively independently of whatever “whole of science” is to be tested; but the rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction entails either that the whole of science cannot be empirically *tested* at all or that the notion of testing has completely lost its assigned function in empirical science. Furthermore, the metaphor of “varying distances from a sensory periphery” suggests that the body of science has a discernible internal structure in virtue of which it need not be tested only *en bloc*, that it must rather be tested in a way that, at least provisionally, ranks certain relatively independent priorities regarding what may be sacrificed and what may be retained in the face of “experience”.

In fact, the apparent metaphor tends to become more literal and more ineliminable in Quine’s later argument, in *Word and Object*. For there, Quine is obliged to oscillate, in characterizing “observational sentences”,

on which the body of science depends, as between those sentences the “stimulus meanings” of which “tend to coincide” for different speakers and those sentences which are “less susceptible. . . to the influences of collateral information” – that tend, in other words, to be “nearer” to the “prompting sensory stimulation”.¹⁷ But it is obvious that there is no way to mark agreement about observability among speakers without conceding the relative independence of identified stimuli from convergent behavior; and there is no way to distinguish observational and collateral information without reintroducing the analytic/synthetic distinction. Unlike Strawson’s thesis, therefore, Quine’s is incoherent because its formulation baffles the very condition under which it permits any form of testability. The very meaning of such an apparently sensible remark as:

The less susceptible the stimulus meaning of an occasion sentence is to the influences of collateral information, the less absurdity there is in thinking of the stimulus meaning of the sentence as the meaning of the sentence. Occasion sentences whose stimulus meanings vary none under the influence of collateral information may naturally be called *observation sentences*, and their stimulus meanings may without fear of contradiction be said to do full justice to their meanings,¹⁸

is utterly undercut by the fact that the condition for its intelligibility entails the denial of Quine’s thesis about the analytic/synthetic distinction. Either, therefore, Quine’s thesis is incoherent for much the same reason as Strawson’s or else it is incoherent for a deeper reason, namely, that it claims *some* kind of validity but precludes our ever being able to formulate a viable condition for its being even conceived as testable.¹⁹

In fact, it is a famous doctrine of Quine’s that holds that “manuals for translating one language into another can be set up in divergent ways, all compatible with the totality of speech dispositions, yet incompatible with one another”.²⁰ But if this is true, then the analytic/synthetic distinction is reintroduced with a vengeance; and if this is not even possible, given that observability and collateral information cannot in principle be contrasted, then it becomes impossible as well to distinguish compatible and incompatible sets of sentences that are at least stimulus-equivalent. In effect, the deep incoherence of Quine’s account is that, attempting to explain the nature of explanatory theories and conceptual networks, it precludes the conditions of their intelligibility, their comparison, and their comparative power. Quine’s venture requires the eligibility of external questions regarding the appraisal of alternative systems, (including his own), but the thesis he advances allows only for internal questions within the compass of any such system.²¹ In effect, incoherence is a claim or charge that *we* impose, on the strength of an interpretation of the purpose or function of a certain human project *and* of the internal

evidence that that project cannot but be baffled in some critical way.

Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* may very possibly be the single most important philosophical work of recent vintage that is either hopelessly incoherent or not clearly capable of being coherently construed. For, in the Preface, after remarking that what he has expressed could be better expressed, Wittgenstein goes on to affirm, without qualification: "the *truth* (*Wahrheit*) of the thoughts (*Gedanken*) that are here communicated seems to me unassailable and definitive. I therefore believe myself to have found, on all essential points, the final solution of the problems".²² Nevertheless, the penultimate paragraph (6.54) offers the celebrated comment:

My propositions (*Sätze*) serve as elucidations in the following way: anyone who understands me eventually recognizes them as nonsensical (*unsinnig*), when he has used them – as steps – to climb up beyond them. (He must, so to speak, throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright.

Of course, Wittgenstein speaks with great care and his choice of terms is always precise. But on that very score, assuming consistency in the use of thought (*Gedanke*) and proposition (*Satz*), it seems quite impossible to construe these remarks compatibly – particularly given that Wittgenstein clarifies his account by introducing propositions like the following which are hardly uncharacteristic: "The totality of true thoughts (*Gedanken*) is a picture (*Bild*) of the world" (3.01); "A thought (*Gedanke*) contains the possibility of the situation of which it is the thought. What is thinkable is possible too" (3.02); "In a proposition (*Satz*) a thought (*Gedanke*) finds an expression that can be perceived by the senses" (3.1); "A logical picture (*Bild*) of facts (*Tatsachen*) is a thought (*Gedanke*)" (3); "A proposition (*Satz*), therefore, does not actually contain its sense (*Sinn*), but does contain the possibility of expressing it" (3.13).

Here, it seems impossible to deny that Wittgenstein wishes to hold that his thoughts *are* thinkable and also without sense; that only propositions have sense (3.3), but that his are ultimately nonsensical; that his thoughts have a sense in that they constitute a true picture of the logical features of facts, but must be rejected as lacking sense. The doctrine that "A proposition *shows* (*zeigt*) its sense (*Sinn*). A proposition *shows* how things stand *if* it is true. And it says (*sagt*) that they do so stand" (4.022) does not really help, since (i) it still says something determinate; and (ii) what it says purports to tell us what is true about the logical structure of facts. For instance, Wittgenstein holds that "A proposition has one and only one complete analysis" (3.25). Hence, the sense in which the structure of a language can be *shown* in its use *and* can be informatively focused by the particular propositions Wittgenstein advances is nowhere explained or even linked with a promising

explanatory clue. It is important to realize that the incoherence of Wittgenstein's account does not lie simply in the apparent contradictions of the *Tractarian* propositions, but rather in his view of philosophy as consisting of elucidations (*Erläuterungen*) (4.112). Elucidations, however, *are propositions* (3.263); the term is also used in the penultimate *proposition*, which apparently must be nonsensical *as* an elucidation. Still, it is clear that Wittgenstein intends, by elucidation, the activity of providing propositions; hence, too, his final elucidatory directive is incoherent, precisely because it cannot tell us what we are to do, and yet it promises that if we do what we "must" do, we "will see the world aright".²³ In a serious sense, we cannot even understand what we have presumably understood by Wittgenstein's elucidations: we are defeated by the "elucidation" that the elucidations given cannot possibly serve to convey the truths they are intended to convey and by the fact that the final elucidation draws us on beyond the only world capable of being elucidated. It is the *use* of incompatibility, contradiction, "dissonance" with regard to the purported purpose or intention of an utterance or project or piece of would-be work, rather than mere instances of such relations, that generates the question of incoherence. In Wittgenstein's case, the threat of incoherence rests with our inability to formulate any manageable project within which the apparently serious order and internal sequence of the propositions of the *Tractatus* can be rehearsed by an equally serious reader. But if the *Tractatus* were construed as a huge joke, its coherence might be saved at the expense of its philosophical power.

Perhaps one final (rather extended) example of philosophical incoherence may be offered. In Nelson Goodman's theory of projection, addressed to the problem of confirmation in science, a careful distinction is made between "actual projection" and "legitimately projectible hypotheses":

adoption of a hypothesis [Goodman holds] constitutes actual projection only if at the time in question the hypothesis has some undetermined cases [cases not yet determined to be positive or negative], some positive cases [instantiations of the hypothesis that are true], and no negative cases [instantiations that are false].²⁴

The criteria for such hypotheses are complex; Goodman warns us particularly to avoid the pragmatist's view that favors the thesis that "the truth and significance of a hypothesis lie in the accuracy of its predictions [regarding the past or the future]."²⁵ Our scientific speculations cannot rightly be assessed solely in consequentialist terms at any time, because we cannot escape the continuing demands of projectibility at all times. Goodman considers projectibility at a time first, though he concedes the

legitimacy of the “question of defining temporally unqualified projectibility”.²⁶ He does not, however, pursue the question (and, as will soon be clear, it becomes fatally ineligible within the terms of his developed view). He does acknowledge that his account is not intended to be “complete and final”; but he also explicitly says that “the line between valid and invalid predictions (or inductions or projections) is drawn upon the basis of *how the world is* and has been described and anticipated in words”.²⁷ These remarks give a certain robust and realistic cast to the theory, and point to Goodman’s search for fundamental criteria distinguishing genuinely lawlike phenomena and what merely masquerade as such. Goodman does introduce in *The Structure of Appearance and Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, a certain relativization; but it is utterly unlike, and incompatible with, the relativization favored in *Ways of Worldmaking*. To focus the difference in a word, the earlier view emphasized the inevitable relativization of the constructions of science *without* treating the world as a construction itself; but, in *The Ways of Worldmaking*, (the) plural worlds “we” (?) inhabit are themselves constructed in constructing our science. It may be that the earlier and later accounts are capable of being construed, separately, as coherent. But they cannot be coherently united relative to the purpose of the theory of projection.²⁸

In fact, in holding that we must “eliminate all projected hypotheses that have since been violated [false hypotheses]”, Goodman states plainly and without qualification that such hypotheses “can *no longer* be projected, and are thus *henceforth* unprojectible”.²⁹ Hence, it is difficult not to suppose (on Goodman’s view) that the determination of unprojectibility may be conclusively achieved at particular times, not at all rarely, quite straightforwardly, within the practice of science. Valid projections are a subset of those “habitually projected” which remain unviolated – the extension of the predicates of which are well “entrenched” through the use of language. “But”, says Goodman,

differences of tongue, use of coined abbreviations, and other variations in vocabulary do not prevent accrual of merited entrenchment. Moreover, no entrenchment accrues from the repeated projection of a word except where the word has the same extension each time.³⁰

(The allusion to the underlying assumption of *The Structure of Appearance* is reasonably clear.) Predicates may be indexed as to their relative degree of entrenchment, and entrenchment is a function of the entrenchment of coextensive predicates.

Nevertheless, more recently, in his latest book, Goodman has maintained that “The uniformity of nature we marvel at or the unreliability we protest belongs to a world of our own making”;³¹ “. . . nothing is

primitive or derivationally prior to anything apart from a constructional system”;³² “[the scientist] seeks system, simplicity, scope; and when satisfied on these scores he tailors truth to fit. He as much decrees as discovers the laws he sets forth, as much designs as discerns the patterns he delineates.”³³ (Here, the image of “worldmaking” takes on a meaning deeper than that allotted to constructional systems.) But if this is so, then it becomes not merely problematic how to demarcate legitimate and illegitimate projections: there *can* be no confirmation in the matter. Certainly, Goodman has relativized the distinction “constructionally”; in fact, he now insists that his view “can perhaps be described as a radical relativism under rigorous restraints”.³⁴ But more than this, we can no longer decisively rule out, as illegitimate, projectibles that appear to conflict with well-entrenched predicates *at a particular time*; the very notions of entrenchment and inductive validity must themselves be relativized. With them, however, goes the prospect of conforming with “how the world is” and of specifying “lawlikeness” by way of anything like a set of relatively formal properties. In “On Rightness of Rendering”, for instance, Goodman holds that

inductive rightness requires that [an inductive] argument proceed from premisses consisting of all such true reports on examined instances as are in terms of projectible predicates. Thus inductive rightness, while still demanding truth of premisses, makes severe additional demands. And although we hope by means of inductive argument to arrive at truth, inductive rightness unlike deductive rightness does not guarantee truth.³⁵

But assignments of truth now depend on the acceptance of projectible predicates, which are in turn relativized beyond the work of merely constructional scientists.

Goodman, of course, realizes that the power of the theory rests (finally) with the notion of “inductively right categories” – which, however, “have no truth-value” since they are no more than categories, predicates, or systems of predicates.³⁶ He appeals to the account in *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, which we have already examined.³⁷ But it is just the difference between the frankly relativized account of *Ways of Worldmaking* and the comparatively, even strongly, non-relativized account of *Fact, Fiction and Forecast* (admittedly compatible with constructionalism) which must be reconciled in order to insure a coherent theory. The original project of the famous ‘new Riddle of Induction’ – in effect, Mill’s project – is perfectly straightforward:

Only a statement that is *lawlike* – regardless of its truth or falsity or its scientific importance – is capable of receiving confirmation from an instance of it; accidental statements are not. Plainly, then, we must look for a way of distinguishing lawlike from accidental statements.³⁸

The point, very simply put, is that, on the strength of the earlier account, illegitimate projectibles do not simply confuse our picture of induction by

generating puzzling but valid inductions competing with those generated from “legitimate” ones: *they do not yield inductions at all*, though they appear to.³⁹ Projectibility was originally intended to provide criteria for the confirmability of hypotheses; now, the difference between the projectible and unprojectible is relativized beyond the interests of constructional scientists. The upshot is that we can no longer determine *which* projectibles yield inductions and which do not: that characterization itself shifts with a shift in the apparent entrenchment of predicates. Quite uncontroversially, Goodman admits: “Obviously there must be leeway for progress for the introduction of novel organizations that make, or take account of, newly important connections and distinctions”;⁴⁰ but then he goes on to say

rightness of characterization... is... a matter of fit with practice; that without the organization, the selection of relevant kinds, *effected by evolving tradition*, there is no rightness or wrongness of categorization, no validity or invalidity of inductive inference, no fair or unfair sampling, and no uniformity or disparity among samples.⁴¹

But now, there is, and can be, *no* formal criterion for appraising admissible and inadmissible deviations from the extensional congruence (or isomorphism) of sets of allegedly well-entrenched predicates.⁴¹ Given the strongly relativistic position Goodman has espoused, there cannot even be a formulable sense in which “evolving tradition” can be counted on to yield a clean, cumulative, and convergent clue about the valid rejection of “illegitimate” projectibles. Hence, projectibility cannot be coherently applied.

There is a deeper issue concerning coherence that Goodman’s theory broaches more explicitly than the other sample theories considered – which we shall pursue shortly, and which may perhaps justify having lingered over his thesis longer than necessary. But, for the moment, we may simply take it that our four examples of philosophical incoherence are of somewhat different sorts: roughly, of what may be termed objective (Strawson), metalinguistic (Quine), methodological (Goodman), and transcendental (Wittgenstein) incoherence. There is no comprehensive way of sorting all such sorts – and there is no need to. The important consideration is simply that the evidence of incoherence is not restricted to the inconsistent or incompatible, is rather concerned with the congruity between what (here) a philosopher generates and what he intends to generate in the way of a thesis. To see this is to see the sense in which the coherent is a concern more of rhetoric (in Aristotle’s sense) than of logic, or, more generally, of practical than of theoretical considerations (or at least of theorizing as a rational practice). It is certainly not decisive that the theories of each of our specimen philosophers are faulty or even inconsistent in some detail; errors

may always be corrected, without threatening incoherence. It is rather that the internal faults of each of the theories reviewed are irremediable in terms of the very undertaking each pursues – though this is not to deny that a rich coherent theory may be developed from each of these accounts. Whether, for instance, Goodman's latest version of the theory of entrenchment is coherent we need not consider. It is just that the relativized theory of entrenchment cannot be coherently reconciled with the provision of any criteria for distinguishing genuinely lawlike and accidental generalizations – *which was the purpose for which the theory was first advanced*. In much the same sense (as we have seen), the enterprises of Strawson, Quine, and Wittgenstein could not possibly be recovered without, at the very least, a radical reinterpretation of what should have been undertaken and of what doctrines, in accord with that revised purpose, one could remain committed to.

For all the grandeur of philosophical theorizing, incoherence among theories is very much the same as in the homeliest practical cases – for example, in seriously attempting to carry water in a sieve. Understanding the nature of an undertaking and the normal constraints upon it, one ought to realize (we suppose) that it is (when it is) impossible to achieve. To demonstrate that an undertaking is impossible or self-defeating (for reasons bearing on its conceivability or on the conceptual compatibility of its means with itself) – for instance, as in squaring the circle, in time travel, in catch-22 situations – is to demonstrate the incoherence of attempting the venture. Sometimes, as in such complex theories as those we have sampled, the difficulty of detection is so strenuous that the charge of incoherence need have only the weakest derogatory force against the agent responsible. On the evidence, some of the most splendid philosophical efforts are incoherent. This suggests that charges of incoherence are often not global, however central to a given undertaking, that they often rest on a demonstrably restricted incompatibility or “dissonance”, the importance of which for the undertaking in question justifies the charge. Otherwise, the palpability of incoherence is the mark of a special sort of foolishness or absurdity or stupidity or pointlessness. This is the reason J. L. Austin's examples of certain “absurdities” provide fine specimens of incoherence, however humble.

Austin offers us three examples, which, as he carefully notes, need not (though they involve utterances purportedly conveying statements of fact) be absurd either for grammatical reasons or for reason of contradiction:

- (1) Someone says ‘All John's children are bald, but [or ‘and’] John has no children’; or perhaps he says ‘All John's children are bald’, when, as a matter of fact, John has no children.
- (2) Someone says ‘The cat is on the mat, but [or ‘and’] I don't believe it is’; or perhaps he

says 'The cat is on the mat', when, as a matter of fact, he does not believe it is.

(3) Someone says 'All the guests are French, and some of them aren't'; or perhaps he say 'All the guests are French', and then afterwards says 'Some of the guests are not French'.⁴³

Austin says that

In each of these cases [so-called constatives] one experiences a feeling of outrage; and it's possible each time for us to try to express it in terms of the same word – 'implication', or perhaps that word that we always find so handy, 'contradiction'. But there are more ways of killing the cat than drowning it in butter; and equally, to do violence to language one does not always need a contradiction.⁴⁴

His first example is substantially altered in the second alternative given; for what he wishes to draw attention to is that, normally, in saying what one says (speaking about John's children), one *presupposes* that John has children and, hence, *refers* to them. If it happens that John has no children, then, as is well known, a puzzle arises about the truth value of what has been said. Here, however, there is as yet no actual incoherence – only the threat of it. But, in the first alternative, one *says* something involving the given presupposition and reference, which undermines, in the second conjunct, the very *activity* of having made the reference in the first conjunct. Here, the obvious point is that the conjunction is not a formal contradiction; and yet (on what we have been calling rhetorical grounds – grounds also sometimes termed "pragmatic", in contrast with the semantic and syntactic), there is a plain "dissonance" or incongruity between what is *said* and what is *presupposed* or *intended* in what is said: the intended reference (of the first conjunct) is rejected in the second, and yet the purported reference appears to be the common purpose of the entire utterance. It is, therefore, incoherent. About the second example, Austin himself explicitly says:

these two propositions [conjoined in the sentence given] are not in the least incompatible: both can be true together. What is impossible is to state both at the same time: his *stating* that the cat is on the mat is what implies that the speaker believes it is.⁴⁵

Here, Austin remarks that the case involving the conjuncts of the first sentence is very different. Quite correctly, his point is that the incoherence lies in anyone's *acting* in the manner indicated – in anyone's *stating* what has been said. The third example is simply a "question . . . of the compatibility and incompatibility of propositions".⁴⁶ One is here apparently affirming and denying what is entailed by one's affirmation, under circumstances in which it is absurd to suppose the agent could fail to understand that fact while understanding what he has said. Hence, again very clearly, Austin provides us with a strong sense in which contradiction bears on incoherence, without doing so for purely formal reasons; the rationality of the agent is essentially involved.

Austin then goes on to supply two versions of what he calls “performatives”, which correspond to the first two sorts of absurdity regarding constatives:

(4) ‘I bequeath my watch to you, but [or ‘and’] I haven’t got a watch’; or perhaps someone says ‘I bequeath my watch to you’ when he hasn’t got a watch.

(5) ‘I promise to be there, but [or ‘and’] I have no intention of being there’; or perhaps someone says ‘I promise to be there’ when he doesn’t intend to be there.⁴⁷

Again, the force of these examples is altered by the second alternative in each case – though Austin’s meaning is clear. Certainly, one could speak conformably with example 4, intending to trick someone; and one could speak conformably with example 5, intending to lie. But the first alternatives in each case correspond rather nicely to what is presupposed and implied, respectively, in examples 1 and 2. It is, in fact, a serious weakness in John Searle’s account of illocutionary acts (betrayed by these examples) that Searle treats their performance as constrained by putatively constitutive rules (necessary and sufficient conditions) that count rather more for seriousness, sincerity, and the like (that is, that function regulatively rather than constitutively) and not at all for coherence.⁴⁸ There is surely nothing incoherent in lying, intending not keep a promise, putatively bequeathing another what one cannot bequeath. Similar difficulties confront the plausibility of Kant’s famous rejection of lying as irrational (though, on his assumption of the Categorical Imperative, rational lying becomes impossible); also, the plausibility of R. M. Hare’s account of *akrasia*, for, that an apparently rational agent might subscribe to an obligation without being able volitionally to control his behavior conformably is not self-contradictory and does not entail the incoherence or irrationality of that agent – only a certain unfortunate weakness. On the other hand, since reflexive judgments of obligation and of what one ought to do are judgments that entail (i) ranking categorical behavioral options, (ii) committing the speaker to that ranking, and (iii) affirming that a particular option takes precedence over all relevant alternatives, it would be incoherent to affirm such a judgment *and* to intend not to act conformably.⁴⁹ Here, we have a clear specimen of incoherence involving what one says and how one acts or intends to act (non-linguistically).

A picture of coherence is beginning to emerge from these considerations: *incoherence is a breach or violation of whatever is constitutive of the rational organization of human thought and action.* But it is not in the least obvious what is constitutive in this respect. Favored regulative constraints (as in Searle’s account of speech acts, also as in conflating the constraints of formal consistency with the purposes of particular agents) often

masquerade as constitutive constraints. But the best case that can be made for construing regulative constraints as imposing conditions on coherence is that the *general practices* of a community (though not any particular instance of a practice) must conform with such constraints. For example, it is, as Kant understood, incoherent to speak of particular promises if, as a general practice, people anticipate that “they” are not intended ever (or generally) to be kept. In that sense, some regulative constraints may have a constitutive force for a given practice; but that hardly supplies sufficient grounds for charging incoherence in *particular* cases – where, that is, the merely formal or quasi-formal constraints (consistency, universalizability, compatibility with regulative uniformities) are simply logically insufficient.

A congruent claim supporting the concession intended has been advanced by Sydney Shoemaker – regarding epistemic matters:

That any particular sincere perceptual or memory statement is true is certainly a contingent matter, and it might seem to follow from this that it can only be a contingent fact that such statements are generally true I wish to argue, however, that it is a necessary (logical, or conceptual) truth, not a contingent one, that when perceptual and memory statements are sincerely and confidently asserted, i.e., express confident beliefs, they are generally true.⁵⁰

The tenability of Shoemaker’s claim is not at stake here. The point is that, in effect, Shoemaker holds that the generalized form of what is regulative (but not constitutive) of (coherent) perceptual and memory statements is, when generalized, constitutive of the practice of making perceptual and memory statements. In effect, on Shoemaker’s view, both solipsism and a generalized epistemic skepticism are incoherent.

In fact, precisely because his thesis concerns cognitive claims as such, Shoemaker’s account appears to introduce a version of the so-called coherence theory of truth. Shoemaker treats his own view, rather suggestively, as a gloss on certain of Wittgenstein’s remarks, for instance: “What we have to mention in order to explain the significance, I mean the importance, of a concept, are often extremely general facts of nature: such facts as are hardly ever mentioned because of their extreme generality”.⁵¹ Shoemaker’s is perhaps not so much a coherentist theory of truth as a coherentist constraint on whatever valid theory of truth may be proposed. In an interesting sense, Wittgenstein’s observation, which Shoemaker adopts, is both an empirical and (what is ordinarily regarded as) a transcendental constraint: as a merely empirical constraint, it could not but be questionbegging; but as a purely transcendental consideration, it could not but be arbitrary. Its force (and philosophical charm) lie rather, in its being at once an observation *internal* to the conceptual network within which we function in a cognitively relevant way *and* an observation so compelling conceptually that we assign *it* a relevance *external* to that

network. This is simply an admission that, rather in the spirit of Descartes' Evil Demon argument, there can be no cognitively independent way of establishing the validity of the corpus or methods of knowledge to which we subscribe – but, also, it is an admission that there need be none. In short, what these considerations show is that the coherentist theory is at best a theory about the cognitive status of our entire system of beliefs, not a criterion of truth – certainly not a criterion that could be applied distributively in assessing particular statements. This exposes at one and the same time the inherent implausibility of the (classical) coherentist criterion of truth and the true pertinence of contrasting cognitive practices and particular cognitive claims. And it confirms, once again, the simple power of our picture of incoherence; for, even with respect to the largest cognitive considerations of which we are capable, we find ourselves bound to favor a theory of truth (as yet unformulated – possibly, not requiring to be formulated) that is congruent with the ongoing habits and practices of human perception, volition, and the like. Hence, the model of coherence appropriate to the practical life of man appears to set a coherentist condition (at once empirical and transcendental) on any viable theory of truth. On the Evil Demon argument, a consistent theory of truth need not entail the truth of human beliefs; but, by the same token, no theory of truth plausible or convincing to human beings could be incompatible with the kind of putatively necessary general truth that Shoemaker advances. This, then, clarifies what a transcendental argument actually is: it is an argument that, relative to our conceptual system, assigns the force of an external constraint to conditions based on regularities confirmed within that system.⁵²

Transcendental arguments, therefore, represent the most profound effort to preserve the coherence of the *entire* network of human thought and intelligible action, for they: (i) concede the circularity of validating that network on internal grounds; (ii) expose the arbitrariness and irrelevance of putatively validating the entire network from the vantage of a cognitively external source; and (iii) defend or revise that network by showing the reasonableness (judging *within* it) of construing regularities perceived within the network as imposing external constraints *upon* it. Its historical contingency cannot, therefore, be avoided. Adverting once again to Shoemaker's term, the "necessity" of transcendental arguments (perhaps, then, also, of at least certain of Kant's arguments) is never cognitively confirmed but only shown to be convincing, compelling, persuasive, plausible relative to the intellectual imagination of an historical and contingently developed community of reflective human beings.

The important bearing of this distinction is remarkably straightforward:

coherence theories of truth tend, when unqualified, to be ultimately incoherent; whatever may and must be added to them to make them viable (to preclude incompatible conceptual networks) cannot be added by appeal to cognitively external grounds, on pain of further incoherence; hence, the only constraint that can reasonably be imposed on them must be drawn from transcendental considerations. Goodman, we may observe, offers the following summary observation:

More venerable than either utility or credibility as definitive of truth is coherence, interpreted in various ways but always requiring consistency. The problems here, too, have been enormous. But the classic and chilling objection that for any coherent world version there are equally coherent conflicting versions weakens when we are prepared to accept some two conflicting versions as both true. And the difficulty of establishing any correlation between internal coherence and external correspondence diminishes when the very distinction between the 'internal' and the 'external' is in question. As the distinction between convention and content – between what is said and how it is said – wilts, correspondence between version and world loses its independence from such features of versions of coherence. Of course coherence, however defined, rather than being sufficient for truth seems to operate conjointly with judgments of initial credibility in our efforts to determine truth. But at least . . . coherence and other so-called internal features of versions are no longer disqualified as tests for truth.⁵³

However, Goodman does not address himself to the obvious question: given, as he himself remarks, that coherence theories of truth require at least consistency among sets of putative truths, how can we coherently accept two conflicting “world versions” as true, even if each is, in some restricted internal sense, coherent? As we have already seen, Goodman’s own account treats entrenchment as internal to some world version; hence, he cannot but lack the kind of transcendental ground on which his original puzzle about projectibility (as well as the present puzzle about competing ontologies or conceptual systems) could be resolved. Clearly, the validity of conflicting “world versions” cannot, contrary to Goodman’s sanguine observation, be confirmed by any sort of coherence *test*.⁵⁴ A related difficulty, as we have seen, affects Quine’s conception of ontic or translational indeterminacy.⁵⁵ Both Goodman and Quine, therefore, favoring (for somewhat different reasons) a coherence theory of truth, fail to acknowledge the need for, and the import of, a transcendental argument that articulates the coherence *of* subscribing to just such a theory.

Doubtless, the most ambitious effort to sustain the adequacy of the coherence theory of truth has been mounted (recently) by Nicholas Rescher. But Rescher himself formulates what may be viewed as the two principal programmatic difficulties of any coherence account: “truths surely have no monopoly of coherence”; and an adequate version of the theory must circumvent the thesis that “coherence of one proposition with others only constitutes a test of truth when these others are independently

accepted as true”.⁵⁶ Thus informed, Rescher proposes to assess, solely by coherentist tests, sets of propositions that he terms *data*. “A datum”, he says, “is a *truth-candidate*, a proposition to be taken not as true, but as potentially or *presumptively* true . . . a *prima face* truth . . . to be classed as true provided that doing so creates no anomalies”.⁵⁷ Nevertheless,

Not *everything* is a datum: the concept is to have *some* logico-epistemic bite. To be a datum is not just to be a proposition that *could conceivably* be claimed to be true but to be a proposition that (under the circumstances) can be claimed to be true with at least *some* plausibility; its claim must be well-founded . . . A datum is a proposition which, given the circumstances of the case, is a *real prospect for truth* in terms of the availability of reasons to warrant its truth-candidacy.⁵⁸

In fact, the very notion of a coherence analysis of truth presupposes that “coherence” does not signify “*mere* coherence” (the consistency of a set of propositions) but “coherence *with the data*”.⁵⁹ The threats of transcendental incoherence – marked just above as (i) and (ii) – are plain enough.

Here, Rescher rightly wishes to avoid the circularity of construing the data as truths. Alternatively, in viewing them “merely as plausible presumptions”,⁶⁰ Rescher attempts to justify coherence-criteria of truth by way of a “second order” pragmatic criterion – in the sense (*contra* Quine: in particular, *contra* Quine’s rejection of the analytic/synthetic distinction) that he favors certain truth-criteria (coherentist) over others, rather than attempts to defend the truth of particular propositions (pragmatically *or* in some first order, classical, coherentist manner).⁶¹ Rescher’s essential claim, then, comes to this:

the ultimate metacritical standard for weighing a criterion of truth-acceptance (in the factual area) is not *cognitive* at all, but rather *affective*, and the reasoning of the test-procedure of truth-determination represents in the final analysis an appeal not to knowledge but to feeling. The affective dimension of pain, frustration of hope, disappointment of expectation – and their opposites – become the court of appeal that stands in ultimate judgment over our procedures for deciding questions of truth and falsity. In a real sense cognition is ancillary to practice and *feeling* becomes the arbiter of *knowledge*.⁶²

Now, this won’t do, in the sense that the *coherence* of fitting the use of the coherence truth-criteria *to* our affective life (on the hypothesis given) remains “internal” to the very system assessed; this is the upshot of Rescher’s insisting on the “regulative” function of the pragmatic precept.⁶³ If this is indeed his argument, then Rescher’s program remains transcendently incoherent. On the other hand, Rescher’s theory would be viable at the very least, *if* the pragmatic precept were construed transcendently. His position would, then, be neither “theoretical” nor “practical” at the level of (internal) cognitive or affective life, but would (transcendentally) have extrapolated findings “internal” to that life as supporting “external” constraints upon it. In that sense, transcendental arguments are both

(metatheoretical and metapractical), though they neither insure knowledge nor rational behavior. They detail rather what, under contingent, historical circumstances, we are drawn to regard as the necessary conditions of both.⁶⁴ From an epistemological and methodological point of view, the beauty (here) of a transcendental argument is, precisely, that it obviates the need to construe our choices of a theory of knowledge and truth either in coherentist or foundationalist or pragmatist terms.⁶⁵ There are transcendental applications of each that cannot be captured by a (generously) empirical program,⁶⁶ and there is no way of vindicating one theory of knowledge over its alternatives (say, foundationalist rather than coherentist) on internal grounds alone.⁶⁷ Why this coherent system rather than that (relative to the real world)? is a question easily matched by, Why these ultimate sources of epistemic justification rather than those? and by, Why this satisfaction of human affect or viability rather than that? There is no internal privilege, and there can be no external vantage: the transcendental is, then, the attempt to construct a coherent vision of what best may be thought to be an externally constrained account of our world seen, reflexively, by agents merely confined within it.

This, perhaps, is the most strenuous form in which the question of coherence arises. But related questions obtain much more subtly and more informally than we have thus far considered. For example, the central character in *The Jew of Malta* is not clearly incoherent: we cannot, on the evidence of the play, construe his motivation and behavior coherently; his apparent satisfaction in destroying himself is difficult to reconcile with whatever we may suppose is, rationally, minimally required in the organization of characteristic human desires and conduct. He is not a coherent character, in the sense not of being demonstrably incoherent but of threatening incoherence: he baffles ascriptions of coherence. One may, not unreasonably, similarly claim that most of Freud's clinical papers and his analysis of dreams are intended to recover what is initially non-coherent (what strongly threatens to be incoherent) in the thought and behavior of disturbed human beings. Again, James Joyce's *Finnegan's Wake* and some of Schönberg's music are non-coherent viewed in detail, whatever overview of their structure we may subscribe to.⁶⁸ Also, certainly at this moment of writing (December 1979), the government of Iran appears non-coherent at the very least, regardless of what one might suppose to be the interests of the Iranian state. The obvious point is simply that straightforward canons of formal consistency and the like are either too weak to decide questions of coherence or cannot be applied without the provision of a suitable context in which the rationality of some human agent's purpose in acting as he has, or in producing what he has, may be made relevantly explicit. Doubtless,

there are forms of human confusion so extreme as to breach even the minima of rationality – for example, in persistently attempting to do what one believes or knows is impossible to do, or in intending to do what one believes or knows is already accomplished. Such forms of incoherence begin to baffle even ascriptions of madness, since it is not quite clear that relevant predications of rationality are even coherently eligible. But certainly, certain forms of insanity approach breaches of coherence in the sense of breaching even the most minimal human rationality; and, of course, as in certain bizarre forms of paranoia, the disorder itself may take the form of an unusually tight adherence to the canons of consistency while in the grip of systematic motives and purposes that depart too radically from characteristic human objectives – for instance, as in the mad consistency of a young boy who believes himself to be a machine, plugged into his source of energy by an invisible electric cord that can be disconnected all too easily. So incoherence in the lives of human beings appears as a breach in rational forms of behavior or production relative to normal or characteristic human interests; but irrationality or incoherence sometimes appears, in a deeper sense, in departures from normal human interests regardless of the conditional coherence of behavior relative to deeply deviant actual interests. To say that a pattern of human behavior or thought is non-coherent is (by way of a term of art) to signify that a certain phenomenon is relevantly open to judgments of coherence, and that one cannot yet see whether it is or is not coherent. Edgar Allan Poe's story of the man in the crowd is a good example: we cannot grasp the coherence of his running "aimlessly" about until we know his motivation even if he has no purpose. People working at strange machines, the working of those machines themselves (perhaps automatically), the customs of exotic tribes, apparently the famous Armory show in which the Fauves first appeared, and – most ubiquitously – the fragments of conversation overheard in real life (or, as in *Last Year in Marienbad*), all demand clarification in terms of coherence.

Context is the clue, however. Faced with an apparently non-coherent (not obviously coherent or incoherent) array of human thought or behavior or work, we search for a plausible or likely context of human purposes within which a given set of dreams, thoughts, plans, endeavors, theories, stories, paintings, statements, utterances, fears, commitments, hopes, or the like may be shown to be relevantly coherent or incoherent. It must be emphasized that there is no antecedent table of human contexts supplied with appropriate criteria of application that can be assigned to particular (provisionally) non-coherent phenomena such that, by applying them, we may straightforwardly settle the question of their coherence or in-

coherence. What needs to be determined are the actual motivation and purpose of an agent in a given context: an agent's utterances or movements make no sense except construed as distinct speech acts or purposive actions or the like; but to characterize utterances and movements thus *is* to interpret them contextually. Hence, as we have already seen in connection with Searle's theory, it is tempting but unconvincing to construe would-be regulative constraints on speech and behavior as the constitutive constraints of coherence. Perhaps the most powerful generalization that can be offered about querying coherence in particular contexts are these: (a) human utterances and acts are not even intelligible if taken atomistically, without reference to internal relations of rationality; and (b) there is no single, real, total system of such relations open to discovery, applicable by the canons of scientific grammar, scientific psychology, or the like, capable of confirming or disconfirming neutral judgments of coherence. Such judgments always depend on the interpretations of interested human agents.

An illustration may help. Imagine a woman asking her husband: "Would you rather have my company as the warm and steady but hardly exciting companion of your middle age that I am now, or the thrilling moments of our first years together?" Somewhat baffled (or annoyed), her husband might well point out that if he could choose to return to the "thrilling moments", "he" would have to face the aging process inevitably again; and that, now that they have both quieted down in their middle age, he still has the knowledge of their first courtship. Faced with a question involving counterfactual considerations, he might even suspect its potential incoherence; he realizes that the choice could never really confront him, either in his youth or in his middle age – though he also realizes that he might have liked one period better than the other. Nevertheless, it would be preposterous to suppose, in the context of *such* a question, that, following Searle, we make take it that the speaker does not know the answer, that "it is not obvious" to both speaker and hearer whether or not the hearer will supply the information wanted unless asked, that the speaker actually wants the information, and actually regards raising the question as an attempt to elicit the information wanted.⁶⁹ Such a view would lead to marital disaster. Very likely, the appropriate response – a response entirely coherent within a reasonably assigned context of familiar human behavior (but not demonstrably coherent on an application of Searle's conditions, or, for that matter, on any formal grounds) – would be a sincere declaration of love focused on the present interval of life and intended to dispel the wife's probable fears about losing her charm and beauty. In short, the intention that informs a speech act (or any other human act) draws on an experience of life that

cannot be relevantly fixed for any of the surface features of an utterance or movement.

Essentially the same weakness as Searle's infects H.P. Grice's quite different account of the "implicatures" of speech acts. Grice posits an entire series of "conversational implicatures" (where, by "implicature", he intends any of a family of logical or quasi-logical connections that may impose conceptually appropriate constraints on what we "say", as in performing speech acts) together with a general "cooperative principle": "Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged".⁷⁰ The principle (CP) is not meant to be vacuously true; that is, Grice believes that what "is required" can be discerned by attending to the general features of speech acts or conversational exchange. He does not actually provide criteria for determining which speech act (in which contextually relevant sense) *is* being performed. He offers instead a rather extraordinary list of specific "conversational maxims" that are not to be confused with the rules of etiquette or the like: for instance: "Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange)". "Do not make your contribution more informative than is required." "Do not say what you believe to be false." "Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence." "Avoid obscurity of expression." "Avoid ambiguity." "Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)." "Be orderly."⁷¹

Grice does not wish to regard these constraints as contractual, but that idea substantially conveys the sense of his notion. His general view is given by the following:

... I would like to be able to show that observance of the CP and maxims is reasonable (rational) along the following lines: that any one who cares about the goals that are central to conversation/communication (e.g., giving and receiving information, influencing and being influenced by others) must be expected to have an interest, given suitable circumstances, in participating in talk exchanges that will be profitable only on the assumption that they are conducted in general accordance with the CP and the maxims.⁷²

Noticeably, however, Grice has much less success in specifying "generalized conversational implicature" (that is, where "the use of a certain form of words in an utterance would normally in the *absence* of special circumstances carry such-and-such an implicature or type of implicature") than in specifying "particularized conversational implicature" (that is, where "an implicature is carried by saying that *p* on a particular occasion in virtue of special features of the context, cases in which there is no room for the idea that an implicature of this sort is *normally* carried by saying that *p*").⁷³ The reason is simply that, in the generalized case, implicatures must be relatively

vacuous when applied in order to be relevant; and in the particularized case, they are already entailed by the “special features” admitted, if relevant.

The trouble with Grice’s account is multiple. First of all, CP and the maxims may be taken as constitutive of conversational coherence (Grice’s “reasonable” or “rational”) only in the sense, already broached in considering Shoemaker’s view, that *general* practices may be expected to conform to them, but not any particular conversational instance. Secondly, there are no general implicatures that can be assigned to speech utterances of given types, since (i) whether putatively “normal” or “special” circumstances obtain depends on the actual context of utterance; (ii) Grice himself nowhere supplies (nor has anyone ever supplied) criteria for detecting when acts of particular types or genres obtain or obtain in the normal sense; and (iii) what is implicated by way of “particularized conversational implicature” is just what, trivially and parasitically, may be coherently required once we understand the particular purpose for which (in a sense internal to the speech act itself) a particular exchange is intended. It is, therefore, quite impossible to separate would-be implicatures pertinent to a speech act from an analysis of that particular speech act. Grice conveys the impression that he has made some progress toward *antecedently* sorting constraints of coherence that may be distributively assigned particular speech acts or genres of speech acts; but any apparent failure to conform with putatively constraining maxims may always be obviated merely by reclassifying the speech act in question in such a way that it conforms with “maxims” extrapolated from our understanding of its own distinctive and internal purpose. Thus, for example, attempting to apply Grice’s account in an analysis of poetry and fiction along speech-act lines, Mary Louise Pratt inadvertently produces a *reductio* of Grice’s position. For, she correctly notes that “rule-breaking can be the (very) point of an utterance”; and she herself introduces the game of “verbal jeopardy”, that is, a genuinely social form of conversational exchange in which “noncooperation”, “uncooperativeness”, a breach of the supposed rules of exchange is the very point of the exchange.⁷⁴ In effect, this means that one cannot ever tell what implicatures constrain a contribution to a conversational exchange or a passage in a fiction or the like, unless one knows what the purpose or point of that particular contribution is; and once one knows that, one knows the coherent purpose that itself constrains that contribution internally. Try, for example, to determine antecedently, and independently of a full interpretation of Jacques Derrida’s “Differance” – that is, merely by noting the types of speech act that Derrida is engaged in in writing as does – what the conversational implicatures are that constrain the coherence of what he says.⁷⁵ It is quite impossible.

To grasp the purposive coherence of a particular piece of speech (or writing) is tantamount to identifying the internal constraints on its exhibiting the coherence it exhibits. We may extrapolate general maxims, to be sure, but we cannot suppose that they have any antecedent force relative to particular speech acts as opposed to general speech practices. Contrary to Grice's contention, there is no viable lexicographical order in accord with which "normal" and "special" cases may be appraised with respect to their coherence or reasonableness. A very pretty and telling illustration is provided (for another purpose) by Michael Riffaterre. Speaking of a Ronsard poem, which begins:

Ha, seigneur dieu, que de grâces écloses
 Dans le jardin de ce sein verdelet,
 Enflent le rond de deux gazons de lait,
 (Ah Lord God, how many graces blossom in the garden of this
 pretty green bosom and swell the round of two milky lawns . . .),

Riffaterre notes the apparent incoherence of speaking of green breasts and two round milk-lawns, and resolves the seeming contradiction by placing Ronsard's poem within a determinate tradition of praise for the female form *and*, in particular, in a relation of inexplicit intertextual allusion to a poem of Ariosto's (or, perhaps, more cautiously, to the theme that Ariosto, among others, employs):

Bianca nieve e il bel collo, e'l petto latte;
 . . .
 Due pome acerbe, e pur d'ivorio fatte,
 (White snow is the lovely neck, and milk the breast; two
 unripened apples, green yet ivory . . .).

The original metaphor, *due pome acerbe*, goes unmentioned but (plausibly) is economically and boldly exploited by Ronsard – particularly in the choice of (the secret) *jardin*, which belongs to the conventions of the genre of love poetry to which Ronsard subscribes.⁷⁶ A comparable procedure is required as well for the resolution of the apparent incoherence of schizophrenic discourse.⁷⁷

To appreciate the force of these remarks is to see also that there can be no convincing way in which to separate the regularities of language from the larger patterns of the rational and purposive life of a community of human beings. Hence, there can be no way of determining the meanings of linguistic utterances apart from the species-specific and historically specialized experience of a particular stock of men. The coherence of speech depends on relating what we assign as the meaning of what is said to some

larger, non-linguistic context of orderly human life, which informs that assignment. One cannot, for instance, even understand the meaning of the words of Keats' line: "O, for a draught of vintage! that hath been/Cool'd a long age in the deep-delved earth" without some grasp of the contingent (non-linguistic) activities of vineyard farming. There is no antecedent reservoir of meanings for words that can be tested to determine a particular fit within a sentence merely by using selected, suitably regular sentence frames or the like. It is, in effect, the coherence and intelligible order of social existence that makes it possible for us to assign even the meanings of words. In fact, the very notion that the meaning of a word depends on its use in a normal context or in circumstances that depend on the "special features of the context", is a remarkably close analogue of Grice's own notion – and cannot but fail for a similar reason.⁷⁸

Nearly all discussants of the issue of coherence are clear that coherence cannot be reduced to consistency. Rescher, for example, beginning very close to the point of Rudner's speculation, remarks: "The 'coherence' of a propositional set is . . . to be understood as requiring not simply (1) the obvious minimum of *consistency*, but also (2) the feature of being *connected* in some special way".⁷⁹ Rudner, in effect, attempts to construe consistency generously enough (by making it preclude a variety of "dissonance" relations) that the feature of "being connected" can be obviated, and coherence can be restricted to merely formal or quasi-formal constraints. And Rescher argues that the "special" connection required links consistency pragmatically with our affective (specifically, our non-cognitive) life. But the informal survey that we have made of a rather wide range of contexts of coherence shows, in a strongly convergent respect, that the relevant regard in which consistency is "connected in some special way" cannot be satisfied by any condition less than that of fitting a reasonable model of the rationality of human thought and action. There may well be room for quarrel and disagreement about the requirements of such a model; and to the extent that there is, there are bound to be divergent ascriptions of coherence and incoherence.⁸⁰ But before attempting to appraise such competing models, we should first ascertain the conceptual locus of ascriptions of coherence themselves. And that we have now done.

NOTE

¹ Richard S. Rudner, 'Show or Tell: Incoherence Among Symbol Systems', *Erkenntnis* **XII** (1978), 129–151 (130)

² This is, in effect, the central problem of Jaakko Hintikka's *Knowledge and Belief* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1962).

³ See, especially, Nelson Goodman, *Languages of Art*, 2nd ed. (Hackett Publishing Co.,

Indianapolis, 1976); *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis, 1978)

⁴ Rudner, *op. cit.*, p. 130.

⁵ Goodman, *Languages of Art*, p. 264, cited by Rudner.

⁶ John Heintz mentions the story in 'Reference and Inference in Fiction', *Poetics*, VIII (1979).

⁷ Nelson Goodman, 'Reply to Rudner', *Erkenntnis* XII (1978), 179.

⁸ Cf. Nelson Goodman, 'On Rightness of Rendering', *Ways of Worldmaking* (Hackett Publishing Co., Indianapolis, 1978).

⁹ P. F. Strawson, *Individuals* (Methuen, London, 1959), p. 38.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 22, 37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 38–39.

¹² *Ibid.*, Ch. 3.

¹³ W.V. Quine, 'Two Dogmas of Empiricism', *From a Logical Point of View* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, 1953), pp. 42–43.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 43, 45.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

¹⁷ W. V. Quine, *Word and Object* (MIT Press, Cambridge, 1960), pp. 42–43.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

¹⁹ Cf. Rudner, *loc. cit.*

²⁰ *Word and Object*, p. 27. Cf. Joseph Margolis, 'Behaviorism and Alien Languages', *Philosophia* III (1973), 413–422.

²¹ Compare W. V. Quine, 'Carnap and Logical Truth', in P. A. Schilpp (ed.), *The Philosophy of Rudolf Carnap* (Open Court, La Salle, 1963).

²² Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, new edition of the translation by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1972), p. 5.

²³ Cf. Robert J. Fogelin, *Wittgenstein* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1976), Ch. 9.

²⁴ Nelson Goodman, *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, 2nd ed. (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1965), p. 90.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 91n.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 119. Italics added.

²⁸ When, for instance, he concedes the relativization of so-called "constructional definitions", Goodman holds that such definitions still depend upon and presuppose our ability to determine "that the expressions have identical extensions" – at least with respect to some "minimum class of sentences that we care about preserving": Nelson Goodman, *The Structure of Appearance*, 2nd ed. (Bobbs-Merrill, Indianapolis, 1966), Ch. 1, esp. pp. 4, 12.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 93. Italics added.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 95–96. Italics added.

³¹ 'Words, Works, Worlds', in *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 10.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 12.

³³ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. x; cf. p. 1.

³⁵ 'On Rightness of Rendering', in *Ways of Worldmaking*, p. 127.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

³⁸ *Fact, Fiction, and Forecast*, p. 73.

³⁹ This is also, very plainly, the interpretation Israel Scheffler gives: cf. *The Anatomy of Inquiry* (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1963), pp. 295–310, esp. pp. 297–302.

⁴⁰ 'On Rightness of Rendering', p. 128.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 138–139. Italics added.

⁴² Cf. *The Structure of Appearance*, pp. 13–29. See, also, Joseph Margolis, 'Cognitive Issues in the Realist–Idealist Dispute', *Midwest Studies in Philosophy* V (1980).

⁴³ J. L. Austin, 'Performative–Constative', trans. by G. J. Warnock, in *La Philosophie*

Analytique (Les Editions de Minuit, Paris, 1962), p. 514. Page references are given to the text as it appears in Joseph Margolis (ed.), *An Introduction to Philosophical Inquiry*, 2nd ed. (Alfred A. Knopf, New York, 1978).

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 515.

⁴⁸ See John R. Searle, *Speech Acts* (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1969), Ch. 3

⁴⁹ See R. M. Hare, *Freedom and Reason* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1963); and Joseph Margolis, *Values and Conduct* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1971), Chs. 3–4.

⁵⁰ Sydney Shoemaker, *Self-Knowledge and Self-Identity* (Cornell University Press, Ithaca, 1963), p. 229.

⁵¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. by G. E. M. Anscombe (Macmillan, London, 1953), p. 56; cited by Shoemaker.

⁵² Here, construing internal and external questions loosely in accord with Carnap's distinction (cf. 'Empiricism, Semantics, and Ontology', reprinted in Leonard Linsky (ed.), *Semantics and the Philosophy of Language*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, 1952); I agree with James Cornman's conclusion that the only way to avoid paradox with regard to external questions is "to find some way to find clues to external questions from within some linguistic framework", *Metaphysics, Reference, and Language* (Yale University Press, New Haven, 1966), p. xx.

⁵³ 'On Rightness of Rendering', pp. 124–125.

⁵⁴ Cf. Rudner, *op. cit.*: "I want . . . to inquire into the problem of how we may tell whether what Goodman, perhaps more provocatively [than in speaking of 'cogent judgments of coherence or incoherence among two different symbolizations of world – including radically different kinds of symbolizations'] sometimes calls two different worlds 'really' are the same world – 'really' are mutually coherent – 'really' are the same 'possible' world", p. 130. It is helpful also to compare Otto Neurath, 'Protocol Sentences', trans. by F. Schick, in A. J. Ayer (ed.), *Logical Positivism* (Free Press, Glencoe, III, 1959); Neurath subscribes to a coherence theory of truth but disallows conflicting protocol sentences.

⁵⁵ Cf. Hilary Putnam, *Meaning and the Moral Sciences* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1978); also, Margolis, 'Cognitive Issues in the Realist–Idealist Dispute' and 'The Problems of Similarity: Realism and Nominalism', *The Monist* **LXI** (1978), 384–400.

⁵⁶ Nicholas Rescher, *The Coherence Theory of Truth* (Clarendon, Oxford, 1973), pp. 48, 50.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 65; also, p. 95.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 257, 262; cf. also, Appendix I.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 255.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 251.

⁶⁴ Cf. P. F. Strawson, *The Bounds of Sense* (Methuen, London, 1966); Jürgen Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, trans. by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Beacon Press, Boston, 1971).

⁶⁵ Cf. Joseph Margolis, 'Skepticism, Foundationalism, and Pragmatism', *American Philosophical Quarterly* **XIV** (1977), 119–127.

⁶⁶ Putnam's theory of scientific realism fails for just this reason; see *loc. cit.*; also, Richard N. Boyd, 'Realism, Underdetermination and a Causal Theory of Evidence', *Noûs* **VIII** (1973), 1–12; and Margolis, 'Cognitive Issues in the Realist–Idealist Dispute'.

⁶⁷ A recent such effort appears in Ernest Sosa, 'The Raft and the Pyramid; Coherence versus Foundations in the Theory of Knowledge' (as yet unpublished).

⁶⁸ Cf. *Music and Letters* **XXXIII** (1951–1952).

⁶⁹ Searle, *op. cit.*, p. 66.

⁷⁰ H. Paul Grice, 'Logic and Conversation', in Peter Cole and Jerry L. Morgan (eds.), *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 3 (Academic Press, New York, 1975), p. 45.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45–46.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 49. See also, H. Paul Grice, 'Further Notes on Logic and Conversation', in Peter Cole (ed.), *Syntax and Semantics*, Vol. 9 (Academic Press, New York, 1978).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 56.

⁷⁴ Mary Louise Pratt, *Toward a Speech Act Theory of Literary Discourse* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1977), Ch. 6. See also Joseph Margolis, *Art and Philosophy* (Humanities Press and Harvester Press, Atlantic Highlands and Hassoeks, 1980), Ch. 12.

⁷⁵ See Jacques Derrida, 'Differance', in *Speech and Phenomena*, trans. by David B. Allison (Northwestern University Press, Evanston, 1973). Cf. also the extraordinary exchange between Derrida and Searle in *Glyph*.

⁷⁶ Michael Riffaterre, *Semiotics of Poetry* (Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 1978), pp. 82–83.

⁷⁷ Cf. Sherry Rochester and J. R. Martin, *Crazy Talk; A Study of the Discourse of Schizophrenic Speakers* (Plenum, New York, 1979).

⁷⁸ The parallel is provided in William Alston's theory of meaning, for example, in *Philosophy of Language* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J., 1964); cf. Joseph Margolis, 'The Meaning of a Word', *Metaphilosophy* IX (1978), 259–275; and 'Meaning, Speakers' Intentions, and Speech Acts', *The Review of Metaphysics* XXVI (1973), 681–695.

⁷⁹ Rescher, *op. cit.*, p. 32f.

⁸⁰ See, for example, John Kekes, *A Justification of Rationality* (State University of New York Press, Albany, 1976), for an appreciation of the complexity of the problem.

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