Lewis and Cavell on ordinary language and academic philosophy

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Abstract: I first show that Lewis and Cavell, regarded as ordinary language philosophers, both part from Austin on the same point, and that in both cases this leads to a similar account of the way ordinary language rules allow successful philosophical (ethical and/or ontological) arguments to reveal truth, as well as a similar account of the way such arguments can fail. I then explain how, beginning with this common basis, they nevertheless end up drawing opposite conclusions about the value of academic philosophy.

Keywords: David Lewis; Stanley Cavell; John L. Austin; Thomas Kuhn; Rudolf Carnap; ordinary language philosophy; academic politics.

1. *Introduction*

David Lewis is in many ways a successor to Carnap. Lewis's modal realism amounts, in the terminology of the *Aufbau*, to a choice of basis: one which gets universal reduction past the seemingly insuperable obstacle of counterfactuals. Similarly, Lewis's mereological interpretation of sets and of the universal-particular relation are the reflexes of Carnap's attempt to carry out such reduction using the fewest ascension forms possible (subject to Goodman's suggestion that we try the part-whole relation).

Lewis also follows Carnap on the possibility of an institution aimed at seeking truth. According to Carnap, "the goal of science consists in this: to find and to order the true statements about the objects of knowledge" (1974: 252, §179). Lewis agrees, and adds that (almost) every department of a "lucky" university would be in that sense scientific. He also adds, however, that the members of a department will typically not agree on what is true. Hence, in most departments, the truth will be sought via dispute:

> Not perhaps [in] the department of frenchified literary theory, where skepticism runs rampant and the pursuit of truth is reckoned passé. Not perhaps [in] the mathematics department, where they are in confident agreement about what's true and how to tell, and they disagree only about what's fruitful and interesting. But in most depart-

> ments, as in philosophy, (1) the advancement of knowledge is the agreed aim; but (2) there are prolonged disputes over what's true. (Lewis 2000a: 5)

Note that the department of philosophy is explicitly included.

It is somewhat controversial whether actual philosophy departments make progress toward truth. Indeed, there is controversy even about physical science. When Lewis was hired by the Princeton philosophy department, in 1970, one of its (decidedly unfrenchified) members was the man who had written this:

> These last paragraphs [...] show that a sort of progress will inevitably characterize the scientific enterprise so long as such an enterprise survives. In science there need not be progress of another sort. We may, to be more precise, have to relinquish the notion, explicit or implicit, that changes of paradigm carry scientists and those who learn from them closer and closer to the truth. (Kuhn 1996: 170)

Kuhn reaches this conclusion, moreover, by examining the way scientific disputes are forced to end. A science has "matured", according to him, only when its practitioners end their prolonged interschool debates and settle into the consensus brought about by a common paradigm.

Lewis never, to my knowledge, refers to Kuhn in his writings. In the case of philosophy, however, he faces an attack from closer quarters. For the disputes which Lewis everywhere describes as philosophical concern, in Bargle's phrase, "debates over ontic parsimony" (Lewis and Lewis 1983: 9). But these are questions of the type Carnap would later call "external", and about which, early and late, he always maintained two things. First, that they are not questions at all in the "strict logical sense", in which "the posing of a question consists in this, that a statement is given and the task is posed, to establish either this statement itself or its negation as true" (Carnap 1974: 254, §180). Second, that, therefore, although answers to such questions may legitimately be used to express an "emotional and practical attitude" (*gefühls- und willensmäßige Einstellung*), we fall into delusion as soon as we treat them as true or false, and hence as proper subjects for *dispute*:

> The metaphysician believes himself to move within the realm in which true and false are in question [*in dem es um wahr und falsch geht*]. In actuality, however, he has said nothing, but only brought something to expression, like an artist. We cannot conclude that the metaphysician finds himself in this delusion simply from the fact that he adopts speech as medium of expression and declarative sentences [*Aussagesätze*] as form of expression; for the lyric poet does the same, without thereby lying under this delusion. But the metaphysician produces arguments for his propositions [*Sätze*]; he demands agreement with their content; he polemicizes against the metaphysicians of other movements, in that he seeks to refute their propositions in his treatise. (Carnap 1931: 240)

Carnap thus repeats, in a more radical register, Kant's diagnosis of metaphysics: it contains antinomies, disputes in which the recognized procedures of argument do not produce agreement, because its practitioners are subject to an illusion of meaning something when they do not.

Lewis disagrees. But his most emphatic statement of that comes in the midst of *agreeing* with Carnap about the premise that there are, in general, no procedures for reaching agreement in ontological disputes:

> If you say flatly that there is no god, and I say that there are countless gods but none of them are our worldmates, then it may be that neither of us is making any mistake of method. We may each be bringing our opinions to equilibrium in the most careful possible way, taking account of all the arguments, distinctions, and counterexamples. But one of us, at least, is making a mistake of fact. Which one is wrong depends on what there is. (1983a: XI)

So for Lewis to maintain his position he must claim that it is rational to hold beliefs, and rational to dispute, about matters in which dispute is not a path to agreement.

Hence the connection to Cavell. Part III of *The Claim of Reason* begins with, and largely centers around, Cavell's criticism of "two assumptions, one about the nature of rationality and one about the nature of moral argument":

> The first is the assumption that the rationality of an argument depends upon its leading from premises all parties accept, in steps all can follow, to an agreement upon a conclusion which all must accept. The second assumption is that the goal of a moral argument is agreement upon some conclusion, in particular, a conclusion concerning what ought to be done. (1979: 254)

The topic is moral, rather than ontological, argument. But the two cases are closely related. At the time of the *Aufbau*, Carnap still regarded moral questions as in a sense empirical and therefore scientific, but he soon adopted the view that they, too, are pseudoquestions[1]. This is the view, later adopted by Ayer and, following Ayer, by Stevenson, that Cavell confronts first of all: the view that disagreements in science are "disagreements in belief", whereas disagreements in ethics are "disagreements in attitude" (Cavell 1979: 259, citing Stevenson 1944: 7). The position is supported, Cavell says, by the fact that moral arguments are "always, and dishearteningly" liable to end in a mere "stalemate", in which "the questions which prompted the argument [are] either left without answer or with incompatible answers which any further argument would seem helpless to resolve" (Cavell 1979: 247).

[1] See (1974: 203-4, §152) and cf. (1931: 237).

If it is natural to regard Lewis as a successor to Carnap, however, it is not so natural to regard him as an alternative to Cavell. Neither Lewis's single explicit engagement with Cavell (1969: 62) nor his more general remarks about ordinary language philosophy (1983a: x) are much help, and we may guess that he didn't intend them to be. He is in general very selective in the views he chooses to criticize or to compare with his own. The same can be said about Cavell, of course, who never, as far as I know, takes any notice of Lewis's work[2]. Being thus left in the lurch by the principals, we will need to reconstruct a relationship between them from what they each say about topics of common interest.

2. *Context*

The principle of ordinary language philosophy, which distinguishes it from a vaguer philosophical appeal to common sense, is the principle of ordinary *context*: that "the profoundest as well as the most superficial questions can be understood only when they have been placed in their natural environments" (Cavell 1976b: 41). The same principle is central to Lewis's thought. I have said above that modal realism provides a system-form which will allow the reduction of counterfactuals to indicatives. Equally important, however, is the way this reduction allows the truth of counterfactuals to depend on the context in which they are asserted.

Because a counterfactual conditional is normally assertible only in contexts in which the antecedent and the consequent are false, the context of assertion must, if the counterfactual utterance can be used to assert anything at all, serve to determine certain *other* contexts at which the antecedent and the consequent are to be evaluated: namely, contexts in which (a) the antecedent is true, but (b) actual background conditions and general principles more or less continue to hold. To assert the counterfactual is to claim that (c) the consequent is true in all those contexts. The combination of (a) and (c) means, in particular, that a counterfactual is normally threatened on two sides by adjustment of the parameter implicit in (b): too far towards "more", and there may be no contexts left in which the antecedent is true (so the conditional becomes vacuous); too far towards "less", and new contexts become available in which the consequent is false (so the conditional becomes false). If the counterfactual is assertible in some contexts and not in others, then the context of assertion must, generally speaking, resolve the vagueness of the "more or less", or, as Lewis puts it, must

[2] I once asked Cavell in person what he thought of Lewis, and in reply he said something about time constraints which prevent us from reading everything.

determine how "strictly" the conditional is to be taken. "That is not altogether wrong", he continues,

> but it is defeatist. It consigns to the wastebasket of contextually resolved vagueness something much more amenable to systematic analysis than most of the rest of the mess in the wastebasket. (1973: 13)

He then proceeds to introduce his own view, according to which a counterfactual is a "variable strict conditional", one which "is as strict, within limits, as it must be to escape vacuity, and no stricter" (*Ibid.*).

Later, however, the systematic analysis expands over the whole wastebasket. The rule that strictness changes to prevent vacuity is of the type Lewis later calls a "rule of accommodation": a rule according to which "conversational score [tends] to evolve in such a way as is required in order to make whatever occurs count as correct play" (1983d: 240). The strictness of counterfactual conditionals is only one of many components that make up the "conversational score", and non-vacuity of counterfactuals is only one among many criteria which determine the correctness of conversational "play". Among other things, the analysis now covers all vagueness in which the strictness of some semantic standard must vary with circumstances. In what sense of "must"? Lewis is explicit:

> If Fred is a borderline case of baldness, the sentence "Fred is bald" may have no determinate truth value. Whether it is true or not depends on where you draw the line. […] We cannot pick a delineation once and for all (not if we are interested in ordinary language). (244)

We all have an interest in ordinary language, are parties to the convention that constitutes it. In saying that we cannot avoid vagueness on pain of breaking that convention, that is, failing to speak at all, Lewis declares himself an ordinary language philosopher.

True, at this point he also invokes Austin, in a way which emphasizes their differences. "Austin's 'France is hexagonal,'" he writes, "is a good example of a sentence which is true enough for many contexts, but not true enough for many others" (245), which means: "true under a large enough part of the range of delineations of its vagueness" (244). Whereas what Austin says is this:

> Suppose that we confront "France is hexagonal" with the facts […], is it true or false? Well, […] I can see what you mean by saying that it is true for certain intents and purposes. […] But then someone says: "But is it true or is it false?" […] How can one answer this question, whether it is true or false that France is hexagonal? It is just rough, and that is the right and final answer to the question of the relation of "France is hexagonal" to France. It is a rough description; it is not a true or a false one. (1975: 143)

So Austin and Lewis agree that, first, if someone asks "Is France hexagonal?", the right answer, in some contexts, is "yes", and, in others, "no"; second, that if they ask "Is 'France is hexagonal' true?", the answer is: true enough for certain purposes but not enough for others; third, that if they continue: "But is it true or false?", the answer is: neither. The issue is not whether this last answer is right, but whether it is right and *final*. If our interlocutor continues: "But must not every meaningful declarative sentence express a proposition which is either true or false?", Austin replies that, no, that is not what we say, whereas Lewis shifts to a new context – call it a semanticist's context – in which he can say: "France is hexagonal" expresses different propositions depending on an index which varies with the context of assertion. "'France is hexagonal' is either true or false", was false in the old context, but is true in this new one.

When we turn to Cavell and Cavell's Wittgenstein, however, matters are less clear. The major difference that Cavell identifies between Austin and Wittgenstein is that Wittgenstein "has as fully worked out a theory of how language becomes metaphysical as he does of how language becomes ordinary, that is, of what is acquired in acquiring language" (1994: 6-7). Austin has no explanation beyond the wile of the metaphysician as to how an ordinary question like "But how do you know?" sprouts into a threat to our knowledge of the external world. But Wittgenstein, according to Cavell, has both a theory as to what is acquired in learning to use such an ordinary question, and a theory as to why just that acquisition leaves us inclined to make the question "metaphysical" – where, for Cavell, "metaphysics" is always traced back to Descartes and no further, and Descartes is understood primarily as a proposer of skepticism.

Cavell must explain, then, how the constraints at work in ordinary conversation dictate a skeptical conclusion, once a special context has been established:

> The philosopher's conclusion seems [...] to be right, and indeed to be deeper than our everyday, average ideas. [...] The convincingness of the conclusion [depends] upon its proceeding, or seeming to proceed, in just the ordinary way any ordinary person must (grammatically) proceed to establish a claim to know of something's existence. But the methods any competent speaker and actor would use to establish ordinary claims seem, in the hands of the philosopher, to establish the inferiority or weakness of those very ordinary claims themselves. (1979: 165)

And this explanation is Lewis's, as well. In the semanticist's context, he will say: an ordinary "might" sentence, "It might be that φ", is true if φ evaluates to true at some world within a certain range, the boundary of which moves in response to a rule of accommodation. The skeptic depends on that ordinary rule:

> The commonsensical epistemologist says: "I *know* the cat is in the carton – there he is before my eyes – I just *can't* be wrong about that!" The skeptic replies: "You might

be the victim of a deceiving demon". Thereby he brings into consideration possibilities hitherto ignored, else what he says would be false. The boundary shifts outward so that what he says is true. Once the boundary is shifted, the commonsensical epistemologist must concede defeat. (Lewis 1983d: 247)

If, moreover, the skeptic's conclusion seems deeper than our everyday ideas, that, too, is thanks to ordinary language constraints. There is, Lewis explains, an asymmetry to certain rules of accommodation. "Because of this asymmetry", for example, "a player of language games who is so inclined may get away with it if he tries to raise the standards of precision as high as possible – so high, perhaps, that no material object whatever is hexagonal" (245). The same thing holds in the case of the skeptic's claim, "You might be wrong":

> We get the impression that the sceptic […] has the last word. Again this is because the rule of accommodation is not fully reversible. […] Because of this asymmetry, we may think that what is true with respect to the outward-shifted boundary must be somehow more true than what is true with respect to the original boundary. (247)

The skeptical argument works by shifting us to a special context – Cavell calls it "the philosopher's context" – in which the rules of ordinary language themselves dictate the skeptical conclusion, and dictate that it will seem more true, deeper, than our everyday knowledge claims.

The semanticist's context bears at a least a passing resemblance to the philosopher's context. It is a context in which "But it must be either true or false" seems deeper or more accurate than Austin's everyday "It is just rough". The semanticist, like the skeptic, must have achieved this by relying on rules of accommodation – that is, by using ordinary language rules themselves to force a context in which ordinary conversational purpose is thwarted. Lewis makes such moves over and over, but one key example has just been quoted: "If Fred is a borderline case of baldness, the sentence 'Fred is bald' may have no determinate truth value. Whether it is true depends on where you draw the line" (244). The first sentence says, with Austin, that "Fred is bald" is neither true nor false. The second sentence, however, presupposes the law of excluded middle, and straightaway a context is established in which it holds: a context in which it may be truly asserted that: "'Fred is bald' is either true or false, depending on the context in which it is asserted".

Aside from the *similarity* between the philosopher's context and the semanticist's context, however, there is also the following relationship between the two: it is only in the semanticist's context that Lewis can explain how the skeptic's inclination motivates her to establish the philosopher's context, and how the resulting argument is neither fully correct nor fully incorrect – not

incorrect play, but nevertheless, so to speak, unsporting. But then if Cavell also differs from Austin in making just such a diagnosis, we should expect to find him, too, establishing something like a semanticist's context. Which he does, for example, here:

> It will help to ask: Can a child attach a label to a thing? [...]
> Mightn't we wish to say *either* Yes or No? Is it a matter of *deciding* which to say? What is it a decision about? Should we say, "Yes and No"? But what makes us want to say this? (1979: 174)

We might answer this question "yes" for certain purposes and "no" for others. But is the answer "yes" or "no"? The right and final answer, from Austin's point of view, is: "Yes, sort of". Cavell, who has more to say, must have entered the same type of context that Lewis does. Once in that context, however, do they not say entirely different things? Different in some ways, perhaps, but we should not forget the similarity that led us here in the first place, namely that both use that context to give essentially the same diagnosis of the skeptic's argument.

3. *The ends of language games*

Asymmetrical rules that cause irreversibility are familiar from competitive game such as baseball, chess, and tic-tac-toe. The absence of correct moves leading back to a previous state is built in to such games for a good reason: it helps ensure that games will typically be finite. Correct play always, or for the most part, leads forwards towards the point where the game will be over. But then, why do we want to ensure *that*? Games in general do not need such a guarantee: in non-competitive games such as Dungeons and Dragons or Minecraft, there is a typical (not irreversible) progression towards a more advanced state of play, but there are no rules that will ever cut it off. The point of a competitive game, however, is for someone to win. Irreversibility in such games is therefore by definition an irreversibility of *progress*: progress toward the end of the game, in both a chronological and a practical sense.

Competitive games conform to this requirement of finitude in different ways. When, as in tic-tac-toe and in tournament chess, the rules as such supply an *absolute* guarantee that the game will end, they do so usually by including the possibility of a draw. A draw is a kind of failure of the game and hence of its rules: competition is designed to determine a winner. But the players do at least part without any disagreement as to who has won. Indeed, one might distinguish between the spectator's interest in competition (to see who wins)

and the player's interest (to see whether she can win), and say that the players' end, though not the spectators', is as well accomplished in a draw as in a win for either side. This would help explain why the rules of Major League Baseball, in which the spectators' interest so completely dominates, aim to avoid ties at all cost. Be that as it may: given that a game has got to end sometime, the failure that consists in ending regularly without a winner is preferable to the more serious failure that would consist in ending irregularly, with each player perhaps claiming to have won.

Irreversibility thus serves the practical end of a competitive game. What, however, is the practical end of ordinary argument? In this case agreement as to who is the "winner" will not normally be, in itself, desirable – not in the "lucky" case that *es um wahr und falsch geht*. We hope rather for agreement about the topic under discussion. "Without the hope of agreement", Cavell says, "argument would be pointless" (1979: 254). Or, as Lewis puts it: "each of two debaters tries to get his opponent to grant him – to join with him in presupposing – parts of his case" (1983d: 239). I don't want my opponent to agree that I am winning, but rather to agree with *me*. And yet, both Lewis and Cavell deny that such agreement is the end – either in a practical or, typically, in a chronological sense – of moral or ontological argument. Towards what end, then, and *to* what end, are the rules irreversibly moving us?

It may help to note how such arguments can fail when, and in fact because, they *do* end with a winner: that is, with an outcome in which one party must rationally grant the whole case to the other. Consider, for example, an argument Lewis imagines in (1983d), which can easily be put in the form of one of Cavell's sample moral arguments from *The Claim of Reason*:

> A (an elected official): You see, I must either destroy the evidence or else claim that I did it to stop Communism. What else can I do?
> B (rudely): There is one other possibility – you can put the public interest first for once!
> A (mistakenly): I can't do that.[3]

Lewis analyzes this conversation as analogous to a skeptical argument. A's initial statement is true, just as Descartes's Meditator is initially correct to say: "I am seated by the fire in my nightgown, etc. How could I be wrong about that?" The initial contexts are such that "An evil demon might be deceiving me" and "I can put the public interest first (at the expense of my political

[3] In Lewis's own presentation: "Suppose I am talking with some elected official. […] He says: 'You see, I must either destroy the evidence or else claim that I did it to stop Communism. What else can I do?' I rudely reply: 'There is one other possibility – you can put the public interest first for once!' […] If he protests 'I can't do that,' he is mistaken" (247).

career)", are, respectively, false. But when the skeptic and the "rude" critic, respectively, assert these possibilities, a rule of accommodation ensures that the context changes so as to make their assertions true. An asymmetry in the rules of accommodation then prevents the context from shifting back, so that if the Meditator now says (without further justification) "But that couldn't be!", or the official now says (without further justification) "I can't do that", they are mistaken. The truth conditions for "It couldn't be that φ" or "I can't do φ" have changed. Therefore, the rude critic, like the skeptic, wins.

The parallel with the skeptic, however, suggests that this is not an example of a *good* moral argument, one that achieves its end. Lewis explains:

> We get the impression that the sceptic, or the rude critic of the elected official, has the last word. Again this is because the rule of accommodation is not fully reversible. [...] I see no reason to respect this impression. Let us hope, by all means, that the advance toward truth is irreversible. That is no reason to think that just any change that resists reversal is an advance toward truth. (1983d: 247)

The problem is not that the conclusion is false: Lewis agrees that the official ought to put the public interest first[4], and also that the skeptic gives a valid reason for doubt[5]. The critic is *not* mistaken in the final context, any more than the official was mistaken in the original one. The problem is that the rule by which the conversation proceeds irreversibly from first word to last is not a rule of advance toward truth. There is a final answer, to which both parties ought to agree, and it is a right answer (is a true statement, given the new context), but its rightness is in no way a consequence of its finality. The initial answer was just as right as the final one.

But then, if getting one's opponent to give away the whole case is not the goal, what rational point could there be in getting *parts* of it? With respect to ontological arguments, at least, Lewis gives an answer, in the Introduction to his *Philosophical Papers*. "The reader in search of knock-down arguments in favor of my theories", he begins "will go away disappointed" (1983a: x). So much we have already come to expect: after all is said and done, Lewis and his opponents may still differ. But then he adds: "Whether or not it would be nice to knock disagreeing philosophers down by sheer force of argument" – and, in a footnote: "It would not be nice, of course" – "it cannot be done" (*Ibid.*). The effect of this sly footnote, with its sudden reminder that what is "nice" for me may not be "nice", per se, is to put philosophical argument into a moral and

[4] See his remarks on the additional reasons "decent men" have for respecting the "convention of truthfulness" in a language (1983b: 31).

[5] See (1986: 116).

political context, and to remind us that the *argumentum ad baculum* lies always at hand. We will return to that point. Meanwhile, Lewis continues:

> Philosophical theories are never refuted conclusively. (Or hardly ever. Gödel and Gettier may have done it.) The theory survives its refutation – at a price. Argle has said what we accomplish in philosophical argument: we measure the price. Perhaps that is something we can settle more or less conclusively. (*Ibid.*)

The reference is to concluding part of "Holes":

> Bargle: I, for one, have more trust in common opinions than I do in any philosophical reasoning whatever. In so far as you disagree with them, you must pay a great price in the plausibility of your theories.
>
> Argle: Agreed. We have been measuring that price. I have shown that it is not so great as you thought. [...]
>
> Bargle: The price is still too high.
>
> Argle: We agree in principle; we're only haggling.
>
> Bargle: We do. And the same is true of our other debates over ontic parsimony. Indeed, this argument has served us as an illustration – novel, simple, and self-contained – of the nature of our customary disputes. (Lewis and Lewis 1983: 8-9)

So this is an example of a successful conversation. The parties do not come to agree with one another about the point at issue. But they do advance towards the truth about something, namely, about the true prices of their respective positions. This advance in accuracy of measurement depends, moreover, on the procedure of *argument*: the apparent price of Argle's view will increase insofar as she grants Bargle parts of his case, and vice versa. Moreover, the parties do end by acknowledging an agreement: not a new agreement forced by the argument, but rather an agreement pre-existing from the first ("in principle"), which made the argument possible, and which the argument brings to light because actuality implies possibility. It is, quite literally, an agreement about *values*: an agreement, that is, about what kind of features in a thing are responsible for its price. The purpose of argument in this case, in other words, is self-revelation. What Argle and Bargle each learn is what they were already prepared to demand from and grant to each other. Irreversibility, then, is here a consequence of what Lewis elsewhere calls the Rule of Attention: what is not ignored at all is never properly ignored (1999a: 434). I try to get the other to agree with me in order to learn, about myself, what it is I am prepared to request agreement with, and what I learn should not, and normally cannot, be unlearned. Irreversibility is in the service, not of progress towards the end, but of progress away from the beginning: away from the initial state of forgetfulness.

Switching back to the case of moral argument, then, we may expect Lewis to agree that "questioning a claim to moral rightness", in the course of moral

argument, “takes the form of asking […] ‘Have you really considered what you’re saying?’, ‘Do you know what this means?’” (Cavell 1979: 268), and that

> assessing the claim is […] to determine *what* your position is, and to challenge the position itself, to question whether the position you *take* is adequate to the claim you have entered. (*Ibid.*)

and that

> The point of the assessment is not to determine *whether* it is adequate, […] the point is to determine *what* position you are taking, that is to say, *what position you are taking responsibility for* – and whether it is one I can respect. (*Ibid.*; Cavell’s emphasis throughout)

If a moral argument results in a more accurate measurement of prices, in other words, it also reveals a prior agreement on values: it shows the opponents can not only take responsibility for (pay for) their own positions but also respect (accept payment for) one another’s. This practical end is achieved, not in particular at the chronological end of the argument, but rather *at every point*, at every irreversible step, as long as each party continues to find the other’s moves respectable. The continued commerce enriches both, insofar as, by means of it, they come to own (possess justifiably) parts of their positions which they otherwise would not.

If an argument ends without agreement on the moral issue, then, that is not actually analogous to a stalemate (a draw), because progress towards a hoped for agreement on that issue was all along in the service of revealing a pre-existent agreement on values. Something like a draw – a regular failure – will occur only if it turns out there is no such prior agreement. “The outcome of the argument will affect whether the parties concerned are to continue to live in the same moral world” (Cavell 1979: 295-6). For example, consider the following:

> A: I’ve decided against offering him the job.
> B: But he’s counting on it. You most explicitly promised it to him. […]
> A: I know, but it has suddenly become *very* inconvenient to have him around, and there is someone else really better qualified anyway.
> B: If you do this to him, I’ll never speak to you again.
> A: Don’t make such an issue of it. I’ll see that he gets a job, and I’ll give him some money to see him through.
> B: Goodbye. (266)

The parties, it turns out, cannot respect one another, cannot agree on the price of what A intends to do. Commerce, on this point, has come to a halt. Still, the failure is regular. Neither party is mistaken; each has competently tak-

en responsibility for a position. The type of irregular failure thereby avoided is the one evident in Lewis's case, where the rudeness of the critic, combined with the official's mistake, prevent the parties from determining *whether* they are in the same world, i.e. whether or not they can agree on a price.

The rudeness, moreover, is responsible for the mistake. The official knows that the critic's move is valid, and that "I can't do that" is not a valid reply. But what alternative reply is there? The old context, in which "I can't do that" expressed something true, was not arbitrary: it was suited to the cares and commitments of the elected official, as the critic is well aware. The language game which the critic exploits, with its underlying conventions of trust and truthfulness, was only one of those commitments, and the critic's move has done nothing to change the others. Under pressure, the juncture between linguistic and non-linguistic commitments breaks, and the official is left with a choice between saying something true but insincere ("Yes, of course, that is my duty") or something sincerely felt but false ("I can't do that"). Lewis is correct, then, to draw an analogy between this moral case and the epistemic case of the skeptic: the skeptic's interlocutor faces just this choice between a reply that is true but not sincerely believable ("Yes, of course, I don't really know") and one that is believable but false ("There can be no doubt"). The type of rudeness involved here, in other words, is *inconsiderateness*. The critic fails to take the official's cares and commitment into account in deciding which move to make. If the conversation chronologically ends here, its practical end has been frustrated. The official's "I can't do that", because it is *mistaken*, does nothing to take responsibility for any position; nor, therefore, does it reveal whether the official's position is one that the critic can respect.

The possibility of rudeness, and of the mistakes it can force, is itself a price we have payed. The rules of moral and ontological argument might, as in competitive games, guarantee a regular chronological end, and in that case rudeness of this kind would be impossible. Austin can seem rude, and this is perhaps the effect, or perhaps the cause, of taking philosophical argument to have the nature of such a game. Whole philosophical cultures can seem infused with rudeness, with like causes or effects. Lewis and Cavell, however, have in common an understanding of the ends of philosophical argument according to which it is an activity in which interlocutors can make progress only by respecting one another's cares and commitments. The rules governing the activity cannot force this respect, and cannot make this respect deserved. In its absence, a forced regular chronological end would serve no purpose; in its presence, there is no need to force one. Hence the rules are such that a rude interlocutor can bring about an irregular conclusion.

4. *Truth in the Academy*

Among the things Lewis inherits from Carnap is also this: that he is willing to speak on behalf of a school of philosophy, in response to those outside the school. Carnap's famous "Principle of Tolerance" concerns just such a situation:

> *In logic, there are no morals.* Everyone may construct [*aufbauen*] his logic, i.e. his language-form, as he wishes. Only, if he wishes to debate with us, he must clearly state how he intends to do it, give syntactical determinations instead of philosophical arguments. (1934: 45, §17)[6]

Tolerance, notice, runs only so far: use whatever language you want, but, if you want to talk to *us* – i.e., to the members of "our 'Vienna Circle'" (IV) – you must learn to speak as we do. "Logical syntax is to supply a structure of concepts [*Begriffsgebäude*], a language, with the help of which the results of logical analysis can be exactly formulated" (*Ibid.*). Here, in other words, Carnap adopts the suggestion which he elsewhere attributes to Neurath: recondition others to replace their speech dispositions with ours. If some cannot be reconditioned in this way (reconditioning, after all, "succeeds in some cases, with some animals and humans, and then in other cases does not"), we simply rule them out of "the circle of those by whom intersubjective science is constructed and applied" (Carnap 1932: 222). Lewis, taking on Richard Routley/Sylvan's "noneism", finds himself actually in this situation: "Routley sees himself as defying an established orthodoxy; and I am prepared to appoint myself spokesman for the orthodoxy he defies. Or at least for those among the orthodox, if any, who will accept me as their spokesman" (Lewis 1999b: 154). Again the problem is that Routley has not expressed himself as we would: "His own words do not answer the question what *we* ought to say in reporting his position" (156). But Lewis's response is subtly different.

> [Routley] does not have the final word either on how his position should be expressed in our language, or on how ours should be expressed in his. Nor do we. There is no authoritative final word; we can only seek the translation that makes him make sense to us, and us to him. (156-7)

Our school lacks authority over him. He can be expected, therefore, to continue speaking as he does. If we want a debate, the burden is on us to become translators.

[6] The translation (1959: 52) reads "if he wishes to discuss it", but the original is *wenn er mit uns diskutieren will.*

That Lewis should give up hope on getting our opponent to speak our language is surprising, given that he groups philosophy with science as institutions whose aim is the advance of truth. For the situation he describes and accepts with respect to Routley is the one Kuhn finds characteristic of pre-paradigm, "immature" science: a period in which "evidence of progress, except within schools, is very hard to find" (Kuhn 1996: 163). Kuhn blames this lack of general progress on a feature famous from his account of scientific revolution, namely on *incommensurability*: the various schools are differentiated by "their incommensurable ways of seeing the world and of practicing science in it" (4). Kuhn also, especially in the "Postscript" to (1996), describes incommensurability as breakdown in communication due to linguistic difference: proponents of incommensurable views "cannot [...] resort to a neutral language which both use in the same way and which is adequate to the statement of both their theories" (201). The only hope, then, is for the two sides to "recognize each other as members of different language communities and then become translators" (202). But we can expect to find *progress* in science, according to Kuhn, only once these disputes between schools come to an end, namely with the acceptance of a common paradigm. If Lewis expects progress in philosophy, should he not, as Carnap advises, try to establish for it a common paradigm – that is, a common language?

But how do paradigms avoid dispute, according to Kuhn? One might imagine a set of rules for science which were established for a definite practical end, namely, to settle scientific arguments in a rational way and in finite time. Such rules, if well designed, would be applicable to any mature science in any period. To determine correct rules of this kind is the task Popper assigned to the discipline of scientific methodology or *Logik der Forschung*, and the particular rules he determines indeed resemble the rules for competitive games – Popper even says that "one might call them the rules [*Spielregeln*] of the game, 'empirical science'" (2002: 25, §11). But Kuhn claims that the actual rules by which science normally proceeds are entirely unlike this. The rules do not aim to settle arguments, because there is no tolerance for argument: scientists do not "normally aim to invent new theories, and they are often intolerant of those invented by others" (24). In a mature science, he says, there is rather, normally, an "apparent consensus" (11) as to what theory is true. In reality this theory is always underspecified (remains to be "articulated"), but what is real, not merely apparent, is that those who share a paradigm "are committed to the same rules and standards for scientific practice" (*Ibid.*). These rules are not constant, as if designed in advance for some purpose; they contain "an apparently arbitrary element, compounded of personal and historical accident" (4). And the apparent consensus at any given (normal) time is the *effect* of these arbitrary

conventions, which are or amount to the arbitrary conventions characteristic of different linguistic communities. The arbitrary rules serve to specify, to within some small range of ambiguity, a particular theory – the "paradigm theory" – which is to account for all results. "The range of anticipated, and thus of assimilable, results is always small compared with the range that imagination can conceive. And the project whose outcome does not fall in that narrower range is usually just a research failure, one which reflects not on nature but on the scientist" (35). The rules produce agreement directly, not via a rational exchange between two parties. They are there not to decide between outcomes (a win for A versus a win for B), but rather to ensure that, with sufficient skill, anyone can achieve the one acceptable outcome. In other words: they are unlike the rules of a competitive game and like, rather, the rules of a puzzle.

The solution of a puzzle does reveal a certain truth, namely about the skill of the solver. This is part of the interest of the puzzle, at least to the one who solves it – and, in general, puzzle-solving does not excite the interest of spectators. But if we expected science was to advance our knowledge *of nature*, then the rules Kuhn depicts as characteristic of normal science are unsuitable for producing that result. Science can't *normally* be expected to reveal new truths. As for "extraordinary" periods when a paradigm breaks down and is eventually replaced, those are characterized by the return of incommensurability, and hence by the impossibility of any kind of general progress at all. In such a situation, scientists addicted to puzzle-solving will look for knock-down arguments, as Kuhn explains in his key comparison between scientific "revolutions" and the real, political kind. As a political revolution proceeds,

> society is divided into competing camps or parties. [...] And, once that polarization has occurred, *political recourse fails*. Because they differ about the institutional matrix within which political change is to be achieved and evaluated, because they acknowledge no supra-institutional framework for the adjudication of revolutionary difference, the parties to a revolutionary conflict must finally resort to the techniques of mass persuasion, often including force. (93)

But that would not be nice, of course.

Lewis may or may not agree with Kuhn's account of the "mature" sciences. His story about the "prolonged disputes over what's true" in every department is relevant only to the extent that he believes those science departments to be "lucky". When he offers a defense of inductive methods, it is rather weak and Kuhnian, if not Humean: we call it "inductive reason", "as we are right to do, because that is indeed the name we have given it" (1986: 117): that is, it is reasonable because *this* is what we call "reasonable". Sticking to philosophy, in any case: Lewis thinks that it remains, in Kuhn's terms, "immature", and, un-

like Carnap, he proposes no attempt to mature it. May we hope, then, that it is sufficiently lucky as to advance towards truth?

We have seen that Lewis, like Cavell, thinks ordinary arguments aim at such an advance: an advance towards a more accurate measurement of prices. But, precisely because they are *ordinary*, their rules are not the rules of any special institution. In a related case, indeed, Cavell argues that *promising* cannot correctly be called an "institution" at all, not at least as Rawls defines the term: "a public system of rules which defines offices and positions with their rights and duties, powers and immunities, and the like" (1971: 55). Cavell points out that the "office" of promisor is unlike offices properly so called: "there is no special procedure for entering it (e.g., no oaths!), no established routes for being selected or training yourself, etc." (1979: 297). The same points apply equally well to the "office" of participant in an ordinary argument. The same applies, moreover, to the office occupied by Socrates: his claim that the god has appointed him official gadfly is of the same kind as Thoreau's list of public offices, beginning with "for many years I was self-appointed inspector of snow-storms and rain-storms, and did my duty faithfully" (Thoreau 1992: IB.7), and concluding

> In short, I went on thus for a long time […] till it became more and more evident that my townsmen would not after all admit me into the list of town officers, nor make my place a sinecure with a moderate allowance. (IB.9)

It is a joke, in other words, and one whose punch lies precisely in calling attention to the incongruity between our true situation and the purposes for which we have established public offices. "If you are chosen town clerk, forsooth, you cannot go to Tierra del Fuego this summer: but you may go to the land of infernal fire nevertheless. The universe is wider than our views of it" (18.2). To justify the Academy, then, in both the original and the extended sense of the term, would be to somehow bridge that laughable incongruity. And the task is indeed laughable: as if we expect every hiring committee to reverse the verdict of Athens and grant Socrates a stipend.

It is difficult to determine Cavell's opinion about this, in part because, when he uses the term "academic", as he does with some frequency, he typically has in mind more the French *Académie des Beaux-Arts* than the Academy of Plato. When he says, for example, that "academic art is (with notable exceptions) bad art, whereas academic science is – just science" (1976a: XXVII), he is drawing the same contrast between science and art that Kuhn implies when he contrasts the solution of a jigsaw puzzle with the way "a child or a *contemporary* artist" (my emphasis) might use its pieces to "make a picture", and adds: "The picture thus produced might be far better, and would certainly be more original, than the one from which the puzzle had been made" (1996: 38). The word "con-

temporary" is there because, as is clear from his brief discussion of the history of painting (161), he believes that painting was, like science, a form of puzzle solving before the Impressionists rebelled against the Academy. Nevertheless, both Kuhn and Cavell connect the academic nature of (mature) science with a feature characteristic of Plato's Academy, namely its withdrawal from the agora. Kuhn's normal science, like puzzle-solving more generally, is of interest only to the participants. Outside of these mature sciences, Kuhn points out, "there are no other professional communities in which individual creative work is so exclusively addressed to and evaluated by other members of the profession" (164) – that is, by those who "by virtue of their shared training and experience, must be seen as the sole possessors of the rules of the game or of some equivalent basis for unequivocal judgments" (168). In the context cited above, Cavell makes the exact same point about the distinction between art and science:

> It is tautological that art has, is made to have, an audience, however small or special. [...] It could be said of science, on the other hand, that it has no audience at all. No one can share its significance who does not produce work of the same kind. The standards of performance are institutionalized; it is not up to the individual listener to decide whether, when the work meets the canons of the institution, he will accept it – unless he undertakes to alter those canons themselves. (1976a: XXVII)

Cavell, then, regards the Academy generally speaking as both a good site for science and a bad site for art.

As to the divergence between Socrates and Plato in its original form, however, Cavell reaches no definite decision: "Now, what is academic philosophy? It seems significant that this question has no obvious answer" (*Ibid.*) This could be taken to mean that, after all this time, it remains unclear what features are particular to academic philosophy, and hence whether it is like academic art (bad) or like academic science (simply philosophy). But the statement could also be taken to mean, more pessimistically, that, after all this time, it is unclear whether or why we should expect anything worthy of the name "philosophy", whether good *or* bad, to take place in the academy. The latter interpretation gains support from what Cavell says elsewhere: for example, about the activity of "looking for an explanation in a region in which you have no inclination to suppose it may lie" that "we might call such an activity 'academic'" (1979: 21). If you are addicted to some type of puzzle, you are "inclined to suppose" that the *solution* lies in a certain region. But you are neither inclined to suppose that the solution will produce anything useful, for example an explanation, nor inclined to examine your motives for nevertheless undertaking to solve it. You must be distracted from any question about what value the solution will have. If insulation from the demands of spectators is a prerequisite to such distrac-

tion, then the continuation of puzzle-solving as a field of purported study depends on the closed political structure of a mature scientific discipline, which forbids appeal to any paradigm-external standard. The quote suggests that Cavell takes this closed political structure and its consequences to be both characteristic of the academy in general and generally inimical to the kind of self-revelation which is philosophy's only path towards truth.

Since Lewis agrees with Cavell about the latter, he must, if he has a more benign view of academic philosophy, disagree both with Kuhn and with Cavell about how it might be organized. And so he does. For Kuhn's mature science to take hold in a field, recall, there must be an end to competing schools. This "is usually caused by the triumph of one of the pre-paradigm schools" (Kuhn 1996: 17). But Lewis's main answer to the title question of (2000a), "Why ignore the advantage of being right?", is that rival "schools of thought", within a lucky field, are parties to a "tacit treaty", the purpose of which is precisely to prevent any such triumph.

To clarify the reasons for this, he imagines first a case both simplified and ironically described. The simplifications are, first, that there are exactly two schools – materialists and dualists – and, second, "that all concerned think the errors of their opponents matter more than the errors of their misguided allies" (2000a: 198). Lewis, himself a materialist (about the actual world), describes the situation as follows:

> In my own opinion as a materialist, the best thing for the advancement of knowledge would be the universal acceptance of the true philosophy: materialism. Or near-universal, anyway. […] Worst would be the universal, or near-universal, acceptance of dualist error. Second best would be a mixture, as at present. A treaty requiring us all to ignore the advantage of being right when we make appointments will raise the probability of that second-best outcome and lower the probability both of the best and of the worst. (*Ibid.*)

Dualists will rate the outcomes in the opposite order, but they may well find common interest with the materialists in a treaty that establishes what both agree to be the second best outcome, thus averting either's worst fears. The simplifications, moreover, are easily seen to be inessential: if anything, the case for the treaty is stronger if we are all involved in multiple disagreements and also cannot always count on our supposed allies.

The irony in the description, however, is this. Lewis describes dualists and materialists, himself included, as hoping that the institution of academic philosophy will reveal truth by choosing the correct side of the argument, much as we may hope academic physics will do in the case of string theory (and much as an inquisitor might hope that society will protect true religion by suppress-

ing heresy: see (Lewis 2000b)). The dispute between materialists and dualists, however, is a dispute about ontic parsimony, and we know that Lewis's real hope for such arguments is quite different: he hopes they will reveal the truth about *prices*, and hence about our antecedent agreement on values. Why would Argle, asked to vote on hiring Bargle, ignore the "disadvantage" that, in her opinion, he is wrong? Isn't it because there is no such disadvantage, because, rather, Argle could not purchase her view without Bargle as a counterparty? Or, to put it differently: whether or not it would be nice to use the *argumentum ad baculum* and win our arguments by literally knocking our opponents down – it would not be nice, of course, but, in any case, Lewis assures us, *it can't be done* (almost ever: perhaps Gödel or Gettier could have done it). What use a treaty to prevent it?

We cannot win our arguments this way, but we have an inclination to try, and the rules of ordinary argument will not prevent such rudeness. In short: on the surface, the treaty is necessary to prevent the bad outcome that my opponents win; but, in truth, it is necessary to prevent the worse outcome that I and my supposed allies do. The inclination to *win*, which has no place in philosophical argument, is characteristic of schools of thought, with their offices and positions, their presupposed limits on what can be said and done (consistent with continuing one's career), their formal and informal rules of successorship. Only the humiliating need to treat with other schools can restrain this *libido sectarum*.

If Lewis and his followers have been more comfortable in academic philosophy than have Cavell and his – and have they not? – then I suggest that this is why. Cavell sees Kuhnian maturity as a threat to the existence of philosophy; Lewis sees Kuhnian immaturity as the only hope of its survival.

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