Science, Narrative, and Our Fundamental Comprehension of the World:

A Meta-Reflection on the Split in Human Understanding

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Abstract

My focus is on two very different forms of understanding—what I call scientific understanding and narrative understanding. I argue that scientific understanding is characterized by its non-agential perspective and non-relational notion of time; by removing oneself from the world, one is able to grasp objective truth. Within narrative understanding, on the other hand, one is immersed in the world; this form is essentially agential and adopts a relational notion of time—i.e. time is in relation to the agent who does things in the world. This split in understanding itself can either be understood scientifically or narratively. The scientific picture of the split makes it seem like narrative understanding is a biased and therefore corrupted form of understanding. This picture of the split accords an epistemic priority to science as the enterprise capable of grasping what objectively is. The narrative picture of the split, on the other hand, shows how science is a useful tool for ascertaining certain types of knowledge, but it must be restricted to the domain within which it is useful. I conclude that there is a distinction between narrative understanding and scientific understanding—and furthermore, that narrative understanding contains a distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects, while scientific understanding is only able to know things (even persons) *as objects*.

Introduction

In 1965, the Cambridge Union Society of Cambridge University invited James Baldwin and William F. Buckley Jr. to debate whether *the American Dream is at the expense of the American Negro*. Baldwin, the acclaimed novelist and civil rights activist, argued in favor of the proposition, while Buckley, the renowned conservative commentator, argued in opposition. The debate was hailed as one of the seminal debates on race relations in America during the civil rights movement. Baldwin spoke first:

> In the case of the American Negro, from the moment you are born every stick and stone, every face, is white. Since you have not yet seen a mirror, you suppose you are, too. It comes as a great shock around the age of 5, 6, or 7 to discover that the flag to which you have pledged allegiance, along with everybody else, has not pledged allegiance to you. It comes as a great shock to see Gary Cooper killing off the Indians and, although you are rooting for Gary Cooper, that the Indians are you. […] I remember when the ex-Attorney General, Mr. Robert Kennedy, said it was conceivable that in 40 years in America we might have a Negro President. That sounded like a very emancipated statement to white people. They were not in Harlem when this statement was first heard. They did not hear the laughter and bitterness and scorn with which this statement was greeted. From the point of view of the man in the Harlem barber shop, Bobby Kennedy only got here yesterday and now he is already on his way to the Presidency. We were here for 400 years and now he tells us that maybe in 40 years, if you are good, we may let you become President. (The New York Times 1965, p. 1-3)

After a 30-minute speech in which Baldwin described what it is like to be a Black American, Buckley stood up to respond. Immediately Buckley discredited the entirety of Baldwin's experiences with a single sentence: "The fact that you sit here, carrying the entire weight of the Negro ordeal on your own shoulders is irrelevant to the argument we are here to discuss" (The New York Times 1965, p. 4). Buckley explained that the color of Baldwin's skin did not change how his argument should be received, and that it was necessary to strip away the emotional impact in order to derive *what is objectively*[1] *the case*. In other words, he distinguished

[1] The concept of *objectivity* will be used extensively in this paper. By 'objective', I mean not only that which is impartial, unbiased, and neutral, but furthermore that with respect to which one's particular embodiment, identity, and individuality is irrelevant to the ascertainment of truth. In this way, what is *objectively* the case is *that which is irrespective of people*—the fact

Baldwin's description of what it is like to be a Black American from an explanation of what is the case, the facts of the matter. Buckley explained how Black American wealth had been increasing, how their opportunities had vastly expanded, and how there were over thirty Black millionaires in the United States. The economic data showed, Buckley argued, that Black Americans were also capable of achieving the American Dream—that, in fact, Black Americans had greater upward economic mobility than the vast majority of the global population.

Buckley used objective facts to undermine Baldwin's deeply experiential argument. However, it is not clear why such facts disprove Baldwin's experiential argument, nor is it clear why there is any disjunction at all between objective truth and experience. In order to grasp what is going on in this historic debate, it is necessary to investigate how we, as humans, understand our world. Importantly, we must recognize that there is an epistemic difference between what it means to know persons and what it means to know objects. In order to make manifest these differences, let us consider a different question of knowledge and color. In his essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," Wilfrid Sellars explores the phenomenon of color with respect to perceptual experience. John owns a tie shop and has just installed electric lighting. His neighbor Jim comes into the shop, and John refers to a tie as "a handsome green one" (Sellars 1963, p. 143). However, Jim claims that the tie is not green, taking John outside, and showing to him that it is in fact a blue tie. Ultimately, John will come to understand that though the tie is blue, it looks green in certain nonstandard conditions, including in his shop (Sellars 1963, p. 147). Sellars brings forth a critical distinction. We can see two ways of understanding color. One can assert that the color of a thing is the color it looks to have to a

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without regard to the relation between person and fact. Conversely, what *subjectively* is the case is what is the case for a person with a particular embodiment, identity, and individuality—where the fact can only be considered through the relation between person and fact.

standard observer in standard conditions. This assertion uses correlation to describe perceptible objects and events. However, one could also assert that color is produced by the excitation and then relaxation of electrons, which emits light of such-and-such wavelengths that are interpreted by the rods and cones in our eyes as being such-and-such colors. Additionally, one could point to the energy gap between valence bands and conduction bands of electrons in certain materials, which causes the scattering of such-and-such wavelengths, producing the appearance that those materials are such-and-such colors. This assertion postulates imperceptible objects and events in order to explain the perceptible objects and events, i.e. it postulates electrons and photons in order to explain why the tie looks green in certain non-standard conditions.

The distinctions that Sellars highlights map onto the differences between Baldwin and Buckley's forms of argument and forms of understanding the world. It is the scientist—relying on her objective data—that has a full claim to truth and the way that *objects* stand in the world. When Buckley discusses the increasing wealth of Black Americans, he treats them not as persons, but rather as objects. Scientists refer to the humans in their tests as subjects, and thereby reduce them to objects (for study) as well. The question at hand then becomes what is at stake in making knowledge claims about persons and objects. Christine McKinnon argues that there is an epistemic difference between knowing persons and knowing objects. There is a way in which her epistemological distinction seems to clarify why Buckley discounts what Baldwin is saying. Buckley treats the question of whether the American Dream is at the expense of Black Americans as a case of knowing objects; Baldwin recognizes that it requires knowing persons. However, the McKinnon analysis collapses two distinctions within one. This paper will explore both distinctions and consider their interconnection.

Two forms of human understanding will be investigated, which will be referred to as *scientific understanding* and *narrative understanding*. The split between the two forms can itself be understood either scientifically or narratively. The scientific picture of science and narrative will be presented as the dominant view of human understanding. The scientific perspective so conceived enables one to remove oneself from the world in order to inspect it devoid of bias, thereby enabling one to grasp objective truth. Through a narrative picture of science and narrative, we will see how narrative understanding enables knowing of persons in a way not possible within scientific understanding. By recognizing the contributions of narrative understanding, we can properly position scientific understanding and restrict it to the domain within which it is useful. While scientific understanding has much to teach us about the objects of the world, narrative understanding can reveal subjective and intersubjective truths, facilitating the knowledge of persons and objects in a way not possible within scientific understanding. There is thus a distinction between narrative understanding and scientific understanding; furthermore, narrative understanding contains a distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects, while scientific understanding is only able to know things (even persons) *as objects*. While we can learn much from a scientific perspective, we must recognize the pivotal role that narrative understanding plays in our lives, including in our lives as practicing scientists.

Section I: Knowing Persons and Knowing Objects

Christine McKinnon argues in "Knowing Cognitive Selves" that there is an epistemic difference between knowing persons and knowing objects, and that this distinction is overlooked when one assumes that the world is an object for study. While she nevertheless does view the world as an object for study, she recognizes that our mode of epistemic inquiry for objects is insufficient for knowing persons:

> Feminist epistemologists argue that these desiderata, which collectively postulate objectivity and disinterestedness as epistemological ideals, are misguided and that a focus on the kinds of knowledge central to 'women's experiences' shows them to be misguided. In this latter kind of knowledge, the facts under investigation cannot be thought to be unaffected by the knower's quest to know them: they are not static. […] Further, the knower cannot pretend to be disinterested in her investigations: her attempts to understand other persons will be frustrated unless she invests a certain amount of herself into the pursuit. She cannot think of herself as an anonymous place-holder, lacking a particular identity. The 'view from nowhere' is not the view from which to come to know other persons. (McKinnon 2007, p. 231)

In order to know objects, McKinnon acknowledges that the view one must adopt is an objective and disinterested perspective. Although she acknowledges that the view from nowhere is requisite for knowing objects, she argues that this same perspective will not allow one to come to know other persons. Rather, one's particular identity, embodiment, and agency are intertwined with one's capacity to know other persons. In this regard, the perspective for knowing persons is different from that of knowing objects. Unlike in the case of knowing objects, 'the facts of the matter' in the quest to know other persons can be affected by the knower's self-understanding. McKinnon continues to flesh out what it is to know persons:

> Seeing persons as self-conscious, self-reflexively aware beings who become who they are as they discover more about the world and themselves and as they come to understand better how to value these discoveries requires that we acknowledge the hazards of supposing that certain of their properties are available to objective, disinterested observers. There is a subjective involvement and investment in coming to know other persons that is quite alien to the standard scientific investigation. Coming to know persons means engaging with them: trying on their point of view, identifying their presuppositions, challenging their interpretations, helping them make sense of their narrative, etc. (*Ibid*, p. 233)

In this way, McKinnon distinguishes the objective truth that one can acquire through scientific investigation from the subjective processes through which one comes to know other persons. Objective truth and knowing objects, then, are linked in just the same way that subjectivity and knowing persons are linked. Although the objective observer can come to know the objective truth of the world, such an observer cannot come to know other persons through this same form of scientific investigation because knowing other persons requires engaging with them subjectively—engaging with them *as oneself*, with one's particular embodiment and identity,

rather than as an objective observer. McKinnon therefore presents an epistemic difference between knowing persons and knowing objects by accepting that scientific inquiry provides us with the objective truth of the world—and that that objective truth comprises the entirety of knowing objects—however, she rejects that such an approach can enable knowing persons.

While this seems to provide us with the preliminary tools to analyze the Buckley-Baldwin debate, we will see that McKinnon is actually collapsing two distinctions. By exploring a distinction between narrative understanding and scientific understanding, we can see how McKinnon's epistemic distinction fits into the split between the two forms of understanding.

Section II: Two Forms of Human Understanding

In order to grasp the distinction between *scientific understanding* and *narrative understanding*, we must develop robust accounts for each. Each form of understanding posits a particular relationship between person and world, and thereby enables a certain type of knowledge. In some ways the epistemic differences here mirror McKinnon's distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects, however the distinction between scientific understanding and narrative understanding is wider than McKinnon's epistemic distinction. In order to understand things in a particular way, one must adopt a particular perspective. Accordingly, each form of understanding adopts a particular perspective. By exploring the varying perspectives of each form of understanding, we will be poised to articulate the split between them. We will also be poised to consider how the split itself can be viewed either scientifically or narratively.

2.10 Foundations of a Scientific Understanding of Our World

The prevailing view for how we ought to comprehend our world is what will be referred to as *scientific understanding*. Descartes' philosophical and mathematical revolutions in the 17th

century are foundational to the dominance of scientific understanding. In part two of *Discourse of Method*, Descartes declared his intention to raze the old methods of philosophy—comparing them to the old, poorly organized cities of Europe—in order to replace them with a modern philosophy modeled on mathematics (Descartes 1637, p. 6). For Descartes, one would have the most well grounded judgments "if from the moment of [one's] birth [one] had had the full use of [one's] reason and had always been guided by it alone" (Descartes 1637, p. 6). In other words, Descartes worries that we acquire a bulk of wrong opinions when we are young because we are not guided by reason alone. When we are young, our primary mode of understanding the world is perceptual and emotional, without sufficient grounding in reason. Accordingly, one would have the most well grounded judgments if one spent one's whole life only guided by reason. In this way, Descartes distinguishes the faultiness of our perceptual faculties from the soundness of our rational minds. Descartes' insistence on the separation of one's rational mental faculties from one's corporeal existence is manifest in *Meditations on First Philosophy* (1641).

Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* was also instrumental to the development of a scientific understanding of the world. The Second Analogy in the Doctrine of Elements is a proof for the notion that the law of causality is a synthetic *a priori*, i.e. something known before experience but the predicate of which is not contained in the concept of the subject:

> If a substance passes out of a state *a* into another state *b*, then the point in time of the latter is different from the point in time of the first state and follows it. […] The question therefore arises, how a thing passes from one state = *a* into another one = *b*. Between two instants there is always a time, and between two states in those instances there is always a difference that has a magnitude (for all parts of appearances are always in turn magnitudes). Thus every transition from one state into another happens in a time that is constrained between two instants, of which the former determines the state from which the things proceeds and the second the state at which it arrives. Both are therefore boundaries of the time of an alteration, consequently of the intermediate state between two states, and as such they belong to the whole alteration. Now every alteration has a cause, which manifests its causality in the entire time during which the alteration proceeds. […] All alteration is therefore possible only through a continuous action of causality, which, insofar as it is uniform, is called a moment. The alteration does not consist of these moments, but it is generated through them as their effect. (Kant 1781/1787, A207-A208/B253-B254)

Everything that happens can then be categorized as a seemingly infinite series of causes and effects, stitched together through time. Something happens at $t_1 = a$, then another thing happens at $t_2 = b$. The link between the two is one of causality, such that *b because a*[2]. While the notion of causality itself is foundational to scientific understanding, as well as the temporal structure presented here (which will be further examined), Kant's particular contribution is the classification of the law of causality as a synthetic *a priori*. In this way, he not only universalizes causality as a law that structures our temporally bound world, but also he centralizes this law within our understanding insofar as it is known *a priori*. Taken together with the pure intuitions of time and space, Kant provides a picture of our understanding that lays the foundations for a scientific understanding of our world—one in which every event has a cause, and our *capacity* to know that every event has a cause derives from our understanding rather than empirical experiences in the world.

Taking Descartes and Kant together, we can grasp the philosophical foundations for a scientific understanding of the world—i.e. the rational mind can grasp truths that perceptual experience cannot. In order to move to scientific understanding itself, however, we must investigate the motivations for this form of understanding.

2.11 Motivating Scientific Understanding: The Search for Objective Truth

When Descartes set out to build a new philosophy, he was predominately concerned with "set[ting] out to get rid of all [of his opinions] at one go, so as then to replace them afterwards

[2] The alteration between *a* and *b* does not consist merely in Δt. Rather, "it is generated through them as their effect" (Kant 1781/1787, A208/B254). This places the causal emphasis on the law of causality itself, instead of the mere passing of time. In other words, it is not merely that two things happen, or they happen through time, but rather that there is a direct link of causality; the alteration is generated through the change from *a* to *b*. This allows for a determinability of events, their causes, their effects, and a type of knowledge of our world not possible if things merely happened due to the passing of time.

with better opinions or even with the same ones after [he] had straightened them out using reason's plumb-line" (Descartes 1637, p. 6). He was worried that he, like everyone else, "relied only on principles that [he] had accepted in [his] youth without ever examining whether they were true" (Descartes 1637, p. 6). Accordingly, he aimed to build a new philosophy—modeled on mathematics—that could be informative on the question of *what is objectively true*. Kant was also concerned with truth, as he asserted a universality of truth, and then questioned what constituted knowledge insofar as things are true only if they are valid for everyone (Kant 1781/1787, A552/B850). Scientific understanding, then, developed out of the groundwork laid by Descartes and Kant, among others; it aims to determine *what is (objectively the case/true)*. Moreover, objective truth becomes characterized as the nonsensory, mechanical character of reality. Wittgenstein's *Tractatus-Logico Philosophicus* exemplifies, from the perspective of logic, this scientific sensibility. Furthermore, through the *Tractatus*, we get a better picture of the scientific paradigm as Wittgenstein provides an account of language built on the assumption that reality is reducible to this mechanical, nonsensory structure.

Wittgenstein asserts that the world is the totality of facts, not things, and that facts are states of affairs, which are states of things, which are just combinations of objects (Wittgenstein 1921, §1.1-2.01). In this way, nothing ever *happens* in Wittgenstein's language; there is neither tense nor aspect, and so time cannot be in relation to a thing nor can things extend over time. Thoughts are just logical pictures of facts, and the totality of true thoughts would be a picture of the world (*Ibid*, §3-3.01). Language is the totality of propositions; propositions are made up of relations between names, and names label objects (*Ibid*, §3.2-4). In this way, propositions are just pictures of reality, and we report reality through language. Furthermore, natural science is the totality of *true* propositions (*Ibid*, §4.11). The Tractarian language allows for assertions that

merely correspond to facts, rather than describing what agents *do*; without tense and aspect, there is no action. All that can be said is what is *objectively* the case.

Towards the end of the *Tractatus*, Wittgenstein connects language, thought, and the world through logic, insofar as thoughts are propositions and language pictures combinations of objects through propositions: "Logic is not a body of doctrine, but a mirror-image of the world" (*Ibid*, §6.13). Language is the totality of propositions and the world is the totality of true propositions—or more specifically, the world is the totality of *objectively* true propositions. There is no space here for describing the truthful experiences or actions of agents. Importantly, if the world is the totality of objectively true propositions, and scientific understanding is the form of understanding that reveals what is objectively true, then within a Tractarian model, scientific understanding is the form of understanding that reveals the world. This connection between objective truth and knowing reality is pivotal to grasping the motivations behind a scientific understanding. Insofar as scientific understanding is capable of determining what is objectively true, and the world is an object for study, scientific understanding is capable of revealing the world to us *as it objectively is*—as contrasted with *as it subjectively appears to us*. Wittgenstein's project in the *Tractatus* exemplifies, from the perspective of logic, the same scientific sensibility of scientific understanding itself. Both Wittgenstein's *Tractatus* and scientific understanding are principally concerned with this nonsensory, mechanical character of reality (how things are) over and against the sensory character of reality (how things appear). In this way, the world is only an object for study, and the function of a scientific understanding is to reveal what is objectively true.

When Descartes sought to raze the foundations of the old Aristotelian philosophy, he was concerned with our inability to know our world because of our reliance on sense experience and

strongly held opinions that might have been false. The new philosophy that Descartes and Kant built, which was historically tied to revolutions in mathematics and physics, invigorated a search for objective truth. Scientific understanding is the form of human understanding that allows us to grasp what is objectively true in the world. Walter Fisher provides an account of what he calls the *rational-world paradigm* that maps onto this capacity to determine what is objectively true in the world, while radically expanding the scope of what can be objectively true:

> (1) humans are essentially rational beings; (2) the paradigmatic mode of human decision making and communications is argument—discourse that features clear-cut inferential or implicative structures; (3) the conduct of argument is ruled by the dictates of situations—legal, scientific, legislative, public, and so on; (4) rationality is determined by subject-matter, knowledge, argumentative ability, and skill in employing the rules of advocacy in given fields; and (5) the world is a set of logical puzzles that can be solved through appropriate analysis and application of reason conceived as an argumentative construct. (Fisher 1987, p. 59)

Fisher extends scientific understanding beyond mathematics, biology, chemistry, physics, etc. Legal, legislative, and public discourses are also motivated and structured by this rational-world paradigm in which the application of reason is capable of solving the logical puzzles of the world. In this way, we can see how scientific understanding transforms even our understanding of the everyday world. The entirety of our world—both the natural world and our social world—falls within objective truth. The hegemony of scientific understanding implores us to understand things in a particular way in order to understand what is objectively the case—e.g. Buckley's insistence of statistics over the experiences of Black Americans.

While we have determined that scientific understanding is motivated by the search for objective truth, we have not adequately explored what comprises this form of understanding. Accordingly, we must turn to the scientific perspective, and the categories of agency and time, in order to grasp from which perspective one is able to understand the world scientifically.

2.12 Adopting a Scientific Perspective: Agency and Time

In his essay "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," Sellars contrasts the manifest image of man-in-the-world with a scientific image of man[3]. The difference between these two is "that [the manifest image of man] limits itself to what correlational techniques can tell us about perceptible and introspectible events and that [the scientific image of man] postulates imperceptible objects and events for the purpose of explaining correlations among perceptibles" (Sellars 1962, p. 19). While there are many scientific images of a person—as the theoretical physicist presents a person as "a swirl of physical particles, forces, and fields," while the biochemist will present her as a complex of biochemical processes and electrochemical signals—the scientific image is a conception that integrates these various images (*Ibid*, p. 20). While this means that the scientific image of man is coming-into-being, insofar as science is not done teaching us about what makes a human *a human*[4], Sellars is nevertheless able to draw some conclusions about what this scientific image of man is:

> I shall, therefore, provisionally assume that although behaviouristics and neurophysiology remain distinctive sciences, the correlational content of behaviourists points to a structure of postulated processes and principles which telescope together with those of neurophysiological theory, with all the consequences which this entails. On this assumption, if we trace out these consequences, the scientific image of man turns out to be that of a complex physical system. (*Ibid*, p. 25)

The key here is how both behaviouristics and neurophysiology point to a *structure of postulated processes and principles*; the scientific image of man is an image of a complex *physical* system. Within the scientific conception of a person, we theorize about the various processes that

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[3] Sellars uses the terms 'manifest image of man-in-the-world' and 'scientific image of man' throughout his essay, and repeatedly refers to the desired knowledge as knowledge of *man*. In an attempt to give both deference to Sellars' original philosophical work, as well as recognition of the oppressive patriarchal system and the role that the universal use of 'man' plays, I will use 'a person' instead of 'man' as frequently as possible. I will only use the gendered 'man' when using Sellars' terms 'manifest image of man-in-the-world' and 'scientific image of man'.

[4] Referring to the physical object—a human *not* as an agential person in the world, but rather as a subject for study.

constitute a person, and those theories are aimed at explaining the physical system that objectively and truly constitutes a person. The question that arises within our investigation of scientific understanding is *what perspective does one need in order to understand a person as a physical system*—or, more generally, *what is the perspective that enables scientific understanding*.

Sellars' scientific image is the amalgamation of many different scientific images, each derived from a different field of study. Physics, chemistry, and biology each contribute a myriad of different facts to the scientific image. One can see that, for science, objects of the world (including people) are to be studied, examined, and then explained according to what constitutes the object and the laws that govern its motion and existence. In this way, the scientific image of a person is an image of a complex physical system, and as such it is devoid of agency. The scientific image of a person is not an image of an *agential* person that *does* things—rather the scientist reduces the person to an object, which allows the entirety of the 'person' to fall within objective truth. The person as conceived by the scientist does nothing at all; rather, things can happen to it and things happen within it. This removal of agency from Sellars' image of a person is comparable to how the world is devoid of agency in scientific understanding. When objects and events are explained through science, one does not appeal to the agential character of the object or event, but rather to the causal laws that brought about the phenomenon. We can thus recognize that scientific understanding is of the non-agential. This necessary perspective that both enables and defines scientific understanding is more than just being non-agential.

If the perspective were of an agent, then the passing of time and the situation in space would be in relation to the agent, i.e. time would be conceived as past, present, and future, and space would be conceived as near or far from the agent. However, scientific understanding

adopts a specifically non-agential perspective, and so the passing of time and the situation in space *cannot* be in relation to the agent. Accordingly, scientific understanding must adopt a non-relational notion of time (and also of space[5]). At the end of Danielle Macbeth's *Realizing Reason*, she considers the radical differences between how one can think about time. Her notion of block time is the idea of non-relational time:

> Think now of a stone that has become dislodged and is, as we would say, rolling down some hillside. The stone is stopped by a felled tree halfway down the hill. Was the stone's trip interrupted? Aristotle might say so insofar as the tree impeded the stone's natural motion, but we would not. A stone can roll all the way down the hillside but if it does not because it is stopped by some such thing as a felled tree then that was not what it was doing. It was simply rolling and would continue to do so until something stopped it. […] Such merely physical processes simply happen, one thing followed by another followed by another. They happen in block time. (Macbeth 2014, p. 442-3)

This maps onto the notion of time used by Kant in the Second Analogy. At t_1 *a*, at t_2 *b*, at t_3 *c*, and so on; the law of causality links *a* to *b* to *c*, during the duration of t_1 to t_3. Time, then, is the spectrum during which things exist, things happen, and things are destroyed. This scientific notion of time will be called non-relational time, which connects it to the non-agential character of scientific understanding[6].

The non-agential character and the non-relational temporal spectrum taken together comprise the perspective of scientific understanding. Importantly, this non-agential and non-relational notion of time requires one to remove oneself from the world. With the separation of body and mind grounding scientific understanding, one can take one's mind and study the world from outside the world. This picture of the outside observer is the fundamental perspective that, at least theoretically, is necessary for scientific understanding.

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[5] It is not a coincidence that the notion of space here comes directly from Descartes' revolutionary theory of space (called Cartesian space) and of coordinates (used to precisely locate objects within space).

[6] It is noteworthy that the 'old philosophy' that Descartes aimed to raze was precisely what Macbeth refers to when she notes that Aristotle would argue that the stone has a natural motion.

2.2 Linking Narrative and Human Cognition

If scientific understanding is the domain of human comprehension that reveals objective truth, then we ought to give great deference to the results produced by the scientific community. In 1944, Fritz Heider and Marianne Simmel published a groundbreaking paper in *The American Journal of Psychology*. They had devised an experiment in which "subjects were requested to interpret a moving picture-film of about 2 ½ min. duration in which three geometrical figures (a large triangle, a small triangle and […] a circle) were shown moving in various directions and at various speeds. The only other figure in the field was a rectangle, a section of which could be opened and closed as a door is" (Heider 1944, p. 244). They performed three experiments with three groups of undergraduate students. The film was shown twice; instructions were given before the film. The goal was to determine whether the ways in which people perceive moving geometric shapes varies based on whether or not they are instructed to interpret the movements as the actions of people.

Heider and Simmel found that in experiment one (when the instructions were simply to write down what happened in the film), all but one of the subjects perceived the picture in terms of animated beings—mostly humans, but in two cases birds. In experiment two, all the subjects interpreted the movements as human actions. In experiment three, the picture was shown in reverse and all but two subjects interpreted the movements as human actions. The following is an excerpt from one of the written replies from experiment one:

> Triangle number-one shuts his door (or should we say line) and the two innocent young things walk in. Lovers in the two-dimensional world, no doubt; little triangle number-two and sweet circle. Triangle-one (here-after known as the villain) spies the young love. Ah! … He opens his door, walks out to see our hero and his sweet. But our hero does not like the interruption (we regret that our actual knowledge of what went on at this particular moment is slightly hazy), he attacks the triangle-one rather vigorously (maybe the big bully said some bad word). (Heider 1944, p. 247)

The extent to which this person provides a captivating story is notable, as Heider says this reports shows "unusual elaboration;" however, the extent to which this person characterizes the shapes as people interacting with each other is demonstrative of a nearly universal phenomenon (*Ibid*, p. 248). This universality has been established by dozens of experiments in subsequent years that confirmed Heider and Simmel's results (Gottschall 2012, p. 105). Taken together alongside these further experiments, the psychology literature has determined that the fundamental form in which people understand their experiences and their perceptions is *narrative*. While we have a scientific basis for considering an alternative form of human understanding, it is necessary to investigate the philosophical grounds for a *narrative understanding*[7] of the world.

2.30 Narrative Understanding and Wittgenstein's 'Family Resemblances'

Insofar as the *Tractatus* provides a scientific paradigm for language and exemplifies the search for objective truth, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* provides a narrative paradigm for language and exemplifies the intersubjective truth in our everyday experiences. In the Tractarian language, words labeled objects and then propositions displayed the relations between objects; however, in the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein pivots away from this picture theory of language. Alternatively, Wittgenstein aims to capture how we actually *use* language and how language is the medium for our thoughts. Objective truth is nowhere to be found within

[7] It is critically important to distinguish between narrative and stories. Though many of the examples that are provided by the psychological literature utilize stories and story structure to make an argument about the mind, it is important to philosophically distinguish between these stories and what should be meant by 'narrative'. Stories are things that we, as humans, tell each other, create, and actively think about. They are our own fabrications, and we can manipulate them with conscious thought. Traditional stories have a beginning, middle, and end, and often aim to teach us something about ourselves or about the world—as Aristotle explains in *De Poetica*. Narrative refers to something far more general than stories. Whereas stories are a particular type of creative, linguistic human expression, narrative is a wider phenomenon through which things and events are categorized and processed in a particular way. Narrative structures human cognition in a particular way, however, it does so on a fundamental level, rather than the conscious level (of stories).

this picture of language precisely because objective truth lies outside our everyday experience of the world, and is therefore irrelevant to an investigation into our everyday use of language. By exploring this picture of language—an *intersubjectively true* picture and one that expresses the narrative paradigm—we can better grasp narrative understanding itself.

In the *Investigations*, Wittgenstein rejects the notion that words simply operate as labels with a strict definition, suggesting instead that we think of each word as having "a family of meanings" (Wittgenstein 1953, §77). In this way, we can think of the array of uses for each word as having *family resemblances*. In a family, some members share eye color or jaw structure or a similar smile, but one cannot specify the family resemblances by stating a set of necessary and sufficient conditions—and so it goes for words. As Wittgenstein notes, one cannot tie down what is meant by a *game* by pointing to a set of characteristics that all games share. Nonetheless, if one knows what a game is, then one is able to employ the word in order to accurately pick out the relevant activities that constitute a game; if one is able to employ the word in order to pick out those activities, then one knows what a game is.

Through this alternative theory for how words function, Wittgenstein is able to link language and thought: "When I think in words, I don't have 'meanings' in my mind in addition to the verbal expressions; rather, language itself is the vehicle of thought" (*Ibid*, §329). Within a Tractarian language, one is only able to truthfully articulate the arrangements of objects through propositions; however, with the notion that 'language is the vehicle of thought', language transforms into the medium through which we think, process, and understand both our immediate and mediated experiences. Instead of providing a logical framework for stating facts, Wittgenstein aims to capture our expressive language—one that we use to describe our actions, thoughts, desires, and anything imaginable. In some senses, this distinction becomes one

between picturing states of affairs and *thinking (imagination)*. 'Language is the vehicle of thought and thought is linguistic' differs from the notion that 'language pictures states of affairs and arrangements of objects in space'—the former concerns the intersubjective truth of our everyday experiences; the latter concerns the objective truth that scientific understanding seeks.

With this alternative theory, Wittgenstein aims to capture how we *use* language. While the Tractarian language is tethered to a nonsensory mechanical picture of the world, the language in the *Investigations* is meant to provide a better picture of how people actually *use* language. In this way, the picture of language in the *Investigations* is informative to our everyday experiences. While we can use propositions to record truths, this is not all that we do with language; we use language to tell what we did, or to say what we are doing, or to express how we feel, or simply to tell a story. While objective truth is the aim of scientific understanding, what we do and the stories that we tell are essential to our narrative understanding.

Just as it was necessary to articulate the particular perspective requisite for scientific understanding, it is now necessary to turn to the same form of investigation with respect to narrative understanding. From what perspective do we narratively understand our world?

2.31 Adopting a Narrative Perspective: Agency and Time

Scientific understanding adopts a non-agential character and a non-relational notion of time because it needs to stand outside the world in order to inspect it, study it, and describe it accurately. Narrative understanding, on the other hand, is necessarily immersed in the world because *we* are immersed in the world.

In "Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man," Sellars provides an account of what he calls the manifest image of man-in-the-world. This manifest image is a refinement of the 'original' image of man-in-the-world, in which all objects are persons and the different kinds of

objects are different ways of being persons (Sellars 1962, p. 10). In the original image, "what the objects of this framework, primarily *are* and *do*, is what persons are and do" (*Ibid*, p. 11). It is noteworthy that the original image is one in which all objects are agents, placing agentive narrative at the center of self-awareness. Sellars refers to a modification of this agency, which is the transition from the original image to the manifest image. This allows for the recognition that inanimate objects only really *do* things as a sort of truncated person. One might think back to Macbeth's example of the stone rolling down the hill during her explanation of block time. She noted that Aristotle would have explained the phenomenon with respect to the natural motion *of the stone*. The original image posits the stone itself as an agent capable of the full range of human activities. However, the manifest image posits the stone as a sort of truncated person. In this way, there is only a single activity that the stone can do when it is rolling down the hill—namely, it will roll down the hill until it stops rolling down the hill because it *belongs* at the bottom; if one picks up the stone and places it back up the hill, then it will once again roll down to where it *belongs*. The manifest image, then, *is* Aristotle's picture of the world; the objects can no longer be seen as acting deliberately, but rather as acting from natures. Earth goes down and fire goes up because that is where they belong.

It is critical to recognize that the manifest image begins with all objects as agents. Narrative understanding is then also linked to an agential perspective. If we consider scientific understanding's non-agential perspective as linked to the fact that the scientist must stand outside the world in order to observe it, then it is natural to recognize that narrative understanding is exercised through the agential perspective. When someone asks us about our day, we can talk about the things that we *did*, the things that we said, the things that we wanted to do, and we are

the agents of the stories of our lives. When someone shows us a tie and we say that it is blue, our assertion is enabled because of *how the tie looks to us*.

Michael Thompson's *Life and Action* is informative to the question of what is truly meant by 'agency'. Thompson distinguishes between naïve action explanation (which is paradigmatically narrative) and a more sophisticated explanation (i.e. a pseudo-scientific explanation) in his second essay "Naïve Action Theory". He first acknowledges the ubiquitous tendency to prioritize the sophisticated explanation:

> Arguments crowd in, after all, to the effect that the explanatory content of naïve action explanation, its underlying etiological basis, must be something that is more directly or more appropriately expressed in some sophisticated form. Our agent is building a house, indeed, but that's not why he's laying these bricks, not really; the ground, in nature, of the brick-laying, must be rather something like this, that she wants to build a house. Such thoughts are the mark of what I will call a sophisticated philosophy of action, which finds in every genuine straight-forward rationalization a movement from inner to outer, from mind to world, from spirit to nature, from 'desire' to 'action'. (Thompson 2008, p. 90)

Thompson then spends the remainder of the essay arguing that this priority is an example of being 'scientific', and that there is much to learn from a naïve action explanation. Importantly, he asserts that no actions must be caused by an internal 'desire' in order to be characterized as the 'action' of an 'agent'. This is critical for what is meant by the *agential* character of narrative understanding. The perspective does not need to be one of an agent whose every action is caused by an internal desire. Rather, we should think of agency in the naïve sense. The agent is laying bricks *because she is building a house*. It is her *action* that defines her agency, rather than some proposition in her head. When the world is understood narratively, it is understood from the perspective of an agent and that agent understands the things happening around her *as agential*.

Since narrative understanding requires an agential perspective, it also requires a relational notion of time and space. Events are described in the past, present, or future, which are located

in a temporal scheme in relation to the agent[8]. Spatially, objects are described as near or far with respect to the agent. This relational notion of time reinforces the naïve notion of agency. The agent is immersed in the world, and we ought not think that action follows the rationalization from inner to outer. The narrative understanding reinforces that she is laying the bricks because she is building a house, just as she calls a brick red because sees that it is red.

2.4 The Split

We have investigated two forms of human understanding. We began with scientific understanding, as it is the prevailing view of how we ought to understand our world. With its claim to objective truth, scientific understanding has been positioned as the enlightened form of understanding. While we have confirmed the educated nature of scientific understanding, we have also seen through Wittgenstein's *Investigations* how deeply narrative our use of language is and how thought is linguistic. We have therefore provided the preliminary work for a distinction between two forms of understanding[9].

If we accept that we can understand the world either scientifically or narratively, and that there is a fundamental split between these forms of understanding, then we must question how this split itself is understood. Do we understand the split scientifically or narratively, and

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[8] Although there is not space in this paper for a deeper discussion here, narrative understanding's relational notion of time is connected to Heidegger's discussions of time in *Being and Time*. His discussions of the temporal relationship between Dasein and death; how we find ourselves as a thrown fact; how anticipatory resoluteness temporally structures an authentic life; these are instances of a narrative conception of time, and ways in which Heidegger is fundamental to narrative understanding. From an agential perspective and with a relational notion of time, one can consider the relationship between being and death, and how the anticipation and certainty of death seeps into the daily routine's of one's life. In this way, we can trace a fundamental link between Heidegger and narrative understanding.

[9] This is *not* to rule out the possibility that there are more than two forms of human understanding. Without providing a preference for one view or the other, it is best to acknowledge that there might be other forms of understanding, and also these two might comprise an exhaustive list. It is simply beyond the scope of this paper, and beyond the sight of this investigation, to ask the question of whether there are additional forms of understanding.

furthermore how *should* we understand the split? By analyzing the split both scientifically and narratively, we can better grasp the significance of these two forms of understanding, and how it relates to the distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects.

Section III: The Scientific Picture of Science and Narrative

The scientific picture of the split seeks to uncover what is objectively true, and so if there is nothing objectively true about the split, then there is nothing for scientific understanding to offer. However, as we saw in Fisher's rational-world paradigm, the scientific paradigm does not admit that there is anything that falls outside of it—not even narrative understanding. We should therefore adopt the position both that there is something objectively true about the split and that we can grasp this truth through a scientific investigation. We must adopt a scientific perspective—standing outside the world—and from a non-agential perspective and within a non-relational temporal spectrum, we must investigate the nature of this split. We ought also to consider the distinction between knowing objects and knowing persons from Section I, and scientifically consider how the distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects fits into the scientific picture of the split.

The question that materializes most immediately is how an investigation of this sort will differ from Section II, which sought to articulate the split in human understanding by applying the categories of agency and time to both forms. The explicit rationale behind applying the same categories to each form of understanding was to conduct an investigation devoid of *bias* that would confer different treatment to each form of understanding. It is from the unembodied perspective, the scientific perspective, that embodiment becomes a concern, which enables one to recognize how one's embodiment impedes one's capacity to fully (objectively) grasp truth. This impediment by our embodiment is considered *bias* from the scientific perspective. In other

words, from the scientific perspective, bias lies in thinking that things are as they appear within perceptual experience. By applying the same categories to each form of understanding, then, an investigation is able to consider the same aspects of each form. A 'level playing field' is created for any comparisons between the two forms of understanding. Within narrative understanding, one assumes an embodied, agential perspective, and so it seems that one would always think that things are as they appear in perceptual experience when one adopts a narrative perspective. It is therefore from the non-embodied, non-agential, outside-the-world perspective that one is concerned about this bias. In other words, it is from the scientific perspective that one can recognize the bias in a narrative perspective. Ultimately, we can recognize that the scientific picture of the split *is* the picture provided in Section II, insofar as our primary concern was fully revealing the split without the corruption of our embodied bias.

The scientific picture of science and narrative asserts that science has the claim to objective truth, while narrative understanding can merely describe one's everyday experiences. These descriptions are riddled with bias, while objective true is necessarily devoid of bias. We can then ask how the scientific picture of the split differs from McKinnon's epistemic distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects. One might be quick to conclude that McKinnon is actually responding directly to this scientific picture: she is responding to the notion that scientific understanding, with its claim to objective truth, is able to grasp all that objectively is, and therefore claims both knowledge of persons and knowledge of objects. The epistemic difference that she highlights, then, would show how these two types of knowing differ.

It seems that McKinnon's primary point is that the way in which science acquires objective truth will be insufficient for coming to know other persons because coming to know other persons requires an in-the-world perspective (whereas science is necessary and sufficient

for coming to know objects). However, the scientific response would not be that science is in fact capable of acquiring the objective truth of a person's in-the-world experiences because such a pursuit is one that acknowledges a person *as an agent*. For science, the world is an object for study and so are people. In psychology, one talks to people as subjects, and then uses the responses as data; the psychologist filters out the bias by taking a disinterested perspective to gather what is objectively true about people. It seems, then, that the scientific picture of the split would in fact agree with McKinnon's epistemic distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects. To know objects, one must take the disinterested, outside-the-world scientific perspective; to know persons (*as agents*), one must step into the shoes of that person or otherwise *talk with* them. The scientific picture of the split would recognize this epistemic distinction, and then highlight that only the former comprises objective truth. In this way, the scientific picture of the split provides an epistemic priority to scientific understanding over narrative understanding—i.e. there is greater epistemological power in scientific understanding. Coming to know persons as persons is irrelevant to scientific understanding because it is epistemically preferred to know them as objects. At this point, McKinnon and the scientific picture of the split have a fundamental disagreement. The scientific picture of the split would maintain that there is no epistemic difference between persons and objects at all—both *should* be understood scientifically and *as objects*—however, it would acknowledge that the everyday experiences of persons *as agents* is not grasped by science. McKinnon would argue that these everyday experiences, the in-the-shoes perspective, is what it *means* to come to know persons; coming to know persons as objects is deficient and falls into the trap of failing to recognize the epistemic difference between knowing objects and knowing persons. The scientific picture presents the world as an object for study; McKinnon recognizes that the world is an object for

study, but then argues that people must be understood differently.

Section IV: The Narrative Picture of Science and Narrative

We are not generally[10] taught in academia to narratively explore phenomena. It is often thought that the scientific lens *is* the academic lens, and that in order to explore phenomena academically, one must remove oneself from the world, from the phenomena, and then inspect it from an outside-the-world view—an unbiased, disinterested, and objective view. Our task now is precisely the opposite. We must seek to understand the split narratively, and thereby narratively understand science, narrative, and the relationship between the two.

While this task might seem difficult or obscure, we have all the pieces already at hand, and simply need to rearrange them in order to see the larger picture. We need only to return to Baldwin and Buckley, and that overcrowded room in 1965, in order to probe our own narrative understanding. What exactly was Baldwin trying to accomplish when he conjured the image of the man in the barber shop in Harlem, whose ancestors arrived in America 400 years earlier in chains, listening to Bobby Kennedy say that *maybe* in 40 years a Black man *might* become president? What was his intention when he conjured the image of a Black child cheering on Gary Cooper as he slaughtered Native Americans, and then that same Black child realizing that *he* is the Native Americans? If Buckley is correct, then it seems that the intention is to use some mere experiential evidence—something that happened to someone—to demonstrate some wider phenomenon. To suggest that this anecdote *proves* anything, then, is just as fallacious as asserting that the sun must revolve around the Earth because we watch the sun emerge from one horizon and set behind the other horizon. Buckley's thought then is that just because it appears

[10] There are some notable exceptions here: throughout the disciplines of literature, philosophy, ethnography, historiography, among others, one can find examples of narrative understanding within an academic context.

this way to us does not mean that that is actually what is going on. Accordingly, Buckley assumes that he can cast aside Baldwin's examples and turn to the data that demonstrates that Black Americans are better off than at any other point in American history.

However, Buckley misses the point. Baldwin is not effective because he presents experiential evidence that highlights a correlation and thereby a wider phenomenon[11]. Rather, he is effective insofar as he enables *the listeners to place themselves in the shoes* of that Black man in Harlem or that Black child watching Gary Cooper. He is effective insofar as he enables the understanding of how it is with him—how it is to be the human being he is, with a particular embodiment, and for whom that embodiment is inextricably tied to a placement in American society during the 1960s. Scientifically, this has no value, but narratively, it is a paradigm of understanding. It is this *within-the-shoes-of* that marks the narrative character of Baldwin's speech, and it is due to his scientific perspective that Buckley refuses to consider what Baldwin is saying. With this paradigm, we can return to the task at hand. We have an outline of narrative understanding, and we can thereby narratively investigate scientific understanding.

If we probe scientific understanding narratively, then we ought to highlight the *learned* nature of scientific understanding. We could not come into the world understanding our surroundings scientifically; with acculturation into language, we come to understand them narratively. Narratively, then, we can see scientific understanding as *developing out of* narrative understanding. Narrative understanding assumes an in-the-shoes, an agential perspective, and thereby bestows the world with *relational meaning* with respect to time and space. Objects can be near me or far from me, people can be *with* me, and I can imagine myself as someone else and can imagine *what it would be like* to be that person. The world around a person is meaningful as

[11] Linking 'evidence' and 'phenomenon' in this way is distinctive of scientific understanding.

it lies in relation to that person, i.e. the world has relational meaning within narrative understanding. This is not to deny the possible objective truthfulness of such claims. If I propositionally assert that such-and-such is near me, then this can be an objectively true claim and it can be a claim nevertheless understood narratively with relational meaning. However, the emphasis remains on the relation between the object and myself within relational space (rather than the objective truthfulness of that claim from an outside-the-world perspective). Scientific understanding, then, develops out of narrative understanding by stripping all of this away—by '*purifying*' it, by removing the 'bias'. The agency is stripped away, and so scientific understanding is left with a non-agential perspective. The relational notion of time is stripped away, and so scientific understanding is left with a non-relational notion of time. The within-the-worldness is stripped away, and so one must stand outside-the-world in order to scientifically understand the world. It is only through the narrative lens that one can see how scientific understanding develops out of narrative understanding through a process of stripping away[12].

From the scientific perspective, the agency and relational notions of time and space distort reality, and make it impossible for narrative understanding to grasp reality as an object for study. McKinnon assented to the claim that reality was an object for study, but then argued *from this perspective* that knowing objects and knowing persons are of different epistemic orders because knowing persons requires a within-the-world perspective. The narrative picture of the split, however, reveals a fundamentally different picture of reality by showing how there are actually two interconnected distinctions here.

[12] Importantly, this process of stripping away is not a mere happening in human evolution, or something that naturally occurs as a human child grows into an adult. We are not born into the world as scientific beings and we also do not evolve through a natural process of stripping away. Rather, this stripping away is essentially agential; it is something that we do ourselves, a capacity that is developed and refined.

People always reside within the agential and relational temporal perspective of narrative understanding. Things are near or far; people are with us or they are elsewhere; we are agents and we understand our actions accordingly; we see others as possessing agency, as *doing* things, as mostly responsible for their actions. If we want to understand *why* she did something, then we put ourselves *in her shoe*s in order to adopt her particular, agential perspective—or we just ask her. The interconnection between narrative understanding and the intellect is brought out by a passage from Sebastian Rödl's *Categories of the Temporal*:

> An intellect that depends on intuition[13] does not think from nowhen, but by means of a time. Thereby it is also temporal in the sense that it represents its object as temporal. Both aspects of its temporality are inseparable. Its relation to time distinguishes intuition-dependent thought from the perception of a merely sensory creature. […] But is time just the form of an intuition that gives content to thought, or is it also the form of perception of a merely sensory creature? An animal perceives that given circumstances are of this or that kind by reacting to them with behavior of this or that form. […] It distinguishes the friend from the stranger and in this sense perceives that a friend is coming. But it does not perceive at what time the friend is coming; it does not distinguish the time at which he is coming from other times[14]. (Rödl 2012, p. 74-7)

Wittgenstein foreshadowed this philosophical move in the *Investigations* when he said: "We say a dog is afraid his master will beat him; but not, he is afraid his master will beat him tomorrow. Why not?" (Wittgenstein 1953, §650). Rödl provides the answer to this pivotal question. The (relationally) temporal character of the human intellect distinguishes human cognition from the perceptual experiences of a merely sensory creature. However, it is not just a particular type of human cognition that has this temporal character, but rather *all* human cognition that is relationally temporal. In other words, the structure of the human intellect *is* narrative. Our mode of processing the world is narrative just as the world itself is also an arena for action; we do

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[13] Intuition is the perceptual content received from the world.

[14] In this way, we can see that Rödl is talking about *relational time* (rather than non-relational time), as the type of time that he discusses is that which is relevant to the actions of an agent and the events going on around the agent. The very fact that Rödl links intellect with temporally bound intuitions, and thereby argues that the intellect is temporally bound, emphasizes his relational notion of time.

things in the world, and even our moments of contemplation are intellectual *actions* taken by agential beings. The scientific perspective is something that we adopt to pursue a particular goal, i.e. obtain objective truth. Alternatively, the narrative perspective is not something we adopt, but rather is the structure of our cognition.

At last we have the tools at hand to consider McKinnon's epistemic distinction between knowing objects and knowing persons from the narrative perspective of the split. We can recognize that the narrative perspective is the structure of our cognition, and that scientific understanding is something that we have created for a specific purpose. In this sense, scientific understanding is a tool that we can use skillfully to accomplish our task, but we can also use it incorrectly; a hammer works well for nails, but will make a mess if it is used on screws. So too does scientific understanding work well for ascertaining objective truth in the world; however, it begins to make a mess when it is used to try to grasp other features of our existence. One product of this mess is the notion that our world is only an object for study and not also an arena for action. When we make this misstep, we arrive at the place where McKinnon begins: the world is an object for study, yet we cannot come to know persons through objective investigation as disinterested observers (only by talking *with* them), and so we must conclude that there is an epistemic difference between knowing persons and knowing objects. However, McKinnon's mistake is the order of the epistemological clarification. The problem is not that persons present an exceptional epistemological case, but rather that we misconceive our epistemological disposition in the world. We are essentially narrative, not scientific. This means that our epistemological disposition is narrative, just as the world is also an arena for our actions. Buckley misunderstands this when he assumes that he can dismiss Baldwin's experiences because they are not relevant to a conversation about what is objectively the case for Black

Americans—but more precisely, he misunderstands the sort of thing that comprises knowledge of persons. Our knowledge of persons concerns the subjective and intersubjective truths contained within our narrative understanding of the world. To speak of the objective truth of persons is to reduce a person into an object for study. In this way, one also collapses the myriad subjective and intersubjective truths that could be grasped through a narrative understanding of that person. The ways in which White American culture oppresses and constricts Black American identities can never be fully expressed by objective economic facts. Through the scientific investigation of these objectives facts, the subjective and intersubjective truths of Black American experiences are leveled; the scientific picture of how Black American wealth has increased hollows out the narratively significant markers that oppression exists.

It is important to note that there are subjective and intersubjective truths about objects contained within our narrative understanding of the world. McKinnon misunderstands this point when she maintains that the world is an object for study and that people present the exceptional epistemological case. The cultural and spiritual significances of countless objects cannot be grasped by scientific understanding, and yet are contained within narrative understanding—e.g. family heirlooms, artwork, etc. Though there are epistemic differences between knowing persons narratively and knowing objects narratively, they both fall within the purview of narrative understanding—and they ought to be distinguished from scientific understanding, which seeks to grasp objective truth. In this way, we can see that McKinnon collapses two distinctions within her one.

The narrative picture of the split reveals the narrative character of our intellect and reframes how we ought to conceptualize the epistemological differences between coming to know persons and coming to know objects. If the world is an object for study, then our goal can

be to determine what is objectively the case and so scientific understanding is the requisite means to accomplish our task. However, the world is *first and foremost* an arena for action and we are persons that *are always doing things*—including studying the world—and talking about those things, and seeking to understand our actions and the world around us. Insofar as studying the world scientifically is something we *do*, scientific understanding is unintelligible *except in light of* narrative understanding. The precision of scientific understanding has misled us to assume that we can quantify everything that is and ignore what is not quantifiable. However, this objective picture removes the color from the world and denies the subjective and intersubjective truths that shape and give *relational meaning* to our lives. Scientific understanding is a useful tool, and science as a mode of inquiry has facilitated some of the most significant developments in human history—but it is only as useful as it is applied to the appropriate objects. When McKinnon passionately defends the distinction between knowing persons and knowing objects—"Looking at the case of knowledge of persons […] showed how insisting on criteria of objectivity and impartiality excludes from epistemological interest certain kinds of knowledge central to our cognitive lives"—she was not wrong, but she underestimates the scope of this epistemological misstep (McKinnon 2007, p. 252). We ought to be far more critical of the necessity of an objective impartiality as it relates to our epistemological pursuits of the world and ourselves.

Conclusion

Standing in that crowded room in 1965, Baldwin implored the hundreds of White British students to step into the shoes of Black Americans—to imagine what it would be like to realize that your country is not *really* your country, and that the color of your skin is determinative of your personal worth to many of your fellow citizens. He described his own experiences and the

experiences of his fellow Black Americans, and enabled those White British students to imagine themselves as another person. When it was time for Buckley to speak, he must have felt that his task was an easy one because he immediately retorted that the color of Baldwin's skin had no relevance to the argument that Baldwin presented. What he meant was that Baldwin's experiences had no relationship to reason or to truth. Only data, statistics, and the products of scientific inquiry could reveal what is objectively true. It is not just the content of this debate that has great bearing on our current predicament, but also the nature of the debate.

This disjunction between objective truth and experience that Buckley presented is emblematic of the scientific picture of the split in human understanding. It presents the world as only an object for study, and misleads philosophers like McKinnon to assume that knowing persons presents an exceptional epistemological case. However, by exploring the higher order distinction between narrative understanding and scientific understanding, we can position scientific understanding as the useful tool that it is, rather than our most precise mode for understanding everything in the world. We can understand both persons and objects narratively—though these epistemological tasks differ even within narrative understanding, as McKinnon rightly noted that one can only come to know another person through talking *with* them. We can grasp objective truth through scientific understanding; however, this means that we cannot come to know persons *as persons* scientifically. We can recognize that scientific understanding is a tool for obtaining objective truth, but it is unable to ascertain the subjective and intersubjective truths that are pivotal to our lives. This is not to deny the pivotal advances that scientific inquiries have made, nor to deny their centrality to modern human flourishing. It is to make room for a renewed reflection on the value of narrative understanding.

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