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Voluntarism, values, and community:

an intersubjective reading of Bas C. van Fraassen's The Empirical Stance

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

Signature: Date:

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ii.) Abstract

In *The Empirical Stance*, Bas C. van Fraassen suggests that philosophical positions include non-factual things like values and attitudes: they are "stances" rather than factual theses. Choosing between stances is not a matter of reason or rational compulsion; rather, we choose the stance that best reflects or expresses our values. For Dien Ho and Anja Jauernig, however, this reduces philosophy to a subjective expression of personal preference (subjectivism) and, moreover, reduces philosophical debate to an irresolvable value-based dispute (relativism).

In this dissertation, I offer an intersubjective reading of van Fraassen. In doing so, I seek to extend what I think is an underdeveloped appeal to community in his work. Approaching van Fraassen with reference to community helps us to appreciate better his position (comprising his voluntarism and voluntarist epistemology, permissive rationality, and stance philosophy) and, as I hope to show, to respond to subjectivist and relativist concerns.

In developing this community-based account, I first consider Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition. This gives us an understanding of stance choice as a process of mutually recognising and committing to particular values and attitudes. In choosing the empirical stance, say, I recognise and commit to the values of the empiricist community. In turn, this community recognises my commitment and acknowledges me as an empiricist, as an adherent of the empirical stance. In Brandom's model, then, we find an account of stance choice as a community matter rather than something purely subjective.

This leaves the relativist issue unresolved: how can we defend our stance choice to another community, whose members perhaps do not share our relevant values? In addressing this, I consider Davidson's radical interpretation and his principle of charity. As Davidson shows us, if we want to interpret (and hence communicate with) another being, we must assume a shared background of agreement. Here I suggest that we might broaden this background agreement to include not only

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beliefs but also things like values and commitments. In this way, if I want to communicate with someone from another community, if I want to defend my values and stance choice to this being, then I must charitably assume that we share a common background of beliefs and values. At the very least, broadening the principle helps us to make further sense of van Fraassen's own response to Ho's relativist fears.

Lastly I consider the epistemic issue of scientific and conceptual revolutions, in particular of the radical changes that are involved, in the context of community. I look at the role of emotion in van Fraassen's voluntarism and its connection to his notion of the "unfollowable rule". I suggest that further reflection on this connection might help us to make sense of drastic and emotional changes in perspective as a matter of community, since the unfollowable rule itself is community-based.

As I hope to show, then, much light can be thrown upon van Fraassen *The Empirical Stance* by considering in detail the role of community and the theme of intersubjectivity in his work. This helps us to appreciate his position and offers him a genuine and detailed way to respond to the twin worries of subjectivism and relativism.

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1.) Voluntarism and values

> So here is the proposal: a philosophical position can consist in something other than a belief in what the world is like (van Fraassen, 2002, 47)

For Bas C. van Fraassen, a philosophical position extends beyond the purely factual realm to include things like values, attitudes, and commitments. This is not unique to philosophy, either. On van Fraassen's voluntarist account of epistemology, *all* claims to knowledge (our beliefs and scientific theories, our views of the world) are to some extent a reflection of our values and attitudes. Van Fraassen's suggestion brings worries of subjectivism, since it risks reducing our philosophical claims to subjective expressions of personal preference. Moreover, if our claims reflect our values in this way, then it is difficult to see how we might discuss our claims and choices with others who perhaps do not share these values. This is a worry of relativism. As a result of the twin issues of subjectivism and relativism, van Fraassen's voluntarist position threatens the possibility of meaningful or philosophical debate and undermines philosophy itself. As such, his proposal fails to appeal.

In defence of van Fraassen, I suggest that within his voluntarist epistemology we can read an account of community and social norms that offers some refuge from these subjectivist and relativist fears. I approach this in three parts. First, I look at van Fraassen's position and the subjectivist and relativist issues it raises. Secondly, in response to these issues, I identify and elaborate an underdeveloped role for community in van Fraassen's epistemology and address the worry of community relativism. Finally, I consider the role of community in relation to scientific and conceptual revolutions, which are a central focus for van Fraassen.

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1.1) Stance philosophy, empiricism, and voluntarist epistemology

> The element of personal decision, values, and volition has entered and received a legitimate place in our epistemic life (van Fraassen, 2002, 91)

In this chapter I look at van Fraassen's position and the subjectivist anxieties it raises. Central to his position is the idea that a philosophical position can be "something other" than a purely factual thesis (van Fraassen, 2002, 47). This "something other" is a philosophical *stance*: an "attitude, commitment, a cluster of such", which "may involve or presuppose some beliefs as well, but cannot simply be equated with having beliefs or making assertions about what there is" (van Fraassen, 2002, 47-8). More than this, van Fraassen seeks to develop his preferred philosophical stance – the

empirical stance[1] – as an alternative to metaphysics.[2] Understood as a stance, empiricism is characterised by a certain attitude towards science. For the empiricist, that is, science represents a "paradigm of rational inquiry" (van Fraassen, 2002, 63). This relates not so much to the content of scientific theories, but to the *practice* of science, which for the empiricist "teaches us how to give up our beliefs" (van Fraassen, 2002, 63). As we shall see, the empiricist's admiration of science is something that extends beyond the realm of belief; hence the need for empiricism as a *stance* rather than a factual thesis. Moreover this admiration manifests most strongly in the area of epistemology - the "central philosophical concern" of the empiricist tradition - and as such van Fraassen concentrates his discussion on what is a predominant issue in epistemology: making sense of scientific and conceptual revolutions (2002, 64).

Examples of scientific revolutions include the shift from Ptolemaic theories to the heliocentric cosmology of Copernicus, the fall of phlogiston in the face of Lavoisier's combustion theory, and more recently, Einstein's relativistic revolution. From an epistemological perspective, these happenings pose a challenge in that they involve seemingly irrational changes in scientific belief. Consider the relativistic revolution. For a classical Newtonian physicist, the idea that mass is dependent upon velocity is preposterous. Coming to accept relativity theory, then, involves coming to accept something that is - from his current perspective - utterly absurd; this is a seemingly irrational jump. It is only *after* the fact that we can make sense of the shift from classical to relativistic physics. The epistemological issue here is two-fold: from the prior perspective, how do we account for our absurd epistemic choices and, from the posterior perspective, how do we retrospectively accommodate these choices as rational and in so doing, legitimate our current epistemic position.

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In addressing this issue, van Fraassen makes a distinction between what he calls objectifying epistemology and his own voluntarist epistemology. For van Fraassen, objectifying epistemology is "a factual theory writing project about cognitive functioning" that produces "theories with clear empirical content [...] constructed in the framework of the accepted science of the day" (2002, 76). For objectifying epistemology then, as van Fraassen sees it, scientific and conceptual revolutions

[1] There is some concern about a possible distinction between what is an empiric*al* stance and what is an empiric*ist* stance (see van Fraassen (2004) and Anja Jauernig (2007)). For our part, however, we shall follow the terminology in van Fraassen's *The Empiric*al *Stance*.

[2] Indeed, van Fraassen dismisses traditional 'naive' empiricism (2002, 42), since it is only as a stance that he thinks empiricism can offer a coherent alternative to metaphysics; however it is beyond the scope of our discussion to detail van Fraassen's dismissal of traditional empiricism and his characterisation of metaphysics. (Here the reader is directed to Chakravartty (2004, 2007) and Jauernig (2007) among others). Nevertheless, we should note that what I am interested in, and what I seek to defend - van Fraassen's voluntarism - has some bearing on his attack of metaphysics. In fact, if we cannot defend van Fraassen's voluntarism against subjectivist concerns, then his criticism of metaphysics holds little sway.

present an "unsolvable problem" (2002, 81). This is because any descriptive, factual theory about our cognitive functioning will be inferred from current psychological or scientific theories that encompass a particular view of ourselves and our world, and any theory of cognition that goes against this particular view will be dismissed as erroneous. In van Fraassen's words, "any objectifying epistemology must imply that I will be in error if I come to believe that I am something not captured by its description of what I am" (2002, 79). For example, say that my theory of cognition depends on a certain psychological view of myself. In objectifying epistemology, this already precludes the possibility of coming to see myself differently, since any view that goes against this current psychological theory can only be regarded as a cognitive short-coming on my part. Furthermore, because the objectifying epistemologist cannot see his framework of knowledge as contingent, "any conceptual revolution taking us out of [our] current scientific view would be an example of cognitive dysfunction, of failure, of error" (van Fraassen, 2002, 79). As such, objectifying epistemology cannot accommodate the epistemological issue of scientific and conceptual revolutions.

This leaves us with a dilemma. We cannot have a "presuppositionless" theory of knowledge removed from our current knowledge base (whether science, psychology, religion) *nor* can we have a theory that relies on this knowledge base but at the same time can accommodate the phenomenon of scientific and conceptual revolutions. The solution for van Fraassen is simply to reject the project of objectifying epistemology in favour of a different epistemology. As van Fraassen sees it, we are "engaged in epistemic pursuit, so to speak, pursuit of epistemic goals, of cognitive gain [...]. About this volitional, intentional activity we hope to discourse illuminatingly without writing a theory about it, at least in the narrow sense of 'theory'" (2002, 82). Rather than constructing theories of knowledge then, van Fraassen suggests a different approach - a voluntarist approach - in which we investigate the "tactics and strategies" of this "volitional, intentional activity" (2002, 82).

With tactics and strategies, importantly, 'success' is not measured in terms of factual agreement or theoretical confirmation but rather in relation to a particular aim or *telos*: our tactics are successful if they help us to reach our aim. Thus success in voluntarist epistemology depends on how we define our epistemic aims. Following William James, van Fraassen outlines two epistemic aims: to gain truth and to avoid error (2002, 86). Of course, these aims are in conflict with one another. If we want just to gain truth we should believe *everything*, catching the truth among the falsehoods; whereas if we want just to avoid error we should believe *nothing*, eschewing all falsehoods along with truth.[3] Because of this conflict, these goals cannot together serve as the aim of our epistemology. We must

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[3] As van Fraassen puts it: "each is gotten at the expense of the other" (2002, 87).

define our epistemic aim as the "measure of balance" that we find between these conflicting aims (van Fraassen, 2002, 87). About this "measure of balance", van Fraassen writes:

> [...] any measure [...] by which we may balance the two desires and find a point of equilibrium, we will have to supply ourselves. Neither logic nor empirical study will take away this element of choice or the value judgement involved in that choice. [...] The value judgement that supplies a measure of balance between our separate desires is up to us; the choice is momentous, and it is unavoidable (2002, 88-89).

Moreover, we can recognise contextual factors that are involved in reconciling this Jamesian tension. Whether I balance my epistemic aim more towards the 'gaining truth' side or the 'avoiding error' side of the spectrum depends on things like relevance and risk (I want to gain truth that is relevant and to avoid errors that might bring particularly unpleasant consequences). In turn, what we count as relevant or risky depends to some extent on what we – as individuals and a collective – value. In van Fraassen's words:

> We need to relativise, or to recognise sensitivity to context, in these two desires. Part of our judgment here, a very important part, derives from our opinion of what others will want from us. We are part of an information economy,[4] in which certain sorts of information are much more valuable than others. [...] *Enfin*, the values involved here are quite different from mere desires for truthful information and freedom from error (2002, 88).

In this way, values and volition find a "legitimate place" within van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology (2002, 91).

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1.2) Voluntarist epistemology and revolutions: permissive rationality and emotion

Still, merely acknowledging the presence (and importance) of values and value-based judgements in our epistemic lives does not address the issue of radical epistemic change and revolutions. We still cannot make sense of the seemingly absurd epistemic choices that come with moving from one theory or worldview to another. To be sure, understanding scientific and conceptual revolutions poses a challenge beyond the scope of this dissertation; nevertheless it *is* the epistemic issue that van Fraassen selects as a case study in explicating his voluntarist account. In order to give a fuller appreciation of his epistemology, then, we shall briefly consider van Fraassen's approach to the issue of revolutions.

[4] The term "information economy" comes from Jeremy Foss.

To make sense of revolutions and the radical changes involved, van Fraassen complements his voluntarist epistemology with a permissive account of rationality and an existentialist theory of emotion. Consider rationality first: for van Fraassen, rationality is "but bridled irrationality" (2002, 92). A belief is rational so long as it is not *ir*rational, where irrationality is understood as something internal ("self-sabotage" as van Fraassen says (2007, 354)) like logical incoherence or inconsistency. To believe simultaneously that it is both raining and *not* raining outside would, for example, be inconsistent and therefore irrational. Provided that we stay within the confines of rationality, however, we may believe anything. This is permissive in that there is nothing that we, as rational agents, *must* believe. As van Fraassen writes:

> Changes in view are not rational because they are rationally compelled; they are rational exactly if they are rationally permitted, if they do not transgress the bounds of reason (2002, 92).

It is important to note the role that van Fraassen's permissive rationality plays in his voluntarism as a whole. Namely, his permissive account helps us to make sense of the voluntarist possibility of two rational inquirers (a cautious one, say, and a risk-taker) who have opposing epistemic practices but who nonetheless operate within the same epistemic framework. Assuming that neither falls into internal error or incoherence, we can understand both the cautious inquirer *and* his bold opposite as rational - even if their respective values result in different epistemic aims and findings. By contrast, if we were to view rationality as something compelling, then both inquirers would be rationally obliged to follow the same epistemic path on pain of being irrational. On van Fraassen's permissive account, however, as long as we stay within the confines of rationality, there is no set path that we 'have' to take. Instead, there are many, many paths that we 'may' take and still remain within the "bounds of reason".

When it comes to scientific and conceptual revolutions, furthermore, permissive rationality helps us to make rational sense (at least retrospectively) of the changes our beliefs undergo during a revolution: the changes from one path to another, so to speak. Provided that the new, post-revolutionary position is not irrational by its own lights, there is nothing irrational in changing paths. Since there are many possibilities within our rational reach, we can still consider ourselves as rational epistemic agents despite drastic changes to our belief system. On van Fraassen's account, revolutionary change is thus rationally permissible.

Admittedly, however, this is only part of the issue. What still needs to be addressed is the prior issue of *how* this shift comes about; that is, how something that is seemingly absurd becomes a live

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epistemic option to us. Before the shift to a new worldview, there is a period when our current epistemic structures (our current values, beliefs, and theories and also our epistemic framework, the patterns of inference and induction that we follow, our current models of decision-theoretic reasoning) are weighed down by anomalies and failed predictions. At this point, the new position does not yet seem a viable (or even sensical) alternative and as such our current epistemic options are exhausted. How does the situation change?

One possible answer, and the one that van Fraassen gives, is through emotion. We shall look at this later and in greater detail, but let us give a brief consideration here. For van Fraassen, it is through emotion that "the very parameters" of our epistemic situation change, allowing us to appreciate the new position as a live option (2002, 102). Following Sartre's (1939) theory of emotions, van Fraassen presents an account of emotion as something transformative. To make sense of this, consider the optimist and the pessimist. Both occupy the same world, but as a result of differing emotions and attitudes, the one sees metaphorical roses where the other sees only weeds. In a sense, this is a form of emotional transformation. Or, to use Sartre's own Aesopian example: trying in vain to reach a bunch of grapes, I am prompted by the tension of my situation (I want the grapes but I can't reach them) to see the grapes differently. They no longer look tasty, but rather unripe ("too green"). My disappointment in being unable to reach the grapes transforms my attitude towards them. I no longer want to eat the grapes and hence it ceases to matter that they are unreachable. The tension of my situation is resolved (1939, 65-6).[5]

Scientific and conceptual revolutions present a similar case. In the moments leading up to a revolution, we have run out of epistemic possibilities ("All ways are barred" (Sartre, 1939, 63)). Any change that "makes intelligible" the seemingly absurd new theory or worldview must be, as van Fraassen notes, "in important part a change in attitude" (2002, 107). And since, given van Fraassen's permissive account of rationality, this change is not rationally compelled, it is thus best understood as a change brought on by what Sartre describes as *emotion*. Prior to the relativistic revolution, for example, the notion of relative mass is but an absurd joke to the classical physicist. Relativity only becomes intelligible (and hence a viable option) to him when emotion changes his attitude towards relativistic physics.[6]

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[5] In Sartre's words: "The disagreeable tension becomes, in its turn, a motive for seeing another quality in those grapes: their being 'too green', which will resolve the conflict and put an end to the tension. Only, I cannot confer this quality upon the grapes chemically. [...] I confer the required quality upon the grapes magically [that is, through emotion]" (1939, 65-6).

[6] Admittedly, the emotion involved here may not be any of the "familiar emotions" that we encounter in everyday life but it is nonetheless something (as van Fraassen writes, "some analogue of" emotion (2002, 151))

Of course, saying that emotion brings about a change in attitude does not explain how or why this emotion is brought about or what kind of situations precedes such a change; it is a causal story at best (van Fraassen, 2002, 109). But what van Fraassen has shown us (and what is important for our purposes) is that his voluntarist epistemology can accommodate talk of emotion, personal volition, and individual choice, and that this is done in a way that partly addresses the issue of scientific and conceptual revolutions.

By now we should have some understanding of van Fraassen's voluntarist position in empiricist epistemology and in philosophy as a whole. For van Fraassen, committing to a particular philosophical position (metaphysical realism, empiricism, materialism) is more than just a factual matter: also involved are various values, attitudes, and non-factual commitments that characterise each particular stance. Against this background, van Fraassen seeks to develop his chosen philosophical position, the empirical stance. In doing so, he incorporates themes from pragmatism (James) and existentialism (Sartre) to tell a story of who we are, as individuals and as a community, engaged in the pursuit of knowledge. This story is distinct from the objectifying tradition in epistemology since voluntarist epistemology defines epistemic success in terms of aims - aims which reflect our epistemic values, attitudes, commitments, emotions, individual and collective needs, and so forth - rather than factual or theoretical correspondence. With van Fraassen's permissive rationality there are many equally rational epistemic paths to choose. The presence of individual volition in his epistemology thus gives us the freedom to express ourselves through our epistemic and philosophical choices.

Two issues arise at this point. The first concerns the very possibility of values and choice in philosophy (issues with voluntarism itself) and the second concerns the consequences of accommodating values and choice in philosophy (issues with subjectivism and relativism). We shall address briefly the voluntarist issue before moving on to what will be the main focus of our discussion: the spectres of subjectivism and relativism in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology.

1.3) General issues with voluntarism in philosophy (epistemology)

Bernard Williams raises the issue of belief voluntarism in his (1973) 'Deciding at Will'. Since beliefs aim at things like truth or accuracy, Williams points out, we cannot simply or coherently believe whatever we choose. Rather, we believe something - say, we believe that *p* - because we have an epistemic reason of some kind that is connected to the truth of *p* (the likelihood of *p* being true).

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that plays a transformative role akin to that which emotion plays in Sartre's theory (van Fraassen, 2002, 107). We might note, however, that some (McMullin (2007)) criticise van Fraassen's emotional characterisation of revolutions and revolutionary change.

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That is, I believe that it will rain tomorrow because the barometer shows a particular reading (something epistemic or evidential) and not because I like the sound of rain (something non-epistemic). On van Fraassen's voluntarist account, however, part of why we believe something is because of our particular values and attitudes and this is a non-epistemic matter.

As a first response, van Fraassen draws a distinction between belief and acceptance familiar from his philosophy of science. He writes:

> There are many reasons to accept a good theory if only because a good theory has many uses and is valuable in many ways. [...] Many of these legitimate reasons for acceptance fall outside the reasons for belief, in that they do not make it more likely that the theory as a whole is 'tracking the truth'. (van Fraassen, 2002, 89-90).

Here it seems that van Fraassen, at least in the case of science, isn't talking about out-and-out belief so much as acceptance, in which case the issue of Williams' belief voluntarism does not arise. However, whether this is a good response depends in large part upon van Fraassen's philosophy of science, his so-called constructive empiricism and the cogency thereof.

Whatever the merits of that response, there is a more straightforward answer to this objection. That is, van Fraassen's voluntarism is at the level of *stances* rather than beliefs and, while it is true that we might adopt or accept a particular epistemic or philosophical stance partly for non-epistemic reasons (reasons involving our commitments, attitude, values, and so forth), our chosen stance will nonetheless provide us with *epistemic* standards for forming and maintaining our beliefs. Thus again, the issue of Williams' belief-voluntarism does not arise, at least not directly.

However, this may only delay rather than respond to Williams' objection. Empiricism is still concerned with matters of knowledge and inquiry. In this way, it is an *epistemic* stance, yet it seems that it is adopted for non-epistemic reasons (because it best expresses our values and attitudes). For Baumann (2011), while we might admit to non-epistemic or pragmatic motivations behind our stance choice, epistemic reasons are also necessary. This is because epistemic stances "have an essential relation to epistemic projects and activities and therefore also to epistemic reasons" (2011, 33). As Baumann understands van Fraassen's voluntarist position, however, we might adopt a stance "for non-epistemic reasons, perhaps even for no reasons whatsoever" (2011, 28-9). This is problematic if our chosen stance is an epistemic stance:

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> [...] it is very hard if not impossible to see how a person could coherently think of her project and her stance as epistemic [...] while at the same time acknowledging that she has no epistemic reasons in favour of her stance (2011, 31).

Understood in this way, stance voluntarism seems to be "deeply irrational" in that we can adopt a stance for non-epistemic reasons but with an epistemic goal or project in mind (Baumann, 2011, 30).

As van Fraassen acknowledges, it is of course irrational ("pragmatically inconsistent") to believe or endorse something with "no good or adequate reason for it" (2011, 162-3). That said, any justification, good *or* bad, that we give for our beliefs risks underdetermination by the evidence available. There is a gap between evidence and belief such that, as van Fraassen writes, "the total evidence we have does not force our current opinion or belief upon us" (2011, 163). How does this respond to Baumann's worry? Well, it shows us that van Fraassen agrees with Baumann overall: that it *is* irrational to believe something for no good or inclining reason, where a good reason is one that speaks (at least in part) to the likelihood of our belief being true.

What does this leave van Fraassen's voluntarism? Well, as the problem of underdetermination shows us, even our best reasons will include non-epistemic things (values, attitudes) and, as such, cannot be not rationally compelling. This is van Fraassen's permissive rationality: we may believe that *p* or we may not, and different people, with different values and commitments, may believe or may not believe that *p* for reasons different from our own. As this suggests, what counts as a good reason is a contextual matter. Van Fraassen's stance voluntarism is simply an acknowledgement of this. As he explains with reference to his chosen stance of empiricism:

> If I acknowledge that what I can thus offer you will not be rationally compelling for you - not rationally compel you to become an empiricist, though it will make empiricism look more attractive to you than it may have seemed theretofore - without impugning your rationality or my own, then - as I understand the term - I am a voluntarist with respect to this empirical stance (2011, 163-4).

For Baumann, though, a good reason seems to be one that would move any rational believer in any context. This is what van Fraassen would call a Prussian view of rationality: rationality as something that dictates a single path that we as rational beings must follow. This view of rationality, however, belongs in the tradition of objectifying epistemology. By contrast, van Fraassen's permissive rationality allows us many paths, each equally rational. In this way, voluntarism allows people to recognise different things as reasons without impugning their rationality.

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Van Fraassen's voluntarism is one level up from simply 'believing at will'; it is believing for reasons that are rational but that are not necessarily shared by nor compelling of all rational believers.

In his response to Williams and Baumann, van Fraassen thus defends his voluntarism as a coherent philosophical position. We shall now consider the implications of voluntarism in philosophy; namely, the issue of subjectivism and relativism.

1.4) Subjectivism issues and van Fraassen

As we have seen, van Fraassen's voluntarist account is a move away from objectivity (or rather, a certain common understanding thereof). On his account, things like philosophical positions, scientific theories, and claims to knowledge reflect non-factual (non-objective) things like values, attitudes, and commitments. This is a concern if we want to defend or critique these things, since on van Fraassen's account of reason-giving, the reasons that we have for our beliefs (or for our stance or theory choice) extend beyond merely factual claims to reflect our values and commitments. How then can we discuss our reasons with others? Van Fraassen addresses this in *The Empirical Stance*:

> Since the differing stances also involve value judgments and attitudes towards life, love, and laughter, their basis may be thought to be purely subjective, merely subjective, and not susceptible to rational debate. But if that is indeed what is behind it [the concern] then I cannot really take it seriously. [...] On the one hand, we know very well how to defeat the simplistic philosophies that make values just a matter of subjective preference, dismissably relative. On the other, we too are members of a highly politicized open society in which ethical and ideological differences are precisely what are most up for debate. We need not look far to see that rational discourse is possible on matters that touch our values, attitudes, and commitments. So I'd just like to say: look around you, take part, welcome to the real world! (2002, 63)

As this extract indicates, for van Fraassen the presence of values need not stifle the possibility for rational and meaningful discussion. Indeed, as we saw in van Fraassen’s response to Baumann, reasons are contextual – value-based or otherwise – and as such dialogue can proceed without recourse to the sort of reasons imagined in objectifying epistemology. Still it is unclear whether such value-based discourse is truly possible in the "real world" and if it is, whether it is appropriate or desirable when it comes to philosophy, science and scientific theories, or claims to knowledge.

As van Fraassen writes, "rational discourse is possible on matters that touch our values, attitudes, and commitments" (2002, 63). However, simply saying that such discourse - rational or otherwise - is

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possible does not mean that it is probable or even feasible in the real world. This is especially clear if we consider societies that are not as "highly politicized and open" as our own; societies in which, say, discussion is not valued and things like equality and tolerance are not virtues. Within these societies, it seems more likely that value-based disagreement will be met with dismissal, stone-walling, or worse, rather than conversation and debate. A similar outcome seems likely should we, as members of a "politicized and open" society, attempt to engage with such a society. This is partly because, as Dien Ho writes, value conflicts "are typically thought of as being potentially unresolvable" (2007, 327). He continues:

> [...] resolutions of value disagreements are often accomplished by pointing out logical inconsistencies within one's opponent's web of value commitments. Indeed, we usually come to the resolution only because we share certain fundamental value commitments (e.g. procedural justice, aversion to pain, the prima facie value of human life, etc.). If, as it is logically possible, one comes across an individual whose web of value commitments is internally coherent, it does not appear possible that we can change his view via rational discourse (2007, 328).

As Ho seems to be saying, we usually solve value-based disputes through some kind of *reductio* move - showing our opponent that their view is logically inconsistent or leads to consequences that both of us find undesirable. This kind of argument, however, depends on a background of shared value commitments. Without such a background, resolution seems unlikely. As such, van Fraassen's confidence in the possibility of rational, value-based discourse concerning our values, attitudes, and commitments needs further justification.

This aside, even if such discourse were possible, it is not clear that it would be appropriate for the disciplines of philosophy or science or for matters relating to knowledge. As Ho sees it, when it comes to real-world value disagreements, "[...] we often employ means to change one another's minds that are philosophically speaking impermissible. We can bribe, confuse, seduce, threaten, and beg our opponents into changing their value commitments" (2007, 330). And in as much as van Fraassen is advocating a portrayal of philosophy (philosophy as stance) that makes philosophical discussion value-based rather than fact-based, then for Ho at least, he seems to be suggesting that bribery, seduction, threats, and confusion tactics find a place in the discipline of philosophy. This is a difficult suggestion to accept.

Anja Jauernig expresses a similar sentiment. She writes: "[...] standing proudly by one's own values, or even showing disdain for the differing values of others, doesn't amount to a philosophical

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critique" (2007, 307). This is because for Jauernig, while some values (such as the value of truth over falsehood, or the value of discussion itself) are inevitably present in philosophical debates, philosophical critique is possible "only with regard to matters concerning which mistakes are possible" and as she understands van Fraassen's value-talk, "there are no possible mistakes with regard to values" (2007, 307).[7] She concludes:

> [...] if [van Fraassen] indeed wants to say that expressing disdain for one's philosophical opponents is appropriate in a philosophical debate, and should be counted as a philosophical critique, we might want to put a question mark behind the relevance and general appeal of his project (2007, 308).

For Jauernig, then, van Fraassen's conception of philosophy is simply undesirable. We can imagine similar concerns about the presence of values in scientific and epistemic claims. If I openly reject a scientific theory because it does not express my values, or if I defend an epistemic claim on the basis of its pragmatic merit alone, it is unlikely that others - scientists, fellow inquirers - will take me seriously in this.

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The points raised by Ho and Jauernig rely on a particular distinction and a particular understanding of values, both of which van Fraassen dismisses. That is, Jauernig and Ho seem to assume a fact-value distinction that makes fact-based discussion resolvable and value-based discussion unresolvable whereas for van Fraassen, "reason to despair in one case would be reason to despair in the other [...]. A debilitating relativism and a shrill shouting dogmatism are the two absurd extremes in either case" (2007, 375). That is, while it is true (as Ho fears) that value-based disputes might be unresolvable, there is also the risk that *factual* disputes be unresolvable ("shrill shouting dogmatism"). Indeed, without a shared background of beliefs, it is unclear how a factual dispute would proceed. If my opponent does not share my beliefs that Fido is a dog, say, and that dogs are mammals, then it seems unlikely that I shall be able to convince him (without bribery, seduction) that Fido cannot breathe under water. As van Fraassen writes:

> We do have factual opinion and values already, we mariners at sea, confronting difficulties to be resolved now. The parallel in this respect is complete. If we have factual disagreement, we can settle that just by looking, *but only provided* our background beliefs are such that what we see settles it. If we have value disagreement, we can settle that too by just looking,

[7] Of course, Jauernig's criticism of van Fraassen - as she herself admits - might be a value judgement about "what is worthwhile in a philosophical dialogue" (2007, 307). Nonetheless, hers is a sentiment likely to be shared by others in the profession and as such has pertinence.

> *mutatis mutandis*; namely, provided our background values are such that what we see settles it (2007, 377).

More than this, Jauernig's worry especially relies on a non-cognitive understanding of values that van Fraassen himself rejects. On a non-cognitive understanding of values, values are classed as subjective things, feelings, sentiments, expressions of "personal preference" (van Fraassen, 2007, 375). For van Fraassen, however, "we can quite consistently express personal preference at odds with what we admit to be real values, or make negative value judgements about our own preferences, even while expressing a preference to maintain those very preferences" (2007, 376). Values, then, cannot be identified with expressions of personal preference. We can express the personal sentiment that, say, "charity is a bore" while still recognising charity as something valuable. That charity is good for society is a value judgement; that we might find it boring is a personal matter. There is no inconsistency here, as far as van Fraassen is concerned. The possible point of confusion on this matter is most likely that both values and personal sentiment are things that are "expressed" or attributed to individuals, unlike facts that have to be stated (as van Fraassen writes, "[...] there is no literal sense of 'express a fact'" (2007, 376)). Nonetheless, "this similarity provides no good argument for equating values, opinions, intentions, aims, and preferences" (van Fraassen, 2007, 376). The expression of values in philosophical or other dialogue, then, need not amount to an expression of disdain or personal dislike.

Still, what "looms large" for both Ho and Jauernig is the possibility that van Fraassen's position will undermine meaningful philosophical (or scientific or epistemic) debate (van Fraassen, 2007, 378). How can we debate and discuss with those from a different background? How can we turn them to our point of view? Van Fraassen is optimistic in his response:

> Well, what about showing them possibilities in the human condition they had not already apprehended? What about opening new vistas for them, about what the world is or could be like? Why this scepticism about human communication that would make it inconceivable that we can show for example metaphysicians how attractive empiricism is, just as we can show people who grew up quite differently just how attractive a life of charity and tolerance toward all can be? (2007, 378)

For van Fraassen, we do not have recourse to the kind of transcendent and objective reasons dreamed about in traditional epistemology (and, if we think otherwise, we are victims of false consciousness). What we do have, rather, is the freedom to choose who we are and who we want to be - as philosophers, as scientists, as inquirers, as individuals - and nothing, not objectivity, nor facts,

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nor truth, can take the responsibility for this choice from us. Ho is sympathetic on this point. He writes:

> Philosophy cannot tell us what to do. We, as a community of philosophers, must *decide* what to do. It is, I think, in this sense that van Fraassen is correct when he says "Welcome to the real world." In the real world, we do make decisions about a particular practice not guided by the rules of the practice but by certain extra-practice considerations (humanism, love, beauty, simplicity, pragmatic reasons, and so on) (2007, 332).

Even so, sympathy is not agreement and as it stands, it seems unlikely that philosophers (or scientists or inquirers) will readily accept van Fraassen's voluntarist position. Nonetheless we should note Ho's mention of community here. That is, it is perhaps through a sense of community and community-based values that we might best appreciate van Fraassen's position. This is my contention, at the very least. In the next chapter, we shall consider how an intersubjective understanding of values might save van Fraassen's philosophy from some of the problems raised above.

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1.5) Chapter summary

In this chapter, I first presented van Fraassen's position in *The Empirical Stance* comprising his voluntarism and voluntarist epistemology, his permissive rationality, and his stance philosophy. For the most part, van Fraassen draws up his position in opposition to what he calls "objectifying epistemology". To show the dissimilarity between van Fraassen's voluntarism and the tradition of objectifying epistemology and to clarify van Fraassen's position, I looked at the epistemic issue posed by scientific and conceptual revolutions and the points raised by Williams and Baumann against voluntarism in philosophy and epistemology.

I then turned to the focus of my dissertation: the issue of subjectivism and relativism and the possibility van Fraassen's position holds for meaningful discussion. For some (Ho, Jauernig), the presence of values in van Fraassen's position makes it difficult to see how public and shared discourse might take place within his voluntarist epistemology. For van Fraassen, however, in an "open" and "highly politicized" society such as our own, we *can* discuss and debate our values, commitments, and attitudes. This is something we do every day, especially when it comes to areas like ethics or politics. Nonetheless, as Ho and Jauernig contest, this does not mean that such value-based discussion is appropriate in fields of inquiry such as philosophy, epistemology, and science.

In response, van Fraassen points to a similarity between fact- and value-based discussion: in both cases, a shared background (of beliefs and values, respectively) is needed. This gives us the means to discuss and debate these matters meaningfully with others. As I suggest, we can understand this shared background in the context of community. In what follows, we shall explore further the role of this shared background and community in van Fraassen's *The Empirical Stance* and how to understand it.

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2.) Community, communities

In this chapter, in response to fears of subjectivism and relativism, I identify an underlying but underdeveloped appeal to the notion of community in van Fraassen's discussion of values in *The Empirical Stance*. I then seek to develop this into an intersubjective understanding of the values that, for van Fraassen, underlie our philosophical and epistemic decisions. In doing so, I turn to the semantic community of Robert B. Brandom and, for the relativist issue, to Donald Davidson's principle of charity.

2.1) Community in van Fraassen

For van Fraassen, we are an "historical community of minds" (2004, 183). We are historical beings, and our situation reflects this. As philosophers, scientists, inquirers, and individuals, we "rely and must rely on our pre-understanding, our own language, and our prior opinion as they are now and go on from there" (2002, 139). This suggests some kind of shared, pre-existing background of values and opinion, a suggestion that, as we saw in the previous chapter, van Fraassen draws on in his response to Ho about the possibility of rational value-based discourse ("If we have a value disagreement, we can settle that [...] provided our background values are such that what we see settles it" (2007, 377)). Here, the reference to "background values" further suggests that the values behind our stance and theory choices and our individual epistemic decisions are not wholly subjective but are in part reflective of our collective historical condition.

With our epistemic decisions in particular, van Fraassen is explicit in his mention of community. His Jamesian voluntarism, recall, requires a choice between conflicting epistemic aims (to gain truth and to avoid error). Deciding between these aims is a subjective matter, since whether we are brave or cautious in our epistemic pursuits is something personal. That is, how we as individuals reconcile our conflicting epistemic aims is a choice that is ours alone. Nonetheless, this individual choice is made against the background of some sort of epistemic community. Recall van Fraassen's words:

> We need to relativize, or to recognise *sensitivity to context*, in these two desires. *Part of our judgment* here [in choosing between the two aims], a very important part, derives from our opinion of what others will want from us. *We are part of an information economy*, in which certain sorts of information are much more valuable than others. This is [...] *a matter of community* (2002, 88, my emphasis).

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Here we can see that our choice ("part of our judgment here") is connected to ("sensitivity to context") the collective enterprise of knowledge, the "information economy".

This talk of us as a collective - a "historical community of minds", part of an "information economy" - suggests a notion of community in van Fraassen's writings. Importantly, if we take our values and commitments as formed against the background of some kind of shared community, then a more developed account of this community could help us to make sense of our philosophical and epistemic choices, and the values behind these choices, as more than "purely subjective, merely subjective" (the subjectivist issue). This in turn could give us a more appealing understanding of van Fraassen's position and the possibility it holds for rational discussion of our philosophical and epistemic choices, at least within the context of our own community (philosophical or greater).

Of course, we shall need more than this if we are to address the issue of dialogue *between* communities (the relativist issue). We touched on this at the close of the previous chapter, namely, the issue of "confrontation with others who do not share relevant values" (van Fraassen, 2007, 378). If a shared background of beliefs, opinion, and values is what makes discussion possible, then discussion without such a background seems *prima facie* impossible. Here, recall, van Fraassen turns to "the human condition": if we are trying to change the mind of someone from a community or background that is different from our own, we should show them "possibilities in the human condition they had not already apprehended" (2007, 378). Whether or not we accept van Fraassen's point here, what *is* important is that we acknowledge the issue of community relativism when developing his notion of community.

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When it comes to collective values and shared backgrounds, philosophers Robert Brandom and Donald Davidson each give an account that is neither subjective nor objective but rather *intersubjective*. This is promising for our purposes. Remember, what we seek is (a.) a more developed account of the shared background values and opinions, such that we can better understand our value-based choices (in philosophy, in knowledge-related matters, in science, and in general); and (b.) some sort of refuge from the worry of community relativism that arises when we consider other communities. Brandom's (2009) talk of semantic "norms" (standards or rules) and reciprocal recognition thereof is particularly fitting in relation to (a.), while Davidson's principle of charity and process of radical interpretation gives a useful approach to (b.).

In what follows, we shall first consider Brandom's reciprocal community, and how his intersubjective account of norms and rules might help us to make sense of van Fraassen's community values, before looking at Davidson's principle of charity and the issue of community relativism.

2.2) Brandom's reciprocally recognised community

In his *Reason in Philosophy* (2009) Brandom gives an evaluative[8] account of rationality. That is, as a rational being, I ought to think and act rationally (or at least, have reasons for not doing so). Similarly, if you recognise me as a rational being, you can hold me responsible to certain (rational) obligations and as such, can judge me to be "more or less rational" in my beliefs, commitments, actions, and choices (2009, 2).[9] This kind of social evaluation or recognition of rationality - your recognition and evaluation of me as a rational being and *vice versa* - forms a "certain kind of community" between us:

> Taking something to be subject to appraisals of its reasons, holding it rationally responsible, is treating it as a some*one*: as one of *us* (rational beings). This [evaluative] attitude toward others is *recognition* [...]. Adopting that attitude is acknowledging a certain kind of *community* with the one recognised (2009, 3).[10]

It is this kind of reciprocally recognised community that we shall consider as a possible development of van Fraassen's notion of community. This necessitates an appreciation of Brandom's project in its own terms.

2.2.1) Rational responsibility: all in the attitude

In as much as it can be summarised, Brandom's task is to provide a description of us as "social, normative, rational, free, self-consciously historical beings" (2009, 17). In doing so, he revisits the German Idealist tradition of Kant and Hegel, in whose respective works he reads an evaluative account of rationality.[11] Brandom's is a rich and complex project, the intricacy of which falls beyond our current scope. For our purposes, we shall limit our attention to Brandom's reading of Hegel and his Hegelian model of reciprocal recognition.

To make sense of Brandom's reciprocal recognition, we must first understand what Brandom means by "normative status" and how this is attitude-dependent. Simply, I have normative (or evaluative) status according to Brandom when I am responsible or committed to some norm or standard. As a speaking being, say, I have normative status because I am committed to certain semantic norms.

[8] Brandom refers to his as a "normative" account; here, however, the term "evaluative" is clearer.
[9] Of course, the conditional here is open to the relativist worry (how do we recognise as rational those beings from other communities).
[10] Unless otherwise stated, the emphasis is his.
[11] It should be noted that some scholars find fault with Brandom's interpretation of Kant and Hegel. These debates need not concern us. It is enough for us that Brandom is espousing an account of a reciprocally recognitive community, whether this is truly Hegelian or not.

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Likewise, scientists are committed to certain standards of explanation, and have normative status in this regard. Importantly, whether or not I commit to a certain norm depends on whether or not I *recognise* this norm. Consider a norm to keep off the grass. In order to commit to this norm, I must have an awareness (some kind of conception) of the norm or standard to which I am committing. If I do not recognise this norm - say, if I cannot read the "Keep off the Grass" sign - then I cannot commit to it and it has no effect on me. In other words, for a norm to have "binding force" on its subjects requires the awareness and subsequent commitment of these subjects (Brandom, 2009, 54). Brandom contrasts this to physical regularities and laws of nature, things which "*must* happen" (2009, 54). Take the law of gravity, for example. This law is effective with or without the awareness or compliance of its subjects, acting upon humans, dogs, tables, and oranges regardless.

Importantly, given that normative statuses require the recognition of their subjects, for Brandom they are attitude-dependent. This is because recognising a particular norm is a matter of adopting a particular attitude towards it. Without this recognitive attitude, we cannot commit to the norm. In this way, norms gain their purport from the attitudes of their subjects (Brandom, 2009, 61). Brandom traces this notion of attitude-dependence to the Enlightenment:

> This movement of thought is animated by a revolutionary new conception of the relations between normative *statuses* and the *attitudes* of the human beings who are the subjects of such statuses, the ones who commit themselves, undertake responsibilities, and exercise authority, and who acknowledge and attribute (practically take themselves and others to exhibit) those statuses. This is the idea that normative statuses are *attitude-dependent*. The idea that authority, responsibility, and commitment were not features of the non- or pre-human world (2009, 61).

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Thus, our normative commitments (statuses) are human constructs; they are not part of the natural framework of the world nor are they divinely imposed:

> They [normative statuses] did not exist until human beings started taking or treating each other *as* authoritative, responsible, committed, and so on - that is, until they started adopting normative *attitudes* toward one another. Those attitudes, and the social practices that make adopting them possible, *institute* the normative statuses [...] (Brandom, 2009, 61).

Brandom develops the attitude-dependence of our normative statuses into a model of autonomy. Since it is *my* attitude that in part institutes my normative status, there is a sense in which only I have authority over which normative status(es) I adopt. As Brandom writes:

> [...] we, as subjects, are genuinely *normatively* constrained only by rules we constrain *ourselves* by, those that we adopt and acknowledge *as* binding on us. [...] In this sense, only we can bind ourselves, in the sense that we are only *normatively* bound by the results of exercises of our freedom [...] (2009, 62).

In recognising and committing to a particular norm, then, I am exercising my freedom, my autonomy. This autonomy consists in "our *authority* to *make* ourselves *rationally responsible* by *taking* ourselves to be responsible" (Brandom, 2009, 63). We institute our normative status ("*make* ourselves *rationally responsible*") through the authoritative act of adopting a particular attitude and recognising ourselves as such ("*taking* ourselves to be responsible"). On Brandom's model of autonomy, then, "authority and responsibility are symmetric and reciprocal, [...] features of the normative subject who is at once authoritative and responsible" (2009, 63). It is this reciprocity between authority and responsibility that, as we shall see, Brandom extends to the social realm in his Hegelian model of reciprocal recognition.

2.2.2) Reciprocal recognition: authority and responsibility in the social realm

By now we should have some appreciation of Brandom's account of us as evaluative (normative) rational beings. We have seen how authority and responsibility are reciprocal across the individual subject, who is both authoritative over his normative status and responsible to the norms and commitments this status entails. Still it is not entirely clear how these norms can exert a genuine force over their subjects, since at the end of the day it is *we* - the rational subjects - who have authority over which norms we recognise and to which norms we commit ourselves. The issue, as Brandom puts it, is that "one must bind *oneself*, but one must also *bind* oneself" (2009, 64).

To make sense of norms as genuinely binding, Brandom extends the reciprocity of authority and responsibility to the social realm. He does this through his model of Hegelian reciprocal recognition:

> [...] authority and responsibility are ultimately *social* phenomena. They are the products of the *attitudes*, on the one hand, of those who *undertake* responsibility and *exercise* authority [as it was for the individual case], and on the other, of those who *hold* others responsible and *acknowledge* their authority (2009, 68).

On this model, authority and responsibility are reciprocal across not one but two or more beings (Brandom, 2009, 66-7). My commitment to a particular norm, my normative status, depends not only on *my* attitude (in that I recognise and commit to this norm) but *yours* as well: "[s]omeone becomes responsible only when others *hold* him responsible, and exercises authority only when

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others *acknowledge* that authority" (Brandom, 2009, 70). In order to institute my normative status, then, *you* must recognise me as committed to the relevant norm. Here, our respective attitudes are individually necessary but only jointly sufficient in establishing my commitment and responsibility to this norm (Brandom, 2009, 70).

Importantly, however, my individual autonomy is preserved since my normative status is still in part a matter of my individual authority and attitude. My autonomy is further respected in that it is up to me to whom I appeal for recognition of my normative status. That is, it is up to *me* - it is an exercise of *my* authority - whom I recognise as authoritative over my normative status. In Brandom's words: "[n]o one has authority over me except that which I grant by my recognitive attitudes" (2009, 71). For your recognition of my normative commitment to be effective, I must in turn recognise your recognition as authoritative.

To illustrate this process, Brandom uses the "mundane example" of chess players (2009, 70-1). Say I am an aspiring chess player. I cannot achieve the status of "good chess player" on my own, since this is not just a matter of my own attitude towards my chess-playing ability but also the attitudes of other chess players whom I recognise as "good". Whether or not I am a good chess player thus depends on whether or not my chess-playing standard is to the satisfaction of those whom I, in turn, identify as good players. For Brandom, "I must be recognised as such by those I recognise as such" (2009, 71). In this way, reciprocal recognition synthesizes a kind of community through the reciprocal attitudes of its individual members:

> My recognitive attitudes can define a virtual community, but only the reciprocal recognition by those I recognise can make me actually a member of it, accord me the status for which I have implicitly petitioned by recognising them (2009, 71).

Moreover:

> [...] the attitudes of myself and my fellows in the recognitive community, of those I recognise and who recognise me, are sufficient to institute normative statuses that are *not* subjective in the same way in which the normative attitudes that institute them are (2009, 71).

Here, community involvement makes my normative status an *intersubjective* affair, rather than a subjective one. My status as a good chess player is not subjective; it is the result of mutual recognition by a community of good chess players.

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2.2.3) Brandom in reflection

As we have seen, Brandom weaves together an historical account of rationality, autonomy, authority, responsibility, and community to arrive at an intersubjective understanding of our semantic norms and commitments.

Brandom's account of rationality is evaluative in that we can be "more or less rational": we can honour our rational commitments and responsibilities or we can shirk them. Moreover, since the rational responsibilities we undertake are partly a result of our individual attitudes, and since we alone have authority over our attitude, we have autonomy over which rational norms we commit to and which responsibilities we undertake. For these norms to be truly binding, Brandom extends this symmetrical model of responsibility and authority to the social sphere such that, for us as individuals to undertake rational responsibilities (and so gain normative status) we must be recognised as responsible by those whom we in turn recognise as authoritative on such matters. In this way, Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition synthesizes a community of rational, normative, committed beings and, in the process, gives intersubjective force to our norms, standards, and commitments, thus avoiding pure subjectivity.

2.3) Reciprocal recognition and van Fraassen's sense of community

How might Brandom's account of community help our endeavours? That is, how might his model of reciprocal recognition help us to understand further our "shared background", our "historical community of minds", such that we can make sense of value-based choices and discussion in van Fraassen's *The Empirical Stance*? Importantly for van Fraassen, individual choice is respected on Brandom's model, in that I have autonomy over which norms I recognise and to which norms I commit. Importantly for our subjectivist concerns, these individual choices are not "purely subjective, merely subjective" but must be recognised by others.

Reciprocal recognition gives us a way to think about how our "historical community of minds" comes about, and how our values and choices within this community might be socially recognised and thus, perhaps, open for public discussion. Still, there are notable differences between the respective projects of Brandom and van Fraassen. While Brandom gives us an intersubjective understanding of our norms and commitments, his primary focus is *semantic* norms whereas van Fraassen is interested in epistemic values and philosophical commitments. There is also a possible discrepancy between Brandom's talk of "norms" and van Fraassen's "values". Working through these differences will give us a fuller understanding of how Brandom's model might develop van Fraassen's position so

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as to address subjectivist concerns with both van Fraassen's stance philosophy and his voluntarist epistemology. We shall consider first the norms-values distinction.

2.3.1) Norms versus values

For Brandom, reciprocal recognition involves norms and rules rather than values. Nevertheless, as we shall see, a consideration of his chess-playing example in relation to van Fraassen's talk of values helps us to make sense of our choices, and the values behind them, as intersubjective rather than wholly subjective.

Certainly, it is not immediately apparent that Brandom's account of norms and standards is comparable to the values, attitudes, and commitments of van Fraassen's stance philosophy and voluntarist epistemology. Committing to a particular semantic standard seems quite a different matter to committing to a particular good or value (the value of charity, say, or of a certain type of explanation). Likewise playing by the rules of chess seems a different matter to stance choice in van Fraassen's philosophy: that is, playing chess involves obeying a finite number of rules and legal expressions whereas, for van Fraassen, choosing a philosophical stance is something permissive, more an act of personal expression than an exercise in rule-following.

On reflection, however, it seems that Brandom's account is indeed rich enough to accommodate both chess-like rules *and* van Fraassen's more permissive values and attitudes. This is because both kinds of commitments can be grounded in the process of reciprocal recognition. Brandom himself concludes his chess-playing example with a suggested extension to philosophy: "I must be recognised as such by those I recognise as such. (The same is true of being a good philosopher)" (2009, 71). If we can indeed broaden Brandom's account of community to include things like van Fraassen's values, attitudes, and standards, then we can use Brandom to further develop the sense of community in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology and his stance philosophy.

To illustrate this, let us consider a community of jazz musicians. Jazz is a style of music with certain recognisable characteristics such as polyrhythm and improvisation. Importantly, however, this is a fluid definition: it is not the case that every piece of music that is polyrhythmic or improvised is jazz nor is it the case that every piece of jazz displays these characteristics. (By contrast, it *is* the case that every game of chess is played by certain rules, on a certain playing-board and with a certain number of pieces, each with certain moves. Conversely, any deviation from these rules would mean that the game is no longer chess.)

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Now let's say that I want to be a part of this community of jazz musicians. On Brandom's account, recall, this is not a purely subjective matter since I cannot achieve the recognised status of jazz musician (that is, become a member of a community of jazz musicians) by *my* attitude alone (2009, 71). I must also seek recognition from whichever group I recognise as authoritative on the subject; that is, from the community of jazz musicians that I want to join. If this community recognises that I measure up to its standards - that I play in the required way and at the required level - and hence recognises me as one of its own, then I gain the status of jazz musician. The same model of reciprocal recognition of authority and responsibility applies here: I keep my autonomy in that I have authority over which group I recognise as authoritative over my status as a jazz musician, just as the group of jazz musicians exercises authority over whether or not they recognise me as such. Similarly for responsibility: I recognise, and am responsible for playing to, the standards of this jazz community, just as the community itself recognises me as responsible to its standards. Through such reciprocal recognition, a community of jazz musicians is formed. This example suggests that Brandom's model is rich enough to ground both jazz *and* chess-playing standards in the synthesized communities of jazz musicians and chess players respectively.

Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition can thus be extended to accommodate norms and standards other than those of the semantic or chess-playing variety. As such, his account might help us to make sense of the broader values, attitudes, and commitments that institute van Fraassen's "historical community of minds". Consider: as an historical community of minds, we have a certain "body of opinion", which includes certain values and attitudes (van Fraassen, 2004, 183). We might value knowledge over ignorance, say, or democracy over fascism. We might hold a particular attitude towards the scientific method, or towards human rights and equality. It is perhaps through the reciprocal recognition of these richer values and attitudes that our historical community is synthesized, thus giving us a collective of beings with common values, attitudes, commitments, opinions, beliefs, standards, and so on. Also, the intersubjective nature of these values and attitudes helps us to make sense of value-based discourse within this community, as our shared history and values provide the requisite shared background for meaningful discussion.

Within this "historical community of minds", similarly, reciprocal recognition of our richer and more selective norms and values might synthesize further communities. Over and above being members of some general and historical community, that is, we might be members of certain select communities: we could be scientists, for example, or athletes or philosophers. And within these communities, too, we find further communities. Within the scientific community, for example, there

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are molecular biologists, theoretical physicists, and organic chemists. Athletes can be triathlon runners or high-jumpers; philosophers can be epistemologists, empiricists, or applied ethicists.

Here, reciprocal recognition helps us to make sense of the interplay between stance choice and the select communities of philosophers and scientists. Choosing a particular philosophical stance, that is, involves recognising and committing to certain values and attitudes. Say I choose the empirical stance. This involves (among other things) recognising and committing to the value of empirical evidence and adopting a particular attitude of admiration concerning the scientific method. In this case, reciprocal recognition of the values and attitudes involved in my stance choice not only institutes my status as an empiricist but also serves to establish a community of empiricists. And since these empiricist values are socially recognised, we can make better sense of value-based dialogue within the empirical stance and, to an extent, within philosophy itself. On this model, we can understand stance choice and the values involved as not merely subjective things, but also as a matter of community.

2.3.2) Semantic versus epistemic

This intersubjective appreciation of our values and stance choice is useful, but how exactly might we discuss these things with fellow members of our community? Here, reflection on the semantic-epistemic distinction offers some insight.

Although Brandom is predominantly interested in semantics, his larger project (as we shall see) concerns reasoning itself. This highlights a similarity between the respective accounts of Brandom and van Fraassen and helps us to make sense of value-based discussion within a community context. In *Reason in Philosophy*, Brandom acknowledges the interdependence of meaning (semantics) and belief: "The semantic and epistemic dimensions of thought and language use are not only understood as inextricably intertwined, their common structure is the *inferential* articulation characteristic of the space of reasons" (2009, 5). When it comes to the practice of giving and asking for reasons, then, what matters more to Brandom than any semantic or epistemic distinction is the inferential structure of our reasons. For Brandom, reasons are understood in terms of inference, which itself is understood in the context of propositional content such that "what is propositionally contentful is what can stand in inferential relations" (2009, 9). Consider: the propositional content of my belief that the moon is round gives me a reason (allows me to infer) that the moon is not square. What I believe, and the reasons behind my beliefs, are both a matter of propositional contents: things that "both serve as and stand in need of reasons" (2009, 8). In Brandom's "space of reasons",

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then, there is an intimate relation between what we believe (an epistemic matter) and the meaning or content of our beliefs (a semantic matter).

Brandom's pragmatic approach to reason resonates well with van Fraassen. For van Fraassen, talk of reason is a contextual matter. In particular, what counts as a reason depends on the context of dialogue. He writes: "[...] it is part of the structure of dialogue that I am meant to present something that I can reasonably believe would count as an inclining reason for you" (2011, 163). Here it seems that both Brandom and van Fraassen are interested in the same thing: the social practice of giving and asking for reasons. Indeed, it is quite conceivable that, in the "structure of dialogue" as in the "space of reasons", what would count as an "inclining reason" for you would be something inferred from the propositional content of your existing beliefs. This helps us to understand the role of shared value and factual opinion in facilitating value-based discussion. That is, if I share a background with my conversational opponent, then I can reveal to him commitments that follow from our common background of beliefs and values. In ethical and political discourse, for example, from the shared belief that women are people, my interlocutor and I might infer from this that, if we value equality for all people, we should commit to treating women equally to men, ensuring equal employment and education opportunities and so on. This is analogous to Brandom in that, in giving reasons, I am articulating inferences from the content of my beliefs, opinion, and values.

Thus despite the semantic flavour of Brandom's project, for him the semantic and epistemic realms are interrelated and as such, his is a fitting model for our epistemic endeavours. Moreover, Brandom's dissolution of the semantic-epistemic distinction helps us to make sense of the social practice of giving and asking for reasons and how, in the context of dialogue and against a shared background, we might offer reasons for the value-based choices in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology and stance philosophy.

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<u>2.3.3) Stance choice and epistemic decisions as *expression*</u>

At this point the reader may be wondering why we would willingly choose to commit ourselves to socially recognised norms, values, standards, or attitudes in the first place. That is, why would we adopt the requisite attitudes and seek recognition from our peers to commit ourselves to certain norms and values? Why opt for such obligation? Brandom addresses this quite clearly and his response has application in van Fraassen's case.

For Brandom, we willingly commit ourselves to semantic norms, and take on evaluative responsibility, because of the "corresponding increase in positive freedom". He continues:

> The positive expressive freedom, the freedom *to* do something, […] is obtainable only by constraining oneself by the […] norms implicit in *discursive* social practices […]. Speaking a particular language requires complying with a daunting variety of norms, rules, and standards. The result of failure to comply with enough of them is unintelligibility. […] But the kind of positive freedom one gets in return for constraining oneself in these multifarious ways is distinctive and remarkable (2009, 74).

The kind of expression that Brandom is talking about here is linguistic expression. We commit ourselves to semantic and linguistic norms because we want to experience the concomitant wealth of expressive possibilities. As an English speaker, I recognise that "table" refers to tables and that the plural of "mouse" is "mice". I commit to these semantic norms because I want to be able to express intelligibly my thoughts about furniture and rodents (among other things) to others. This kind of expression is the benefit of being a speaker, of being part of a reciprocally recognised community of speakers, thus choosing to constrain ourselves by certain norms pays off with expressive power.

We find something similar happening in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology. Consider his mention of the "information economy". As inquirers, we commit to and constrain ourselves by particular epistemic norms and values because doing so allows us to participate in a knowledge-based economy. Such participation in turn increases the scope of what we might know, since we can share, collaborate, debate, and discuss with fellow inquirers. By taking part in this sort of epistemic enterprise, we can take part in something greater than ourselves: we find our place in the collective epistemic enterprise and achieve together that which is impossible alone. This is the expressive benefit that comes from choosing to constrain ourselves by the epistemic norms and values of our current knowledge economy. Science is an example in this case. Scientists commit themselves to the standards and values of their particular community: they follow a certain method and seek particular kinds of evidence and explanation. By so constraining themselves, individual scientists are able to take part in the scientific community and to collaborate with fellow scientists on large-scale projects such as the Large Hadron Collider in Europe or the Square Kilometre Array (SKA) in South Africa, Australia, and New Zealand. More often than not, collaborative projects pay off with greater epistemic yields than individual research.

Philosophy is a similar example. Constraining ourselves by philosophical values (such as the value of rational debate) allows us to contribute to the philosophical conversation and to work together with other philosophers. Stance philosophy is a microcosm of this. If I choose the empirical stance, and commit myself to empirical values and so on, I can collaborate with other empiricist philosophers on particular kinds of philosophical questions using a particular approach. Working together on a large-

scale collective project helps us, as individual philosophers, to contribute meaningfully to the discipline.

We choose to constrain ourselves by certain norms and values (semantic or epistemic) because doing so brings the possibility for meaningful debate and exchanges with others. Just as committing to the semantic norms of a community of speakers allows us to communicate and share with others, committing to the epistemic norms of a community of inquirers allows us to collectivise our knowledge and to pursue greater goals of inquiry.

Expression as *self*-expression: reflections on the jazz case

There is also a sense in which choosing to commit ourselves to certain norms and values is in part an expression of self. Consider van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology. For van Fraassen, our epistemic choices extend beyond the facts at hand: our decisions (whether we eschew all truth in the name of caution, say, or believe on the scantiest of evidence) are partly a matter of personal volition. It is in this way that, as van Fraassen writes, "[t]he element of personal decision, values and volition has entered and received a legitimate place in our epistemic life" (2002, 91).

Of course, contextual concerns still influence and regulate our choices. Our current "information economy" for example, in which "certain sorts of information are much more valuable than others", is an example of a contextual factor that might influence our epistemic lives (van Fraassen, 2002, 88). Indeed, in making any epistemic decision, we must recognise what is at stake and the value judgements involved. We must recognise, say, that in the current climate, information about interest rates and credit balances is considered more important than information about how many footsteps it takes to get to the bank. Nevertheless, while our epistemic choices might reflect the "information economy" of our current community, our decisions are still acts of will - of personal volition - and in this regard they are expressions of self that define who we *are* and *could be* as inquirers, philosophers, individuals.

Likewise in the world of jazz, self-expression plays a significant role. For this reason, our earlier jazz example highlights a further similarity between van Fraassen's voluntarism and Brandom's reciprocal recognition. Say I am a fan of Charlie Parker. I do not appreciate him merely because he plays jazz saxophone; there are lots of jazz artists who play saxophone. Rather I appreciate Parker (as opposed to, say, John Coltrane or Sonny Rollins) because of the particular way in which he expresses himself through his instrument: his individual style, the particular embouchure he employs, the timbre he achieves. I appreciate his expression - the musical *choices* he makes, so to speak. We can look at this another way: jazz artists do not make music in the way that they do *just* because this is what a

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certain community recognises as 'jazz'. Over and above this, making music - jazz in particular - involves a kind of creative emphasis or artistic release. In this way playing jazz is a form of self-expression, and it is this element of self-expression that makes, say, Parker's jazz different from Coltrane's.

But what relevance does this have to van Fraassen's voluntarism? Well, as we have seen in the jazz case, Brandom's reciprocal recognition has room for expressions of self. This is because individual autonomy is respected: as individuals, we have freedom over which attitudes we adopt and to which norms and values we commit ourselves. In as much as our self-expressive and volitional acts are attitude-dependent, then, they can be accommodated on the model of reciprocal recognition. In van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology, then, while my epistemic choices must be recognised by others, they are still in part a matter of personal volition, an expression of self. Stance choice, for example, involves a degree of self-expression. Indeed, what is it that motivates me in choosing a particular epistemic stance over others, in committing myself to one set of standards and values over others, if not (at least in part) my individual volition? I commit to, say, the empirical stance over other philosophical stances because it is in the empirical stance - in the values and attitudes of the empiricist - that I find the greatest expression of who I am and who I want to be, as a philosopher and an individual. Here, reciprocal recognition helps us to make sense of our stance choice as an act of individual self-expression that is also, at the same time, socially recognised and hence not purely subjective.

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2.3.4) Brandom and van Fraassen in reflection

Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition thus suggests an intersubjective understanding of norms and values that can accommodate van Fraassen's voluntarism while taking us away from pure subjectivity. That is, since Brandom's model respects individual autonomy, my epistemic decisions and stance choice remain a matter of will and personal volition. Importantly, however, these personal decisions and values must be recognised by the community that I, in turn, recognise as authoritative. This kind of reciprocally recognitive community gives us a dynamic and intersubjective understanding of individual choice and motivations, as well as the values and attitudes these choices reflect. Furthermore, we can extend the model of reciprocal recognition to accommodate the looser and less defined standards and values of, say, a jazz community. In this way, Brandom can account for our richer and less exact norms and values, those beyond the semantic realm.

This is important when it comes to subjectivism in van Fraassen, since it shows that Brandom's model can accommodate the values, attitudes, and commitments as well as the individual and value-

based choices in van Fraassen's stance philosophy and voluntarist epistemology. Social recognition of our values and choices, moreover, offers a development on van Fraassen's "historical community of minds" and helps us to make sense of this community as a shared background of reciprocally recognised values and opinion. Furthermore, reciprocal recognition of our richer and more select values and choices *within* this overarching and historical community synthesizes smaller, more select communities (of empiricists, for example, or molecular biologists). This multi-layered sense of community thus helps us to understand how stance choice and values can be discussed, shared with, and recognised by others in our community.

2.4) The relativist issue: enter Davidson

> I agree that mere pointing to the possibility of dialogue between stances will not serve me sufficiently (van Fraassen, 2007, 372)

Reciprocal recognition thus offers some development on van Fraassen's "historical community of minds" by giving us recourse to socially recognised values and opinion. This adds an intersubjective element to the values, acts of personal volition, and individual choices that are present in his stance philosophy and voluntarist epistemology and in so doing, addresses subjectivist fears. Still, the question remains: how do we discuss and defend our values and choices to those who are outside our reciprocally recognitive community and thus, perhaps, do not share our background? How do we communicate across different communities?[12] These concerns are reflective of Ho's relativist fear that value disagreements between different stances or communities will result in bribery, threats, seduction, and begging rather than rational discussion (2007, 330). Recall, van Fraassen's response to such relativist fears points us to the "real world", to "showing [our interlocutors] possibilities in the human condition", "opening new vistas for them" (2007, 378). But how exactly are we to go about showing possibilities or opening vistas to those outside our community?

To this end, Donald Davidson gives us a way to think about the relativist issue and how it might be addressed in van Fraassen's "real world". As we shall see, a broadening of his principle of charity shows us how value-based discussion between different communities might proceed.

2.4.1) Radical relativism and Ho's fear

What is important for us to note, before we look at Davidson, is that Ho's fear is not one of radical community relativism or incommensurability. This is because, for Ho, we can and do acknowledge

[12] Here, "different communities" can refer to either different historical communities (communities from different historical or cultural contexts) or different select communities (of empiricists, metaphysicians, micro-biologists) within the same historical community. The issue is the same: communication.

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the rival community as a community and its language as language. In our experience, that is, we can and do recognise those communities, languages, theories, and stances that are different from our own. As such, the issue is one of seemingly irresolvable value-based disagreement between communities rather than a case of unrecognisable forms of life, patterns of thought, or systems of language (to use Catherine Elgin's term, "unrecognisable intelligences" (1999, 92)).

2.4.2) Davidson's principle of charity

> Charity is forced upon us; whether we like it or not, if we want to understand others, we must count them right in most matters (Davidson, 1984, 197)

Davidson (1984), through his version of the principle of charity, offers a model of rational discourse that helps us to make sense of how communication between communities might proceed in van Fraassen's case. Let us first consider the principle in its original context, namely, in relation to the task of radical interpretation. Radical interpretation is the process of interpreting (the utterances of) someone or something who speaks a language that is radically different from our own. The main obstacle to this process is the interdependency of meaning and the propositional content of beliefs. As Davidson writes:

> A speaker who holds a sentence to be true on an occasion does so in part because of what he means, or would mean, by an utterance of that sentence, and in part because of what he believes. If all we have to go on is the fact of an honest utterance, we cannot infer the belief without knowing the meaning, and have no chance of inferring the meaning without the belief (1984, 142).

Here, the radical interpreter is trying to solve for two interrelated unknowns: meaning and belief (belief-content), on the basis of behavioural evidence alone; that is, on whether or not the speaker seems to "hold true" a particular sentence or utterance. Say we are in the process of interpreting a being called Alice. Without additional insight into either what she believes (the content of her beliefs) or the meaning of her utterances, we cannot move from a behavioural observation of what Alice seems to hold true to a claim about what she believes or what her utterances mean. Perhaps Alice holds true the utterance 'Il y a un vélo' when there is a bicycle in her vicinity. The interdependence here prevents us from taking this as evidence that Alice believes that there is a bicycle around. This is because, in order to ascribe this bicycle-related belief to Alice, we would need to know what her utterance means, and in order to know what her utterance means, it seems that we would need to know what she believes. Indeed, the same utterance and the same behaviour are consistent with Alice believing that there is a bicycle seat around, or a set of bicycle wheels, or a

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fourth dimensional time-slice of a bicycle. Because of the interdependence of these two unknowns, meaning and belief, we have no way to interpret Alice.

The principle of charity, however, infiltrates the circle of meaning and belief by "holding belief constant as far as possible while solving for meaning" (Davidson, 1984, 137). In other words, the principle lets us interpret some being as having beliefs that accord with our own, thus allowing us to make optimal sense of its utterances and behaviour. In our example, then, by applying the principle of charity, we ascribe to Alice those beliefs that we ourselves would have, were we in her position.[13] In effect this breaks the interdependence of meaning and belief, and thus allows us to charitably interpret the utterances of Alice.

Our application of the principle is justified since, as Davidson writes, "disagreement and agreement alike are intelligible only against a background of massive agreement" (1984, 137). This shows us that the term 'principle of *charity*' is misleading: while our interpretation of Alice is a charitable one, our application of the principle itself is not. That is, it is not for the sake of charity and kindness that we assume Alice to share our beliefs; this assumption is necessary if we are to find her at all intelligible. That is, if we cannot find a way to interpret Alice's bicycle-talk as largely true (say, for example, she describes bicycles as friendly flying creatures), then we have no grounds for thinking that she is rational or that her bicycle-related beliefs are true:

> The methodological advice to interpret in a way that optimizes agreement should not be conceived as resting on a charitable assumption about human intelligence that might turn out to be false. If we cannot find a way to interpret the utterances and other behaviour of a creature as revealing a set of beliefs largely consistent and true by our own standards, we have no reason to count that creature as rational, as having beliefs, or as saying anything (Davidson, 1984, 137).

For Davidson, then, it is through application of the principle of charity that radical interpretation (and hence, rational discourse) is possible.

2.4.3) Broadening the principle: beliefs and values

For Davidson, applying the principle of charity involves assuming a background of shared *beliefs*, against which interpretation and communication is possible. The empirical underpinning here is that

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[13] Note that, since the principle operates as a holistic constraint, and since we ascribe to Alice only those beliefs that *we* (as fallible human beings) would have if we were in her situation, there is enough room for error on both Alice's part and our own.

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we, as rational human beings, share a "vast amount of agreement on plain matters" (Davidson, 1984, 153). For our purposes, we might extend this agreement to include not just beliefs but also values and commitments. Broadening the principle of charity in this way opens the possibility for value-based communication and discussion.

Consider: if I am trying to interpret, say, Alice's utterances, and her utterances include evaluative terms, then I need a broader sense of the principle of charity. That is, to perform fully my interpretative task, I need to assume a common background of shared beliefs *and* values. This makes sense in the context of shared, (human) physiological agreement. As humans, for example, we have common mammalian needs (for food, sleep, and shelter), aversions (to physical pain or discomfort) and desires (for companionship or security). These commonalities might beget certain shared values: say, we might value things that satisfy our basic needs or that fulfil our desires.

This is one way in which we can make sense of van Fraassen's mention of "human communication" (2007, 378). Discussion between *homo sapiens*, value-based or otherwise, takes place against this background of widespread human agreement, comprising shared beliefs, values, commitments, needs, desires, and so forth. Such a common background gives us a means to discuss and further debate our value-based differences *without* resorting to bribery, seduction, and other such measures. That is, rather than bribe or threaten my opponent, I might show her how my stance or my community better fulfils our shared desire for, say, equality or better expresses our shared value of tolerance or peace. Broadening the principle of charity in this way helps us to elaborate van Fraassen's reference to "human communication" and, moreover, his talk of "showing [...] possibilities in the human condition" (2007, 378).

<u>2.4.4) Opening new vistas: ambiguity and the principle of charity</u>

Davidson's principle of charity, then, promotes a sense of commonality that allows us to interpret and communicate with those outside our own community. Elgin (1999) further shows how application of the principle might foster communication. Her suggestion, as we shall see, also finds expression in van Fraassen's account.

To complete the interpretative task, we must charitably assume agreement between us and the rival community; that is, we must apply the principle of charity. As Elgin suggests, this involves "construing seemingly shared terms as ambiguous" (1999, 90). Consider the case of Newtonian physics and the relativistic revolution. Einstein's theories of relativity brought about massive changes in our understanding of space, mass, and time. How might a relativistic physicist reconcile his new theory with the classical viewpoint? How might he interpret Newtonian physics as compatible with

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his own? Simply, he would apply the principle of charity: he would assume agreement between himself and the Newtonian physicist. For Elgin, this assumption, reconciling these two views, amounts to a charitable construal of common terms as ambiguous. To use her (1999) example: from his view, the relativistic physicist can recognise that the term 'mass' is ambiguous. While it appears in both relativity theory and classical physics, 'mass' has different meanings in each. In relativity theory, 'mass' refers to something variable; in classical physics, it usually refers to something constant (Elgin, 1999, 90). If we employ a richer scientific vocabulary that distinguishes between proper or rest mass (which is constant) and inertial mass (which is not), we can interpret classical theory from the relativistic viewpoint. That is, we can recognise that 'mass' in classical physics is ambiguous between proper mass and inertial mass whereas in relativity theory, mass refers just to inertial mass. Once this and other ambiguities are acknowledged, the apparent incommensurability between the two theories falls away, opening the possibility for communication (Elgin, 1999, 90).

In *The Empirical Stance*, van Fraassen recognises a similar role for ambiguity (which he calls "our redeeming weakness" (2002, 145)) in reconciling rival stances or communities. The same case of classical Newtonian and relativistic physics, for van Fraassen, "shows that at least the most precise language about nature that we have, devised by the most precise of physical scientists, can harbour hidden ambiguities" (2002, 114). The same could be said of philosophical and "real world" discourse. Hence, acknowledging and resolving possible ambiguities in the case of our disagreements, value-based or otherwise, might help us in assuming agreement with our rivals and thus enable us to communicate rationally with one another, rather than turning to bribery and other tactics. Consider a stalemate between, say, a vegetarian and a non-vegetarian. Applying the principle of charity, we might assume that each values life and the absence of pain. Upon reflection, however, we might recognise ambiguities in their respective use of these terms. The vegetarian, that is, might take 'life' as any sentient life, and 'pain' as most forms of animalian pain. The non-vegetarian, by contrast, might understand 'life' as human life, or life with a certain level of sapience. The term 'pain' he might understand as solely human pain or perhaps unnecessary pain, where unnecessary is defined in relation to human necessity. Recognising these ambiguities in the face of a stalemate, more so than not, opens the gate for further discussion and debate and, possibly, resolution.

As this suggests, identifying and resolving ambiguity is one way in which we might understand van Fraassen when he suggests "opening new vistas" for our conversational opponents, "about what the world is or could be like" (2007, 378). That is, the role of ambiguity here shows us that, just as our scientific vocabulary (terms like 'mass', as we saw) is compatible with many different scientific

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theories, the same vocabulary in philosophy or in the "real world", the same way of talking, can be compatible with many different ways of life.

2.4.5) Davidson and van Fraassen in reflection

In reflection, our discussion of Davidson and the principle of charity consisted of two parts. First, as we saw, the principle of charity grants us the assumption of commonality, of shared human agreement, between us and those outside our community. Importantly, by broadening the principle of charity, we can extend this agreement to the include not only shared beliefs but also shared *values*. Secondly, applying the principle of charity (that is, making sense of this agreement) is a matter of resolving ambiguity in our shared terms, including shared evaluative terms. In van Fraassen's language, we can understand this in terms of "human communication", as "opening new vistas", "showing [...] possibilities in the human condition" (2007, 378). This broad understanding of Davidson, together with Elgin's suggested role for ambiguity, thus helps us to make sense of van Fraassen's response to Ho's relativist fears and, moreover, his optimism over the possibility of value-based discussion.

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2.5) Chapter summary

Our aim in this chapter was to offer a possible response to subjectivist and relativist concerns with van Fraassen's stance philosophy and voluntarist epistemology. In this regard, we looked at van Fraassen's reference to community (his "historical community of minds" and knowledge economy) and sought to develop this using the work of Brandom and Davidson.

To address the subjectivism issue, we looked at Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition. This gave us a description of how our norms gain their purport through a process of mutual recognition: I recognise a particular norm, and myself as responsible to this norm, just as others recognise me as in this way responsible and I in turn recognise them as authoritative in recognising me. Reciprocal recognition in this way synthesizes a community of norm-followers. We extended Brandom's model to include things like van Fraassen's values and attitudes. Here, reciprocal recognition provides an intersubjective account of these values and attitudes, and gives us recourse to a general community of like-minded beings (van Fraassen's "historical community of minds"). Reciprocal recognition of our more select values and attitudes within this greater community, moreover, synthesizes further more select communities (e.g. of empiricists, scientists, marathon runners). This gives us an intersubjective understanding of the richer and more select values and attitudes that underlie our stance choice and epistemic decisions, and helps us to make sense of how we might discuss these choices with others within our greater community.

This left us with the issue of community relativism: how can we talk to beings from outside our own community? Davidson's radical interpretation and his principle of charity offered some insight. Davidson shows us that, if we want to interpret (and hence communicate with) those outside our community, then we must assume a shared background of agreement with them. Here, we broadened this agreement to include not only shared beliefs but also those shared values and commitments that might be common to us as humans. This gives us a way to read van Fraassen's reference to the "human condition" and "human communication" (2007, 378). Moreover, we considered the role of ambiguity in applying the principle of charity. This helps us to make sense of how we might resolve seeming disagreements by resolving hidden ambiguities in our shared terms. Our experience with scientific and conceptual revolutions is an example of this: that is, by resolving ambiguities in common terms, rival theories can be reconciled. We saw this in relation to the term 'mass' that appears in both classical Newtonian and relativistic physics. Resolving ambiguities when it comes to our shared evaluative terms, too, helps us to reconcile value-based disagreements and to "[open] new vistas", as van Fraassen suggests (2007, 378).

Still, this takes for granted that we recognise these shared terms as *terms* rather than nonsense of absurd rabble. That is to say, there is still the matter of our initial encounter with a rival community and how we arrive at the stage of radical interpretation and disambiguation: how do we come to recognise - let alone interpret or disambiguate - the seemingly absurd terms and language or another stance or community? This is the issue of scientific and conceptual revolutions and we shall explore this in the next chapter.

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3.) Resolving the absurd: an emotional transition

At the close of the previous chapter we considered Davidson's approach to the issue of community relativism. His radical interpretation and principle of charity shows us how to reconcile rival communities; however, his approach does not consider how we arrive at this stage. That is, for us to assume a shared background with someone requires us to take them seriously; it requires us to see their beliefs, values, language, community standards, and so forth as something other than absurd nonsense. Most often, this involves some kind of 'leap', a shift in perspective or a change in attitude, that prompts us to take seriously that which previously seemed absurd. For his part, van Fraassen explains this leap with reference to emotion (on Sartre's functional account), which he can accommodate within his voluntarist epistemology by virtue of his permissive rationality. Importantly for our concerns, emotion is something subjectively felt and thus, the place of emotion in van Fraassen's epistemology might renew fears of subjectivism. Nonetheless, as I hope to show in this chapter, there is some connection between community and van Fraassen's talk of emotion which might fend off the spectre of subjectivism.

In *The Empirical Stance*, van Fraassen addresses emotion and the leap to the absurd with reference to the drastic changes and shifts that typify scientific and conceptual revolutions. While this is an apt example, it does bring with it further issues (most obviously, whether there are in fact such revolutions) that muddy our consideration of the matter at hand: the role of emotion in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology, in particular the emotional leap that takes us from the nonsensical to the sensical and thus allows us to begin the process of disambiguation. For this reason, we shall consider the leap first in van Fraassen's own (revolutionary) terms and then again, in a more simplified context. We shall then consider a possible connection between emotion and community.

3.1) The dual issue

Making sense of the leap presents a dual issue. On the one hand, we have the prospective issue: how do we come to take seriously something that seems, from our current perspective, absurd nonsense? And on the other hand, we have the retrospective issue: having made the leap, how do we now (retrospectively) legitimate it - since indeed, as van Fraassen writes, "we must be able to see our present as a rationally endorsable continuation of the past" (2002, 112)? The retrospective issue, as we have already seen, is addressed in Elgin's reading of Davidson. That is, we can reconcile our

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past and present perspectives by disambiguating seemingly shared terms. Let us look at this briefly before addressing the prospective issue.

3.2) The retrospective: ambiguity

For van Fraassen, the retrospective issue of scientific and conceptual revolutions is one of recognising the post-revolutionary position as a "rationally endorsable continuation" of the prior position. This he calls the "royal succession" of science:

> [...] the posterior view brings with it a very clear understanding of the prior, now superseded theories. In this way it can grant them their proper place in the sun. Indeed, when it comes to 'royal succession' in science - the replacement of older successful theories by new rivals - the pretender to the throne must show, by its own lights, why the older theory was as successful as it was (2002, 115).

One way to show this, as Elgin proposed, is through the disambiguation of shared terms. In classical Newtonian physics, to return to our earlier example, to say that mass is relative seems absurd. In relativity theory, however, it is only *inertial* mass that is relative rather than proper mass (which is constant, as in classical physics). For the Newtonian physicist, however, the phrase 'mass is relative' seems absurd since 'mass' can mean either inertial mass *or* proper mass interchangeably (van Fraassen, 2002, 112). Once we recognise this hidden ambiguity, we can explain the observed success of Newton's laws in cases where inertial mass and proper mass happen to be equal and as such, maintain the royal succession of science.

3.3) The prospective: emotional transformation

Before this, however, we have the prospective issue. This is the issue of understanding why and how we turn from our current position (or perspective or community or worldview) to something that seems absurd by our current standards. To explain the 'why', van Fraassen turns to Sartre's theory of emotions. For the 'how', as we shall see later, he introduces the notion of an 'unfollowable rule' that shows us how to revise our position when necessary.

Let us ask: why do we turn towards the seemingly absurd? For van Fraassen, this revolutionary shift in perspective, coming to consider something which before was nonsensical to us, suggests a change in our value judgements. Think about the moments leading up to a scientific or conceptual revolution (the Kuhnian "time of crisis", as it were). Faced with growing anomalies and failing predictions, we can maintain tradition only with the help of increasing epicycles and *ad hoc*

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hypotheses. As such, we begin to question current theory, but to what end? From our current perspective and with our current value judgements, any alternatives to the status quo we cannot consider as anything but absurd or nonsensical. What is needed here is a change in our value judgements such that we can revise our *prima facie* dismissal of these alternatives. It is this change that, for van Fraassen, is best explained through the lens of emotion:

> A change that makes intelligible something that was previously unintelligible must be in important part a change in attitude. If the change is not rationally compelled by the evidence but involves also an element of choice, we must note that it is a typical role of emotion to precipitate (or even mainly consist in) such a subjective transformation (2002, 107).

Consider the conditional here. Could this change be "rationally compelled by the evidence"? Given its nature, it could not. All that the evidence might suggest is that our current theory is in its death throes. When it comes to which of the seemingly absurd alternatives we should consider (if at all), the evidence is silent. This change is not something that is evidentially or rationally compelled nor is it open to "factual or theoretical deliberation" (van Fraassen, 2002, 143). Rather, the change in value judgement involves "an element of choice" and, as such, is prompted by emotion, subjectively felt.

This transformative role of emotion was proposed by Jean-Paul Sartre in his (1939) *Sketch for a Theory of Emotions*:

> [Emotion] is a transformation of the world. When the paths before us become too difficult, or when we cannot see our way, we can no longer put up with such an exacting and difficult world. All ways are barred and nevertheless we must act. So then we try to change the world; that is, to live it as though the relations between things and their potentialities were not governed by deterministic processes but by magic. [...] The impossibility of finding a solution to the problem is apprehended objectively, as a quality of the world. This serves to motivate the new unreflective consciousness which now grasps the world differently, under a new aspect, and imposes a new behaviour [...] (1939, 63-5).

Consider (as Sartre does) Pierre Janet's example of a patient who, when asked to confess to her therapist, instead "throws a fit of nerves" (Sartre, 1939, 69). She does not want to talk but the situation demands it. Her emotional reaction resolves the tension here by changing the situation, effectively "renouncing the act [of speech] as beyond her power" (1939, 70). "Now", Sartre writes, "and for as long as she is in tears and shaking with her sobbing, all possibility of speaking is taken from her" (1939, 70). This kind of emotional transformation suggests a functional understanding of

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emotion (emotion as transformative) that van Fraassen uses to describe our experience of scientific and conceptual revolutions. When it comes to revolutions, that is, it is emotion (or "some analogue of" emotion) that transforms the situation, changing our value judgements such that the new perspective, previously unintelligible, now stands as a viable option (van Fraassen, 2002, 151).

Importantly, if we are to understand scientific and conceptual revolutions as rational, we must be able to view this transformation as rationally endorsable (van Fraassen, 2002, 140). In van Fraassen's case, this looks possible, given the permissive rationality of his voluntarist epistemology. To make sense of this (how his position rationally accommodates such emotional transformations), we shall turn to a more mundane example than scientific revolutions.

3.3.1) Emotion and epistemology

In the third and fourth lectures of *The Empirical Stance*, van Fraassen considers the role of emotion in his epistemology and how, through some kind of rationally endorsable emotional transformation, we can make rational sense of radical changes in perspective. His case-in-point is the phenomenon of scientific and conceptual revolutions and the drastic changes that are involved. This example is central to van Fraassen's book, since his is an epistemic project and explaining such revolutionary changes is a predominant epistemic concern. Nonetheless, revolutions present a complicated, if not controversial, case. As such, if we are to make sense of the place of emotion in van Fraassen's epistemology (and how it fits with his permissive rationality) we might do better to look at emotional change in a different context.

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The Jamesian example of interpersonal relationships is a possible starting point.[14] Consider friendship. Certain people that we meet in life, we feel an amicable attraction towards. Sometimes we can explain this feeling (shared tastes or hobbies, similar humour) and other times we cannot. In the latter cases especially, it is often emotion that takes us from merely knowing someone to being their friend. We can look at this another way: making friends with someone requires us to assume, before logic or fact would allow, that this person is already a friend. We smile at them, we offer to share our food, we show them compassion, we listen to their stories with care. These kindly acts are not prompted by logic or fact, since we have no evidence as such that this person is or will be our friend. (Indeed, this would be a rather strange way to think about it: 'We became friends only when the evidence showed in favour of us forming a friendship'). Becoming friends with someone is thus not a matter of fact or logical compulsion; rather it involves a leap of sorts, an emotional transition. Our preliminary acts of friendship are prompted by a subjective feeling, an emotion as it were, that

[14] See William James, 'The Will to Believe' (1896)

we just 'like' this person. It is this feeling, and the behaviour that it brings, that takes us from acquaintancehood to true friendship. As James puts the point, "The desire for a certain kind of truth here brings about that special truth's existence" (1896, 24). For our current purposes, 'desire' here is a subjective feeling, a Sartrean emotion that transforms the situation and 'brings about' a friendship.

Of course, making friends with someone is by no means comparable to a revolutionary change in world view; nevertheless this simple case can help us to understand how van Fraassen's voluntarism and his permissive rationality can accommodate emotional changes in belief. On van Fraassen's account, recall, rationality is "but bridled irrationality" (2002, 92). For this reason, when it comes to such changes:

> [...] we can continue to view ourselves as acting reasonably - I should say, as acting in a way we can endorse to ourselves as reasonable. Changes in view are not rational because they are rationally compelled; they are rational exactly if they are rationally permitted, if they do not transgress the bounds of reason (2002, 92).

Let us consider again our example. We experience some kind of subjective feeling towards someone that prompts us to assume a kinship with them. This change in view is not rationally *compelled* since neither fact nor logic enforces our change in perspective towards this person. That is to say, someone else, with logical and reasoning faculties similar to our own, need not experience the same feelings nor make the same assumption of friendship that we do. Nevertheless, on van Fraassen's permissive account, our change in view is rational in so much as it is not *ir*rational.[15] And certainly, it is not beyond the "bounds of reason" that, upon meeting someone new, we approach them as a friend.[16]

<u>3.3.2) Imagination and understanding emotion's transformative role</u>

By now we can appreciate that van Fraassen's proposal that it is emotion that propels a change in view or perspective. We can also appreciate that such change can be accommodated on van Fraassen's permissive account of rationality. Still, it does not follow that this change or the role played by emotion is fully understood. Here, Ward Jones on imagination gives us some reflection on the transformative role of emotion.

[15] Recall that reason for van Fraassen is a contextual thing and as such the "bounds of reason" are determined by community, dialogue, or a similar intersubjective context. Of course, the "bounds of reason" may themselves change (as often happens during a revolution) but given van Fraassen's contextual understanding of reason, this change would presumably happen in a greater context than individual emotion or subjective whim.

[16] That is unless, of course, they are wielding a knife in our direction and we hold the belief that knife-waving folk do not make for good friends.

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Jones suggests that it is our imagination that evokes an emotional transformation in perspective or belief:

> Consideration of [alternative theories] involves, among other things, *imagining* the world to be a certain way. Imagining a theory to be true is a matter of 'trying it on', of temporarily taking the world to be as the theory describes it to be. An imaginer can, of course, have emotional responses to her imaginings. She can be angered or saddened by them, feel satisfied or unsettled by them, be horrified or emboldened by them (2011, 134).

So in our previous example, part of why my perception of someone changes from stranger or acquaintance to friend is that I imagine the situation as such. I 'try on' the friendship: I imagine what it might consist of or how this person might be like as a friend. In so doing, I prompt some kind of emotional reaction (happiness, perhaps, or contentment, or a desire for the situation to be realised, perhaps even disgust or revulsion).

We can think of imagination as playing a similar part in other examples of radical belief change. As Jones suggests, switching to a vegetarian lifestyle might come about through an imaginative exercise, for example, imagining how I would feel if my family dog were to be slaughtered and served as food. What I feel as a result of this imagining might be enough to change my views on the current treatment of livestock animals or the relationship between humans and other animals. Religious conversion is another example that Jones gives. Non-believers might imagine (through reading certain texts or the confessions of others) what a life imbued with religious belief could feel like and, in so doing, experience a desire to explore such a life further (Jones, 2011, 135). In the case of scientific and conceptual revolutions, too, the suggestion of imagination helps us in understanding the emotional transition. Admittedly, while it might seem unlikely that we are in any position, before the revolution, to imagine the rival paradigm - indeed how can we imagine the absurd? - we could perhaps imagine taking seriously ("come to entertain" (van Fraassen, 2002, 73)) a theory that accounts for, in however strange and absurd a way, anomalies and experiences for which our own theory cannot.

The capacity of imagination to elicit emotional changes is a possible start when it comes to making sense of these transformations and the suggested role of emotion in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology. That being said, there is still a way to go before such things are fully understood and as such this is a possible area for future work on van Fraassen's *The Empirical Stance*. For our current purposes, however, what is important is that emotion is an individual and subjective factor in van Fraassen's voluntarism. How does this relate to our earlier consideration of community? In

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addressing this question, we must consider van Fraassen's notion of an 'unfollowable rule', a rule that is based in community and serves to guide emotional changes and revision.

3.4) The prospective: the unfollowable rule

Recall that the prospective issue with scientific revolutions was understanding *why* and *how* we turn towards something that seems absurd from our current position. As we have seen, van Fraassen's Sartrean account of emotion (emotion as transformative) attends to the 'why' question: emotion (or something like it) changes our judgement of what is or is not absurd such that we can approach something that previously we found nonsensical. Now we turn to the 'how' question: having opened ourselves to 'the absurd' - so to speak - how do we then adopt or take on this new perspective? To address this, van Fraassen presents the notion of a dual-purpose but 'unfollowable' rule, the empiricist version of which he calls the *Sola experientia* rule. This rule not only shows us how to revise our current perspective but also, as we shall see, offers some intersubjective backing to emotional transitions in van Fraassen's epistemology.

Let us consider this *Sola experientia* rule. Literally, 'sola experientia' translates to 'experience alone' and this, according to van Fraassen, serves as the mantra for classical (naive) empiricism. As an epistemic rule, *Sola experientia* prescribes that "any claim to knowledge, any support for opinion, must come from experience; experience trumps all" (2002, 120). At first blush the rule seems simple enough, but following it presents a three-fold difficulty: how do we identify what 'experience' is, how do we interpret it, and what do we take from it? As it is we cannot apply the *Sola experientia* rule until these three questions have been settled yet in order to settle these questions we must first identify, interpret, and extrapolate with regards to experience (2002, 125). This is troublesome since, as the history of empiricism shows us, there are many things we might identify as 'experience' and many ways we might interpret or extrapolate from this 'experience'. Moreover, any choice between these alternatives (how we identify, interpret, or extrapolate from experience) must be based on experience, since experience trumps all. Here, however, this is an impossible request because the subject of choice is experience itself; hence, the rule is unfollowable (van Fraassen, 2002, 126).

So what use is an unfollowable rule? As it turns out, the seemingly paradoxical nature of the *Sola experientia* rule gives it a dual purpose. Its "first and most obvious role" is to "strengthen and maintain tradition" (van Fraassen, 2002, 141). That is, if we put aside for the moment the trouble of the previous paragraph, we can take for granted that we already have some kind of interpretation

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and understanding of 'experience' currently in place as a result of the empiricist tradition. This is the message in van Fraassen's mariner story:

> We must accept that, like Neurath's mariner at sea, we are historically situated. We rely and must rely on our pre-understanding, our own language, and our prior opinion as they are now and go on from there. Rationality will consist not in having a specially good starting point but in how well we criticize, amend, and update our given condition (2002, 139).

As this story shows, we have already a "pre-understanding", a "prior opinion", of how to identify and interpret experience, and what we can extrapolate from it. In its primary role, the *Sola experientia* rule serves to maintain this pre-understanding and prior opinion and to keep the status quo.

For the most part, this is enough; however, when existing understanding fails us (the Kuhnian "time of crisis") and it becomes increasingly difficult to maintain tradition, the *Sola experientia* rule switches function. In its secondary role, rather than maintain and support tradition, the *Sola experientia* serves to undermine any aspect of current understanding or theory that might be considered interpretative. Here, the rule operates in full awareness of the 'experience alone' constraint, sifting through the layers of current theory and discarding ("devaluing") anything that is interpretative or extrapolative, to arrive at a new and pure empiricism (2002, 142). This secondary role of the *Sola experientia* addresses the 'how' part of the prospective issue in that it gives us the means to revise and change our current perspective, to "peel off layer after layer, possibly leaving nothing intact in the end" (van Fraassen, 2002, 142).[17]

Let us consider this in reference to classical Newtonian physics and the rise of Einstein's theories of relativity. In the heyday of classical physics, before Newton's laws begin to show strain, the *Sola experientia* rule serves to maintain the Newtonian tradition. Around the turn of the twentieth century, however, it becomes apparent that Newtonian physics is in trouble as its calculations fail to predict accurately the movements of astronomical bodies or the behaviour of quantum-sized particles. Modern science stands in crisis. The *Sola experientia* rule now switches to its secondary revisionary function, thus providing the young Einstein with the means to critique the science of the day, in particular its adherence to absolute space and time. Indeed it is in this way that popular science texts often illustrate the downfall of classical physics, as van Fraassen demonstrates:

[17] Admittedly there might seem to be an element of false consciousness or "double-think" in the dual-purpose Sola experientia and as such, we may struggle to make sense of it as a rule at all rather than a dictum with two "quite separate" applications (2002, 142). As far as van Fraassen is concerned, however, this struggle is purely philosophical. "Happily", he writes, "it's only philosophers who take ideas to their logical extreme, and happily no one listens to philosophers when they do. In the hands of reasonable people, this dual-role is actually a great boon" (2002, 142).

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"'Newton [and his followers] did not arrive at Einstein's relativity because, enslaved by old ideas and seeing his own results with myopic eyes, he extrapolated his facts in a biased way. Einstein pointed out how Newton had gone beyond the deliverances of experience, removed Newton's metaphysical additions, and thus made way for the right theory, truly true to experience'" (2002, 141-2).

3.4.1) Emotion and the unfollowable rule

Now we have some appreciation of the two functions of the unfollowable rule (to maintain tradition and to break it down) but how do we switch from one to the other? For van Fraassen, this switch involves a change in value judgement and as we have seen, such a change is best understood "under the heading of emotion, not as factual or theoretical deliberation" (2002, 143). We can make sense of this as so: for the most part, we follow the rule as it is, based on our current interpretation of 'experience', until this interpretation begins to fail us. The tension and frustrations of struggling to maintain a defunct tradition prompt an emotional shift in the situation. Now, following the *Sola experientia* rule is a matter of revising interpretation and changing tradition. In this way, the transformative power of emotion takes us from following the rule to maintain the orthodoxy, to using it as a means to revise our current position.

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Further reflection on the connection between emotion and van Fraassen's unfollowable rule brings us to our previous theme of community and intersubjectivity. In van Fraassen's voluntarism, recall, emotion is a subjective and individual matter such that people may or may not experience emotional transitions at different times or for different reasons. What changes my worldview (and when) might be completely different to what changes yours. Someone who is a risk-taker, say, might experience a shift in perspective before a dogmatic type might. Similarly, a more trusting person might assume kinship with strangers where others would not. But how does this relate to our consideration of community? As we shall see, these subjective changes relate to community through the unfollowable rule. It is the unfollowable rule, operating in the context of community, that allows us as community members to change and revise current perspective.

In this way, the unfollowable rule might give some intersubjective backing to an otherwise subjective and personal emotional transition. Of course, the initial shift in perspective (whereby we acknowledge the dual function of the unfollowable rule) is and must be a subjective matter, but when it comes to applying the *Sola experientia* in its revisionary role, instigating "reasoned and proportionate change" within the community is an intersubjective affair. Within a community, revising current opinion and theory quite probably takes the form of intersubjective activities such as dialogue and debate. As van Fraassen writes, "[h]appily reason [reasoned change], within a

community, is a matter of politics in the broad sense of the term, of negotiation and dispute, strife and reconciliation [...]" (2002, 142-3). In some way, then, we can find a sense of community and intersubjectivity in van Fraassen's talk of emotion and emotional transition.

If we can accept the seemingly paradoxical notion of an unfollowable rule in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology, then we shall be rewarded with a rule that both maintains and (when necessary) defies tradition. This dual-purpose rule helps us to make further sense of drastic changes and revision in our perspective or worldview and also brings an element of intersubjectivity to what is otherwise an emotional and subjective transition.

3.4.2) Brandom and the unfollowable rule

Briefly we might reflect on a possible parallel between van Fraassen's unfollowable rule and our earlier discussion of Brandom and reciprocal recognition. For Brandom, recall, being a rule-follower (that is, achieving normative status) is a matter of reciprocal recognition. This two-part process weaves together an account of authority and responsibility in relation to a particular norm or rule: I am authoritative over which rule I recognise myself as responsible to, just as you are authoritative in recognising me as responsible and I am authoritative in recognising your recognition as authoritative. The symmetry of authority and responsibility here gives a sense in which we, as rule-followers, both make (authorise) and take (are responsible to) the rules we follow.

There seems a possible similarity here to the unfollowable rule. When I apply the rule in its first function, to maintain tradition, I am not explicitly recognising its interpretative element. That is, I am not explicitly recognising that I have authority (in that I can interpret the rule) in whether or not I recognise the rule in this way. However, when I apply the rule in its secondary function, to defy and revise tradition, I *do* recognise its alternative interpretations and my authority in this regard. Through my recognition, I am "*making* it the case" that these interpretations are correct, "by *taking* it to be the case that they are" (Brandom, 2009, 93). Here, I am still a rule-follower in that I am still recognising the rule as authoritative, and myself as responsible thereto. I am simply exercising my authority in recognising one interpretation of the rule rather than another as authoritative. The reciprocity of making and taking here, of authority and responsibility, gives us a dynamic understanding of rule-following.

Brandom's model thus shows how we can both make (interpret) and take a rule; that is, how we can be both authoritative over and responsible to (a particular interpretation of) a rule. This might give us a way to understand better the dual nature of van Fraassen’s unfollowable rule: that is, for the most part we 'take' the *Sola experientia* as it is and according to our current interpretation of

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'experience'. We do not consider its dual function nor the interpretative element that is present. However, when we *do* acknowledge these things - during a time of crisis - we can 'make' the rule anew, revising our current interpretation of 'experience' and hence the *Sola experientia* itself. The fluid notion of rule-following that Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition offers us thus sheds some light on how we might understand the unfollowable rule in operation.

Brandom's model is a social one, moreover. That is, to be a rule-follower I must be recognised *by others* as such. When I 'make' a rule, my authority here (my interpretation of the rule) and my 'taking' of the rule must be recognised by others if the exercise is to count for anything. I cannot simply re-interpret and apply a rule at whim; fellow community members must acknowledge my re-interpreted rule and that I am following it. (Brandom: "[s]omeone becomes responsible only when others *hold* him responsible, and exercises authority only when others *acknowledge* that authority" (2009, 70)). This suggests that further reflection on the possible connection between Brandom's reciprocal rule-following and the unfollowable rule might help us to make fuller sense of van Fraassen's account in terms of intersubjectivity and community. I leave this as a possible avenue for future work.

3.5) Chapter summary

In this chapter, we looked at drastic changes in belief or perspective. These changes pose a challenge in traditional epistemology, since they typically involve some kind of 'leap' that gives us a different perspective, a perspective that appears absurd from our current position. Van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology, however, can accommodate this leap, partly as a result of his permissive account of rationality. For van Fraassen, what is rational is what is not *ir*rational. Changes in view are thus rationally permitted provided that the new view is not irrational nor does it commit "self-sabotage", to use van Fraassen's term (2007, 354).

To explain why such changes take place, we looked at the role of emotion in van Fraassen's epistemology. Following Sartre, van Fraassen gives a functional account of emotion, whereby emotion transforms our situation such that what once seemed nonsensical now makes sense. Emotion is thus one possible way in which we might "come to entertain" a belief that we once found absurd and hence change our perspective (van Fraassen, 2002, 73).

Given that emotion and emotional transitions are subjective things, they seem to stand apart from our concerns with community and intersubjectivity. Nonetheless, we did find some connection between emotion in van Fraassen and the theme of community, in the form of the 'unfollowable rule'. In *The Empirical Stance*, van Fraassen presents the notion of a dual purpose, and hence

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'unfollowable', rule that both maintains tradition (the current perspective) and serves as a means to undermine it. As we saw, switching between the two functions of the unfollowable rule requires an emotional transition. At the same time, it is the rule in its secondary function that helps us to change and revise current perspective. That is, it is through emotion that we acknowledge the revisionary function of the unfollowable rule, however, in making the necessary revisions, we follow the rule itself rather than our emotional (and subjective) whim. More importantly, we suggested, rule-following here is in part a community matter and hence, the connection between emotion and the unfollowable rule adds an intersubjective element to van Fraassen's talk of emotions in epistemology.

We then considered van Fraassen's unfollowable rule in relation to Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition. We suggested this as a possible avenue for future work, since Brandom offers a dynamic account of rule-following that seems to have parallels to the *Sola experientia*. Specifically, the reciprocity of authority and responsibility, of 'making' and 'taking' a rule, may help us to further understand the dual function of van Fraassen's rule. The social element of Brandom's model, moreover, would lend support to our suggestion that the unfollowable rule provides an intersubjective backing to the role of emotion in van Fraassen's voluntarist epistemology.

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4.) Final reflections

As I hope to have shown, there is an underdeveloped role for community in van Fraassen's *The Empirical Stance*. Importantly, the themes of community and intersubjectivity, when read into van Fraassen's work, give us some recourse against subjectivist and relativist worries.

Van Fraassen's voluntarist position, as we saw, admits the presence of values, attitudes, and personal volition in our epistemic and philosophical lives. Our philosophical position, or "stance", is thus more than a factual thesis; it is an expression of who we are and who we want to be. For some (Ho, Jauernig), this presents an undesirable view of philosophy in that it suggests that a philosophical claim is akin to a subjective expression of personal preference (worries of subjectivism). Moreover, if our epistemic claims and choices reflect our individual values and volition, how are we to discuss these claims and choices with others who perhaps do not share our values (worries of relativism)?

To address subjectivist concerns, we looked at Brandom's model of reciprocal recognition. Reciprocal recognition, remember, is the dynamic process of recognising and being recognised: I recognise and choose to be responsible to a particular value, just as you must recognise me as responsible to this value, and just as I must recognise your recognition as authoritative. It is in this way that I choose and commit to a particular value. Here the social reciprocity of our authority and responsibility introduces an intersubjective aspect to our values and choices. Importantly, on this model, van Fraassen's voluntarism is respected since I have authority over which values I choose to take on or be responsible to; nevertheless these values and choices, while my own, are not purely subjective since they gain some of their purport from the process of reciprocal recognition. This suggests that our otherwise subjective values and choices are in part intersubjective, thus quelling fears of subjectivism.

This brought us to the issue of community relativism and the possibility of value-based discussion: that is, how do we recognise, and hence discuss, the values and value-based choices of those outside of our reciprocally recognitive community? Conversely, how can I discuss and defend my values and choices to others, if they do not recognise or share my values as such? Davidson provided insight here. His principle of charity, especially, gives us a way to interpret others, and hence communicate with them, by assuming a shared background of widespread agreement. Extending this agreement to include not only beliefs but also things like values and commitments helps us to understand van Fraassen's optimism ("showing [...] possibilities" (2007, 378)) when it comes to debating and discussing our value-based differences. Moreover, as we saw, applying the principle of charity often

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involves recognising and resolving hidden ambiguities in shared terms, including our evaluative terms. Resolving ambiguities opens the way for further discussion and debate, as van Fraassen writes, "opening new vistas" (2007, 378). Davidson's radical interpretation and principle of charity thus help us to make sense of van Fraassen's optimism in his response to fears of community relativism and value-based disagreement.

We then considered the shift in perspective that allows us to approach a rival community as such, such that we can apply Davidson's principle. That is, at first glance, the values, standards, and methods of another community might appear absurd to us. In these cases, before we can apply the principle of charity and hence interpret and communicate with this other community, we must first be able to recognise their value judgements and beliefs as such, rather than absurd babble. As we saw, taking seriously something that seems absurd requires us to make a leap of sorts, to change our perspective or value judgements. Van Fraassen explains this change with the help of Sartre's theory of emotion, in which emotion is something transformative. For van Fraassen, then, it is through some kind of emotional change or transformation that we experience a shift in our perspective or a change in our values. Importantly for our purposes, an emotional transformation is a subjective and personal experience, and as such seems somewhat apart from our community-based concerns. Nonetheless, upon further reflection, there is some connection between the role of emotion in van Fraassen and his notion of the community-based unfollowable rule. That is, while it is emotion that first turns us towards the absurd, the process whereby we revise and change our standards and value judgements is conducted through application of the unfollowable rule, which itself operates within a community. This connection suggests a possible intersubjective element to what is otherwise a subjective and emotional experience.

As I hope to have shown, an intersubjective reading of van Fraassen's *The Empirical Stance* gives us some recourse from subjectivist and relativist concerns and in so doing, helps us to appreciate better his voluntarist project. Possible avenues for future work include further reflection on van Fraassen's unfollowable rule, particularly in relation to Brandom's social account of rule-following. This may give us further insight into the connections between emotion, community, and the unfollowable rule which, in turn, may help us to make better sense of the role of the individual within the epistemic community and his relationship to the community during times of change. Another possible (and more general) avenue is the suggested role of emotion in epistemology. Ward Jones' mention of imagination as a possible catalyst for emotional transitions is a start in this regard and further reflection may improve our understanding of the place of individual volition and choice in van Fraassen's voluntarism.

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