

Discussion

Reply to Roderick Long

Dialectics: A Reconstruction

Bryan Register

Roderick Long and Chris Sciabarra are two of the most interesting libertarians around, and we can't help but learn a lot by paying attention to any engagement between the two. I'm not sure that Long is right when he suggests that analytic philosophy and dialectical methodology complement one another. But I'm fairly confident that Long's analytic approach helps make the nature of dialectics itself clearer. Perhaps this is as it should be. Analysis as practiced by analytic philosophers excels as a *philosophical* methodology: it's quite good at helping us get clear on our concepts (like, say, *dialectics*) and the relationships between them, but it would be overambitious to start extending the method to other disciplines. There isn't and needn't be an analytic history, an analytic biology, and so forth—though there is and should be analytic philosophy of history, of biology, and so forth. By contrast, dialectics, as far as I understand Sciabarra, is not supposed to be a *philosophical* method at all. Rather, dialectics is a method intended to guide the empirical investigation of reality, especially social and historical reality. If this distinction is correct, then we can see that Sciabarra has functioned as a philosopher, while the thinkers he writes about—Hayek, Marx, Rand, Rothbard, and the panoply of dialectical libertarians he mentions in concluding *Total Freedom*—are the real practitioners of dialectics. And since the debate is, then, a philosophical one, we can expect Long's analytic 'fussings' to be quite helpful in getting clear on the nature of dialectics, even though they might not be very helpful as a complement to dialectics itself. (The other side of the coin is that Sciabarra

is off the mark when he complains that analytic philosophy is insufficiently dialectical: since analytic philosophy is not a kind of social science, it's not the sort of thing that could or should be dialectical. Likewise for his criticisms of Kant.) However, I'll suggest below that when Long's important distinctions are brought to bear, they serve to defuse some of his own criticisms of Sciabarra's work. To put the point another way, analytic philosophy, embodied in Roderick Long, brings more clarity to dialectics, embodied in Chris Sciabarra, than the latter could bring alone, but that clarity is the only thing analytic philosophy can bring. Again, perhaps this is as it should be: "Philosophy . . . leaves everything as it is."

Long's most important criticisms of Sciabarra turn on whether the latter is committed to the substantive ontological thesis of internalism. The two arguments that I'll focus on are Long's claims that Sciabarra blurs the distinctions between metaphysical and epistemological categories, and between abstraction and idealization. In both cases, I will suggest that Sciabarra is guilty of the charge and is committed to a version of internalism. However, I'll try to defuse Long's criticisms at the last moment, since I do not believe that Sciabarra's implicit internalism is mistaken. Sciabarra should just say he's an internalist—of a certain kind, which I hope will be clarified below—and be done with it.

Abstracting From Abstraction

The centerpiece of Long's discussion is his instructive set of remarks on the difference between precise and non-precise abstraction. Precise abstraction abstracts a part from the whole of which it is a part and considers that part as though it were in fact in isolation from ("in abstraction from") the whole. Non-precise abstraction abstracts a feature of a thing from the thing, and considers that feature without regard to the thing of which it is a feature. But it does not deny that it is always a feature of things and never exists apart from the things of which it is a feature. Precise abstraction is said always to falsify, while non-precise abstraction need not falsify. (If I go wrong in the following discussion, it will

probably be because of some error in my understanding of this distinction, so I'm going to spend a little time characterizing the distinction as I understand it—critics then have a place to start.)

Let me allude to an example of a precise abstraction. The whole from which this abstraction is drawn is, let's say, an historical event: the Battle of Gettysburg (which is itself abstracted from the Civil War, which is itself . . . etc). The abstraction is some historian's account of the battle. The historian abstracts from the whole—a concrete battle—an abstract model in which topographical, moral, command and control, meteorological, optical, ballistic, psychological, medical, and other facts will be mentioned. The historian then traces the relations between the various elements. For instance, she might note that two key attacks were mistimed because of a failure in command and control of a certain kind, or that another very ill-considered attack was performed because a commander had a certain kind of illness; she might note that casualty rates tended to change in a certain way when the opposing forces had certain relations to one another and to the topography of the battlefield, and so forth. This abstraction plainly falsifies in a certain sense. It ignores the overwhelming majority of the facts, and draws averages on ones it doesn't ignore. For instance, the account may state that Pickett's Charge began at a certain time, when that was only the average starting time of the front line of soldiers, who had to pause and re-align themselves in a routine way, and so forth. It would be impossible for the historian not to precisely abstract and create an abstract model of the events she seeks to understand. Were she to fail to abstract, she would simply wallow in an array of unintegrable facts.

Long argues that thinking that abstraction *in general* falsifies—because precise abstraction falsifies—is Hegelian and mistaken. But it is a mistake, he says, to think that this is the only kind of abstraction there is. There is also non-precise abstraction. Precise abstraction allows for modeling and idealization by abstracting parts of the whole to be modeled or idealized. Non-precise abstraction forms concepts. The former is said to falsify, the latter is not.

Why do I say that non-precise abstraction forms concepts? Long observes: "In Objectivist terms, the distinction can be seen as

one between measurement-*omission* and measurement-*exclusion*” (Long 2001, 409). Non-precise abstraction omits measurements, while precise abstraction excludes them (from consideration). But, since we’re sounding Objectivist, the process of concept-formation is the process of measurement-omission. So, since measurement-omission is non-precise abstraction, and is also concept-formation, non-precise abstraction is concept-formation. Note that, when Long goes over some remarks about abstraction from Rand to show that she thought that abstraction does not falsify, these deal entirely with concept-formation. This encourages us to think that non-precise abstraction is concept-formation.

Additional light might be shed here by noticing Long’s contrast between praxeological and neoclassical economic claims. Long provides a sample praxeological claim: “voluntary action always involves an exchange of what the agent wants less for what the agent wants more” (412). He provides no sample neoclassical claim, but he does explain that “neoclassical models distort and falsify reality by . . . precisely abstracting . . . from, and thus treating human beings as *lacking*, certain features (ignorance, non-monetary goals) that they actually possess” (411). Note the implicit contrast between what the praxeologist and the neoclassicist are talking about. The praxeologist is talking about voluntary action. The neoclassicist is talking about human beings. (Of course, the praxeologist happens to be talking about human beings too, because such beings happen to engage in voluntary action. But, except as a matter of psychology, you probably don’t have to know this to grasp the truth of the praxeological principle, and the principle would probably be true even if there were no human beings.) The neoclassicist seems to be trying to model actual human reality by taking a person and shearing away a number of features without which she would be quite different from what she is. The praxeologist seems to be announcing a conceptual truth. Thus the contrast: the neoclassicist is precisely abstracting that silly simplistic model *homo economicus* from the whole of a human being, while the praxeologist is non-precisely abstracting the concept *voluntary action* from those entities that have the feature of engaging in such behaviors. We are reinforced in our sense that precise

abstraction yields models, while non-precise abstraction yields concepts.

Long states: “There is nothing ‘provisional’ or approximate about non-precise abstraction; it is perfectly accurate. It may not express the whole truth, but what it does express is entirely true” (410). I don’t quite follow this remark. If non-precise abstraction forms concepts, it’s not plain how it could form things that are true or false, since concepts don’t have truth-values. Perhaps, despite the arguments in the last two paragraphs, I have mistaken Long’s characterization of non-precise abstraction, and he does not mean to say that non-precise abstraction is concept-formation. However, if non-precise abstraction could be the abstraction of parts from wholes of which they are parts, then we have lost all place for precise abstraction. The distinction would then be between, on the one hand, bad abstractions of parts from wholes (these are precise and falsify) and, on the other hand, good abstractions of parts from wholes and also of features from things of which they are features (these are non-precise and do not falsify). In this case, it’s hard to see why Hegel *et al.* claim that all abstractions falsify. If Hegel was confusing precise abstraction for all abstraction, then we understand his mistake. But if he mistook bad abstractions for all abstraction, then we don’t understand him any more; such a mistake seems unlikely.

Perhaps Long is simply trying to say that the use of concepts doesn’t necessarily mislead, or that there’s nothing cognitively questionable about their use—this seems to make the most sense, and is certainly true, so I’ll assume that’s what he meant.

On the broader point, Long is plainly correct, and the two forms of abstraction shouldn’t be run together. It’s also true that Sciabarra has not mentioned this distinction or paid explicit attention to it in his writing. But Sciabarra has only blurred the distinction in an important way if he, in practice, says things about the one kind of abstraction that are true only of the other kind.

Sciabarra writes: “Every act of abstraction requires an act of integration. Every act of differentiation requires a movement toward unity” (Sciabarra 2000, 64). He is trying to say that plucking parts out

of a whole is an incomplete process: we should abstract parts from the whole only insofar as we then relate the various parts back together within the whole. Note with what he is showing a concern: not the appropriateness of our concepts, but the appropriateness of our models or idealizations. In fact, I suspect that Sciabarra is more or less exclusively concerned with this form of abstraction. He says that *Total Freedom* "seeks to reclaim radical *social theorizing* in the name of liberty. It stresses the necessity of context, the 'totality' of systemic and dynamic connections among *social problems*" (1, emphases added). The main stress in *Ayn Rand: The Russian Radical* is laid on Rand's three-level analysis of power relations in *society*. The main question of *Marx, Hayek, and Utopia* is: do we have the epistemic power to successfully model *social* wholes?

Sciabarra cites his mentor, Bertell Ollman, who claims that "[a]n 'abstraction' is a part of the whole whose ties with the rest are not apparent; it is a part which *appears* to be a whole in itself" (cited in *MHU*, 55; emphasis original). Ollman certainly appears, in the passage from which this sentence has been abstracted, to be defining 'abstraction.' If Ollman thinks that abstraction just *is* precise abstraction, and if Sciabarra disagrees, I can't imagine that he wouldn't have told us so. Now, Ollman is mistaken if he does think 'abstraction' has just the one meaning he gives it, and Sciabarra is also mistaken if he agrees. But this error is a strictly semantic one (of just the sort analytic philosophy can help us avoid). And it's the same understandable error that Hegel apparently made. It's not plain that it leads Sciabarra astray in any important metaphysical way.

To the contrary, Sciabarra's interest is in social science and the explanation of historical events. In order to understand society and history, it's necessary to abstract parts of a society or historical events from the social or historical whole of which they are parts and then study them in relation to one another. But this is precise abstraction.

Sciabarra's Internalist Commitments

Long argues that "the doctrine that *all abstraction is falsification*

entails the doctrine that *all relations are internal*. If any account of X that leaves out its relation to Y is a partial falsification of X, then being related to Y is essential to X, and so without that relation X can neither be nor be understood" (407). I don't think that his argument establishes his stated conclusion, but it does establish the one he needs to push forward. His conclusion is that all abstraction is falsification if and only if all relations are internal. But he then discusses accounts of things. Things are abstracted in precise abstraction, not non-precise abstraction, which abstracts features of things. So the objects of non-precise abstraction are not accounted for—try accounting for redness in general (as distinct from this thing's being red). Nor can the result of a non-precise abstraction falsify, for the trivial reason I noted above. So Long's argument applies only to precise abstraction. But with respect to precise abstraction, he appears to be correct. All precise abstraction falsifies if and only if all relations are internal, for the reason he cites.

But now, what's the problem? Long is justified in raising this as an objection to Sciabarra, because the latter has sought to avoid internalist commitments. But it's not plain why he should. Sciabarra's concern is with understanding, and changing, certain social wholes. In order to grasp these wholes, he wants to precisely abstract some of their parts. He knows that doing this might lead him astray, so he seeks a methodology that will make him less likely to make mistakes. By an examination of various actual approaches to the study of social wholes, he sees that fruitful social theorizing often has the following feature: it keeps better track of the context in which the precisely abstracted social parts exist than does inferior theorizing. On this evidence, he produces a bold hypothesis: fruitful social theorizing is more fruitful *because* it is more context-oriented. Now why should that be the case? One plausible reason is a further bold hypothesis: that components of the context in which a social entity (an individual, group, or institution) exists are highly determinative of its behavior across time; that is, that relations to other social entities within the social whole have sufficient explanatory power with respect to the entity's behavior to be essential to that entity.

On this view, Sciabarra is motivated to accept internalism and

dialectics because he thinks that social entities really do behave the way they do because of their contexts, and his evidence is that the best theories are the most contextualist. Now, this little story has been fanciful—I really don't know why Sciabarra was attracted to dialectics—but if it were true, it would explain why he makes the commitments he does. (Either way, it justifies *our* making them.)

And he certainly does make them. Long charitably put away the strongest weapon in his accusatory arsenal, which is Sciabarra's *definition of methodological orientation* (!):

A methodological orientation (or research orientation) is an intellectual disposition to apply a specific set of broad ontological and epistemological presuppositions about objects of study and their typical relationships to particular fields of investigation (Sciabarra 2000, 143; underlined emphasis added)

There's no escaping the implication that a dialectician will *expect* the social world to be populated by things whose systemic and dynamic relations will be internal to them, and that expectation is a social-ontological commitment to internalism. (Social-ontological commitments are not to be confused with social metaphysical commitments.)

This commitment happens to be a commitment to something true, or at least plausible. So why does Sciabarra shy away from it? "Internalism and externalism are highly problematic concepts insofar as they remain connected to *cosmological speculations about the ultimate constituents of the universe*" (182; emphasis added). Sciabarra is considering internalism and externalism—with their associated methodological programs of organicism and atomism—as cosmological schemes. But unless dialectics was supposed to guide astrophysicists, this contrast between dialectics and organicism/atomism is not relevant. The relevant contrast is between dialectics and organicism/atomism as methodological orientations intended to guide the empirical investigation of social and historical reality.

Sciabarra continues to say: "As long as a context is defined, I have no problem with using the relational concepts 'internal' and 'external.' Nevertheless, it is perfectly acceptable and in some

respects desirable to substitute other concepts for internalism, given its connections with the strict organicist framework" (183 n. 83). What Sciabarra is worried about is the attempt to regard any relation as either internal or external outside of a context in which the relation has that status. Internalism and externalism fail to specify such contexts; both views propose that relations are intrinsically internal or external. But Sciabarra's proposal is that relations can acquire either status only in relation to the explanatory context of a knower. Some knower, then, is internal to each instance of internality or externality.

In fact, neither internalism nor externalism should have any use for the notions of internality, externality, or essentiality of relations. This is because they each treat all relations as having the same status with respect to all three features. For internalism, all relations are equally internal and essential—but that's the same as saying that all relations are equally external and inessential, which is what externalism would say.

One of the virtues, I think, of Rand's theory of concept-formation is that it requires there to be a contrast object to any category, the members of which one seeks to integrate. Without a contrast object, the members of a category do not appear to be similar to one another, because similarity is just a level of perceived difference. Two objects are similar to one another if and only if they appear to some subject to be less different from one another than they do from some contrast object. Thus, similarity can exist only in the context both of a knower and of a contrast object.

But internalism and externalism both deny the existence of the contrast object for the traits of internality and externality. Internalists deny the existence of external relations, but this also denies the existence of a relation that can serve as contrast in the formation of the concept of internality. To deny the existence of such a contrast is to deny the similarity between the various internal relations, because similarity is always contrastive with difference. Hence, internalists end up denying the existence of anything different. So if we are to make sense of the notion of internality, we must admit at the outset that some relations will be external ones.

Now, if some relations are internal and some are external, how do we decide which ones are which? Well, one way is to use a special feature of internal relations. Internal relations are essential to the relata to which they are internal. For a relation to be internal to an entity is for that relation to be essential to that entity, so that the entity cannot exist without the relationship obtaining and cannot be understood by anyone who doesn't know about the relationship. For Sciabarra's Rand,

An essential characteristic is one on which the greatest number of other characteristics depends. It is a fundamental without which the other characteristics would not be possible. This is Rand's bow to those who would view relations in ontological terms. But since a synoptic vantage point is impossible, our identification of a defining characteristic must be related to the state of our knowledge. Epistemologically, a fundamental characteristic is "one that explains the greatest numbers of others." Hence, our grasp of relations is always a *contextual* activity because our distinctions between what is "essential" and what is "nonessential"—roughly equivalent to what is internal and external to our investigation—"may be altered with the growth of man's knowledge." (138)

One problem with this Randian approach is the narrowness of its applicability. Rand's approach to definition is only applicable to concepts of entities, concepts that 'go with' nouns. This is because the defining trait of a class of things is that trait, possessed by all of the things in the class, which explains (to us) the most other characteristics of the things possessing that trait. But what if we were looking for the definition of a word (or, as Rand would say, a concept) that is not a noun? We can hardly look for that trait of all rednesses that explains the most other traits of those rednesses (though we can look for that trait of all red things that explains why they're red).

However, Sciabarra is concerned with social entities, so we'll let

this objection to Rand's approach lapse. The claim of Sciabarra's Rand, then, is that the feature(s), and especially relation(s), of a social entity that has (have) the most explanatory power is relative to the cognitive context of a knower. As knowledge advances, more powerful theories will be proposed, theories that select different traits of things as their most explanatorily powerful traits. As we become aware of these more causally powerful traits, we redefine the term referring to the bearers of those traits. Essences change because essentiality is bound up in explanatory power, and the explanatory power of the explanans exists only in relation to a theory that relates the explanans explanatorily to its explanandum. Specifically, in defense of dialectics, Sciabarra will claim that some relations are essential.

However, the Randian theory to which Sciabarra is appealing is one-dimensional with respect to the differences it allows. Rand allows essences to change across time in accordance with their explanatory value: as knowledge progresses, essentiality shifts from one trait to another. But different theories can be designed to meet different purposes. This is important when we come to another of Long's criticisms of Sciabarra: that the latter has ignored the difference between quidditative and modal essences.

Kinds of Essence

Long (2001, 421) explains:

An entity's quidditative essence is what the entity most fundamentally and distinctively is; it is what explains and integrates the greatest number of the entity's properties. An entity's modal essence, by contrast, is the set of all those properties the loss of which the entity could not survive.

Long accepts that Rand's view relativizes essence, but he suggests that she, like other Aristotelians, only relativizes quidditative essence, not modal essence.

Note that essences are said by Long to be essences of entities.

But the essences that interest Rand are traits the possession of which by things qualifies the things as members of given categories. Essentiality does not go with entities but with categories; Rand says that “[a] definition must identify the *nature* of the units, i.e., the *essential* characteristics without which the units would not be the *kind* of existents they are” (Rand 1990, 55; final emphasis added). An essential trait isn’t essential just to a thing on its own; it is essential for that thing’s membership in a category. For Rand, an essential trait is a defining trait, and you’re a member of a category if and only if you possess the essential trait of that category.

I’m sure that Long is right that Rand is interested in quidditative essences. Rand is therefore interested in that trait, mandatory for membership in a category, that explains the most other traits of members of that category. Quidditative essence hasn’t got much to do with entities, but modal essence does. For Long, a modal essence is a property the possession of which is a prerequisite for a thing’s continuing to exist. If you lose your modally essential property, you cease to be. So quidditative essences are essential for being members of categories, while modal essences are essential for being.

Rand says that what exists are entities, and Long (2001, 422–23) appeals to this when he critiques Sciabarra for thinking that his approach is Randian:

Sciabarra seems to be saying that which relations are essential to X’s *existence* [are] relative to our epistemic context—which suggests that one and the same object will count from one perspective as having survived, and from another perspective as having perished. If Sciabarra takes this to be a Randian solution, he is surely mistaken, since such a solution is incompatible with a metaphysics of entities.

Rand surely has a metaphysics of entities, as Long suggests. She seems to regard entities as being entities intrinsically. But she should not do so, and the thrust of her metaphysics disallows this move on her part.

Rand does not accept the existence of real universals. For Rand,

entities belong in categories because we put them there. Our categorizations are subject to norms, but these norms are goal-based. A categorization is not good because it matches the pre-existent intrinsic structure of the world; it is good because it serves our purposes. In order to serve our purposes, a categorization will have to track some similarity, often of causal power. But the similarity is only a similarity relative to a categorizing subject. Remove the subject and the similarity disappears. But moreover, remove the subject’s *goals* and the similarity disappears. It is impossible to make sense of the act of categorizing without interpreting it as aiming toward some goal.

Universals were supposed to underlie the sameness of different things. Different things can be the same in some respect because they share a universal. But Rand rejects universals. So she rejects this account of sameness in a respect. Sameness in a respect governs category membership: different things go into the same category because they are the same in some respect, and that category has all and only the things that are the same as them in that respect. One category for which this is true is the category of entities. Something is an entity, not because it is intrinsically an entity, but because we categorize it that way.

So it seems that Long is mistaken to say that “[w]hether a thing exists or not is *not* relative to epistemic context” (423). The epistemic context includes the purposes of the knower, and these might exclude some things from the category of entities that another knower, differently constituted, would have included.

Now, this obviously does *not* mean that things pop into and out of being according to varied epistemic needs. It means that something will or won’t be an entity according to varied epistemic needs. Crucially, it means that something will or won’t count as an entity at a time depending on the conceptual scheme with which we approach it.

Let me explain what I mean by ‘conceptual scheme.’ I don’t have in mind anything deeply radical or even especially Kuhnian. A conceptual scheme is just the array of concepts actually employed by the empirical investigator in categorizing the objects of her investiga-

tion. One example might be the difference between the conceptual schemes of praxeology and physics. Physics simply doesn't have the categories 'person,' 'action,' 'reason,' and so forth, just as praxeology will never have the notions of 'quark,' 'ellipse,' or 'charm.' In this case, the reduction of theories expressed in the one vocabulary to theories expressed in the other vocabulary does not appear to be in the offing; the notion of a unified science isn't very popular nowadays and probably for good reason. Conceptual schemes needn't be incommensurable in this way; the conceptual schemes of the military historian and the cyberpunk writer fall on the same side of the physical/human sciences divide (whether or not the latter recognizes the divide), but probably still don't have much overlap. The military historian just doesn't live in a world of flesh/metal deconstruction and cyborgs (yet), and the cyberpunk writer as such has no use for phalanxes or massed armor assaults. When I appeal to the notion of a conceptual scheme, my point is that something is an entity only if it is categorized as such, and such categorizations are done by people with conceptual schemes that are designed for varying purposes. So whether something is an entity or not depends in part on the cognitive purposes of an acting investigator.

Recall the one-dimensionality of Rand's approach. Sciabarra (2000, 181) inherits it. He writes:

Our abstractions cannot stand alone, for each is imbued with meaning when placed in its larger context. Abstraction necessarily entails the selection of some aspect of a totality to the exclusion of other aspects. But as our inquiry widens, it may become crucially important to consider those excluded aspects as well. The process of abstraction, then, requires a concomitant process of integration.

Long suggests, and he seems to be correct, that Sciabarra's approach is one in which more and more relations become internal as cognitive progress is made. To be sure, Sciabarra's claim comes with the weakening modal operator 'may': "... it *may* become crucially important to consider . . . excluded aspects as well." But his conclu-

sion has a modal strengthener: "The process of abstraction . . . requires a concomitant process of integration" (emphasis added). Such a modally strengthened conclusion can only be supported by a modally strengthened premise. I take the weakening 'may' to be a way of noting that at not just any point in cognitive progress does a given relation become internal; thus, while every relation becomes internal in the end, a given relation might or might not become internal at some point on the way to the end. If the 'may' is intended to weaken the premise rather than clarify it in the way I've suggested, then the conclusion must likewise be weakened. Sciabarra should only have said that the process of abstraction sometimes requires a concomitant process of integration. Since such a weakened conclusion, aside from not having been written by Sciabarra, seems against the grain of his general approach, I'll continue to read him as making an internalist commitment here. If that reading is mistaken, then Sciabarra's view in *Total Freedom* more closely approximates the view I'll be recommending here.

Thus, Sciabarra, like Rand, has a one-dimensional approach to changes in the essentiality of features. Rand allows traits to gain or lose essentiality as knowledge advances, and Sciabarra allows more and more relations to become essential as knowledge advances. In fact, even Rand's approach is more flexible than Sciabarra's, because she at least allows traits to lose essentiality. No relation ever seems to become external in Sciabarra.

The end-point of cognitive process is the synoptic vantage-point, from which everything can be taken in at a glance. Long (2001, 423) argues:

if all relations were *modally* internal from the synoptic vantage point, then all relations would be modally internal from *every* vantage point [since modal internality is non-relative], and all external relations would be merely provisional approximations. If this position is to be avoided, then we must grant that some relations would be modally external *even from the synoptic viewpoint*.

Thus, for Long, modal internality is non-relative. So if, as Sciabarra seems to suggest, every relation is internal relative to the synoptic vantage point, then every relation is modally internal. But that is the thesis of internalism, which Sciabarra seeks to avoid.

The one-dimensionality of Rand's model of changes in essentiality now becomes deeply problematic. The way Rand allows traits to vary in essentiality is exclusively temporal. At a certain stage in our knowledge, a trait is essential; at another, it may not be. Likewise for Sciabarra: at a certain stage in our knowledge, a relation is external; at a later stage, it will be internal. At the theoretical end-point, then, they are all internal. But what's missing from Rand's account is any mention of the varying epistemic purposes brought to the categorizing process. Because different categorizers may vary with respect to cognitive purpose, they may categorize different things as entities. Thus, in one conceptual scheme, designed for a given purpose, something might count as an entity, with which other entities have internal relations. But in another, it might not count as an entity at all, and so no entity can have internal relations with it. It is external to the conceptual scheme in question, and insofar as discussion across schemes occurs (say between the military historian and the cyberpunk), the entities sanctioned by one scheme and not the other will often be regarded as external to the entities sanctioned by the other.

One way of seeing the proposal I'm trying to make is by asking how we should understand the synoptic point of view. First, I'm treating the synoptic point of view as the cognitive ideal in a Platonic sense: the knower without the limits imposed on us mere mortal knowers. (Precisive abstraction—and falsification—with a vengeance.) The 'synoptic delusion' then becomes the delusion of thinking that somehow we'll not just approximate but occupy the synoptic vantage point.

One way of understanding this cognitive ideal, which I'll call the 'integrated' way, is to regard the synoptic view as that which we would have if we were to finish *all of our* epistemic projects; that is, if we were to know everything knowable in *our* total conceptual scheme.

By 'total conceptual scheme,' I mean that conceptual scheme that would be achieved were we to integrate all of the conceptual schemes that we ordinarily let lie around unintegrated. For instance, the military historian and the cyberpunk that I mentioned earlier probably don't integrate their theories. The conceptual schemes that include concepts like *line*, *phalanx*, *flank*, and *advance* have never, I imagine, been integrated with the conceptual apparatus that includes *masculinist-contempt-for-the-flesh-and-the-feminine-in-a-world-of-simulacra* and other constructs of value to cyberpunks. In the integrated synoptic vantage point, these two conceptual schemes would be brought together somehow.

By 'epistemic project,' I mean the pursuit of a cognitively preferred situation; one of knowledge rather than ignorance. Such projects may have various different kinds of products (such as interpretations *versus* explanations), and they may meet various needs (such as performative practice *versus* theoretical guidance), but all of them will meet some cognitive need felt within the conceptual scheme in which the project is pursued. Quantum mechanics is an epistemic project, and so is Austrian economics. So is learning how to fence, because the trained fencer has a more preferred cognitive state—knowing how to fence—than the novice. One might, in principle, be able to finish the one project without even beginning the other. But in the integrated synoptic vantage point, *all* such projects that can be envisioned within our integrated conceptual scheme would be completed.

Why *our* scheme? Well, the synoptic vantage point is the cognitive ideal. The synoptic knower knows all. But what we can characterize as known or in principle knowable must be so characterized from within our present conceptual scheme. We can project alterations to that scheme, but we cannot envision one that is radically different from it. To imagine such a 'scheme' would be to imagine a language that could not be translated into our own. But such a 'language' could hardly be characterized as a language. The 'speakers' would not be able to express what we characterize as truths; they wouldn't even be able to express what we characterize as falsehoods. Such a 'scheme,' then, would fail to be a means of cognition and

those possessed of it would not be knowing subjects but mere brute entities. The synoptic ideal is the idealized version of *our own* synoptic position because we can't imagine any other synoptic position.

So the proponent of the integrated cognitive ideal proposes that the synoptic vantage point is a point of view in which all of our conceptual schemes have been integrated and all of our projects completed, and completely integrated into one overarching scheme.

An alternative view of the synoptic ideal can be called the 'pluralist' view. The pluralist's synoptic ideal does not require integration as/at the end of epistemology. The pluralist's synoptic ideal knows all that can be known in any of our conceptual schemes, but integrates that knowledge only insofar as some cognitive purpose of ours justifies such integration. The synoptic knower would know all that could be known, but would know many things merely additively, rather than integratively; the items of knowledge would exist side by side, not linked together (except where justified by some local cognitive goal). The occupant of the synoptic vantage point would know in the way that a society could be thought as 'knowing,' metaphorically, the tacit practices of all its members, but without the metaphor. Thus, the knowledge need not be integrated, just as society can function without total knowledge of all of its members being integrated in one central mind.

As the analogy suggests, the 'integrated' view of the synoptic ideal is the ideal of the omniscient, authoritarian socialist planner, who knows all and directs all according to some plan of her own, not drawn from the goals of individual knowers and actors but imposed on them from higher up. On the 'pluralist' view, the synoptic perspective would be special—qualifies as an ideal—because it represents the peaceful co-existence of many different perspectives, not the elimination of all perspectives but one.

The integrated view is either contradictory or imperialistic. The pluralist view allows the synoptic knower to have many cognitive purposes at once. The integrated view does not. So the integrated view allows the synoptic knower to have either no purpose, or one. If the synoptic knower knows purposelessly, then it's impossible to understand the knowing activity or to characterize its result as

knowledge. If the synoptic knower has a single purpose that excludes all other perspectives, then the possible contributions of other perspectives are ruled out. But since the synoptic knower knows everything, that means that these contributions were only apparent; they didn't allow for real advances in knowledge.

Libertarians should prefer the pluralist view, since they recognize that the invisible hand guiding society is directed by the harmonization of many perspectives and purposes, rather than the reduction of all perspectives to one and the coercion of everyone to abandon their own purposes in favor of the integrated social purpose of the planner. (Objectivists, who seek a unified science, should feel torn.)

The synoptic perspective, then, can be specified only with reference to our cognitive goals. But our cognitive goals are instrumental goals, not final goals. We know, at least usually, so that we can act wisely. So the synoptic point of view cannot be thought of as terminating all action, but rather only cognitive action. The synoptic point of view must be thought of as possessed by some real actor at the end of epistemology, not by a non-actor past the end of action. The synoptic perspective must be thought of as embedded in, rather than at the end or edge of, time. This is important because knowledge is internally related to action, which is internal to time. To precisely abstract knowledge from time, then, would be to radically falsify its nature. (To precisely abstract it from the finitude of human consciousness is also to falsify its nature, but not quite so radically. We can imagine a knower who knows all, but we cannot imagine a knower with no purpose, just as we can't imagine anything else not in time.) So my vision of the synoptic vantage point should seem a little paradoxical: it's the point of view of someone who knows everything knowable from any point of view (even a future point of view), but is still engaged in action in the present. Such an actor would inhabit a cognitive ideal, where a cognitive ideal consists in knowing all that one could possibly want to know.

What does this mean? The suggestion is that the cognitive ideal, as understood by libertarians, is one that encompasses the irreducible plurality of cognitive goals. This means that even if all relations were internal from the synoptic point of view, they wouldn't necessarily be

internal in relation to some one unified cognitive purpose held by the synoptic knower. Internality, even at the end of epistemology, is agent-relative. Only the context of our goals determines the internality of a relation, even a modally essential relation.

But if that's true, then—unless there's some cognitive purpose that requires the total integration of all entities that can be categorized as entities from any perspective—it won't be the case that all relations will be internal, even from the synoptic point of view. But there could not be such a purpose. The synoptic point of view is constructed from all conceptual schemes that are possible to us, within reality, rather than within the Platonic abstraction being constructed. No real knower could have as a real purpose the possession of a kind of knowledge requiring the total integration of all entities, in the same sense that no real person can have as a real purpose jumping to the moon.

If the synoptic point of view is seen as an additive but unintegrated sum, then any given relation will be internal or external in relation to the elements from which the sum is constituted. So even if some relation were internal for one of those elements, it still need not be considered absolutely internal. Only if a relation were internal or external for all of those elements could it be considered absolutely internal or external. I doubt whether any such relation can exist. Some conceptual schemes will be incommensurable, and so what's internal for the one will of necessity be external for the other.

If internality is relative to cognitive goal, and abstracting a part from the whole falsifies only if it is internally related to that whole, then whether a precisive abstraction falsifies will be relative to a cognitive goal. If, for some cognitive purpose, a relation is external, then the relata can be safely abstracted from one another without concern and without falsification. This is true even though the same abstraction of the same part from the same whole would constitute falsification were it done for some other cognitive purpose. Falsification, then, is internal and relative to the cognitive purpose of the abstracting knower. So Long is right that not all abstraction falsifies, but a stronger claim is justified: not all precisive abstraction falsifies, either.

Conclusion

My hope is that I've defended Sciabarra's methodological approach by making clear his social-ontological commitments, clarifying the proper scope of dialectical investigation, and proposing a non-monistic view of the cognitive ideal. Thus, I think that Sciabarra's approach is substantially clearer when seen through the lens of Long's analytic distinctions, even though I do not agree with Long's conclusions (at least not the ones I've discussed here).

Dialectics is a methodological orientation intended to guide the empirical investigation of society. Its recommendation is that when the social scientist or historian considers parts of social wholes, she bear closely in mind the context from which that part is abstracted. Dialectics puts forward the bold, substantive social-ontological hypothesis that social entities are embedded in their social contexts in an essential way: from the perspective of the libertarian social scientist or historian, the interesting dynamic behavior of social entities can only be understood when context is attended to. Which parts of the context are important will depend on the cognitive purposes of the social scientist, because different parts of the context will explain different behaviors of the entity. Insofar as a social scientist recognizes the existence of a social entity at all, she might well regard it as irrelevant to her explanatory endeavors and not include reference to it in her theorizing. But there will be many social entities other than the one directly under consideration to which she will have to pay attention if she wants to correctly understand the dynamics of her object of study. That's the version of internalism to which Sciabarra is committed. And if this commitment is correct—and I can't help but think that Sciabarra has shown so, by demonstrating that many of the major advances in the theory of liberty have been done with that kind of internalism taken for granted—then dialectics is the correct methodological orientation for those who seek to understand a certain part of the world—society—with a certain goal—freedom.

Now that Sciabarra the philosopher has interpreted the world, the point for the practitioners of dialectic is to change it.

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