

Truth And Emotion

Haraway in this text seems to assert that it is not possible for individuals to arrive at a precise representative interpretation of a particular body of work, or art, and even the world itself (world is originally fallen apart), as one's own view of the world, our 'hopes' and 'contending practices' constantly interfere with one's faculty of transforming sense-data, or assigning meaning to the sense-data. This consequently hinders our ability to see things 'as they are'. In my essay, I will first be discussing the most fundamental proposition that Haraway seems to base her quote on i.e. 'Just as the world is originally fallen apart'; next, I will be discussing certain reasons why this altered interpretation of the work takes place including the impact of emotions, how we use language itself and other norms and developed practices in society; I will then be discussing what it primarily means to be interpreting or 'reading' a work in its truest sense and in what cases this truth can be determined, and finally, juxtaposing my previous two sections, I will be concluding whether this *biased* interpretation (if it is indeed something different from the work itself) is useful in furthering the purpose of the text (or art) and society in general and to what extent should this biased representation be allowed, or perhaps even encouraged.

Section 1: Are we able to see the world in its original form?

Coming to the most fundamental premise of the quote, whether we are capable of seeing the world as it exists in its truest sense, it is important first to engage in a thought experiment. Suppose you and a few of your other colleagues are standing surrounding a table. Light is hitting the table at different angles and everyone is asked to give their opinion of what the table's actual colour might be. A few people voice out that the table's color is brown, while the other group says that it may be light brown or dark brown or perhaps even black. Even those who say it is light or dark brown are unable to decide how light or dark the table really is, and differ on the gradient of 'lightness' and 'darkness'. What then is the actual color of the table? Some might say that the table has a particular color, but we are not able to see that color for what it is; while others may argue that the table has no color at all, that the attribute of color that we assign to it is not an 'intrinsic' property of the table; while certain other novel answers like there is indeed a table which has color and our interpretation of the colour is correct irrespective of what others may perceive; and to account for arguably the deceptively easy question- 'Does it even matter what the table's color is?'

It is easy to see the implications of this thought experiment- people perceive and attribute different qualities to different objects, and while the contention over the table's color is relatively trivial, it is still meaningful in demonstrating how our sense-data (data gathered by senses such as sight, touch, hearing, feeling and taste) is influenced by certain properties. Coming back to the example of the table, it might be argued that the table is smooth, but put it under a microscope and suddenly the valleys and curves and scarves on the table become visible. Our senses, as is demonstrated through this example, are susceptible to multiple errors, or at some point our brain integrates the accurate sense-data in a way that makes its integration fallacious (this is the objectivist view- that the sense data is accurate, but it is our interpretation that leads to disagreements like the one described above). One thing that is indeed conclusively demonstrated is that reality or matter does not exactly correspond to our own mind's construction of it and our own sense of reality. Even standing under a yellow light in front of the mirror alters our perception of what we look like, or standing in the distorting mirrors in a carnival showcases us how our sense can be deceived under different circumstances.

One argument against this is that the fact that we know that our sense can be deceived, for example

when we see a mirage on a hot day, and there are certain sense-data that we doubt, for example I know my body doesn't distort the way it seems in the carnival mirror, demonstrate to the very least our sense's capacity to correct itself or to at least know when it is being deceived. However, for the proponents of this argument I pose this question- how do we know that we indeed our being deceived? One answer (in the case of the mirage can be, which can also be extended to dreams) is that the moment I reach the particular spot, or I wake up, I stop perceiving those occurrences/objects and hence I get to know that it was indeed real or not. And in the case of the distorted mirror, I intuitively know that my body doesn't look like that because I have a somewhat stable and consistent image of my body in my head and that does not correspond to this distorted image. However, what these two answers or probable explanations of why our sense have the capacity to correct themselves, which also makes them ultimately fallacious, is that these answers presuppose that we know what reality looks like (I know what my body looks like, or I am able to distinguish the mirage and the dry land as well as dream and my actual living world). These arguments presuppose what they try to prove-that we have a notion of reality in our head which is accurate, and as soon as our senses fail to give us the information which corresponds to this notion we start doubting them and hence we have a notion of reality in our head. This is circular reasoning and hence, these objections must not be considered as contenders to the fact that our senses can deceive us.

Another pseudo-objection that can be foreseen is that while we aren't able to correctly appraise certain properties, there exists certain properties that we can't really disagree upon, properties that are intrinsic to the object itself. For example, we can measure the weight of an apple or can gauge its shape while its color, taste, etc are qualities that we cannot indeed measure the same way. If one disagrees on the weight of an apple, one of us is simply wrong. This was the distinction between primary and secondary properties. Primary properties are those properties which are of the object itself, while secondary properties are those properties that we ascribe to the object. However, let's try to take this argument to its logical conclusion, as Berkeley did. Using Berkeley's reasoning, try imagining an apple that is colorless. Chances are that you are imagining an apple that is either white, black or simply the colour of its background (it is invisible!). What is indeed a colorless apple? Berkeley said thus that while primary and secondary qualities may be distinct, it is impossible to perceive one while leaving out the other, and hence our ability to error and perceive something wrongly extends to these primary qualities.

Hence, even in the physical world, where biological processes are concerned, our bodies can error and gives us an inaccurate picture of what reality is really like. The colour spectrum example is another instance of this- I have always been taught that what seems to me to be green is actually called red, and the reason why when you perceive red and in reality I perceive green, we both call it red because I have never seen the color through your eyes. For me green is red, and there is no accurate way of deciding whether what I perceive is indeed correct or not.

Now that we have dealt with how the sense-data can be erroneous, we can move on to see how our we integrate that sense data (concepts, notions about what is right or wrong, etc) can be susceptible to certain other biases.

Section 2: How one's interpretation of the work, or reading, or conception of abstracts concept in general can be effected through emotions, usage of language?

On the use of language

We use certain acceptable phonetic sounds and symbols and related biological processes such as the vibration of our vocal chords in order to communicate certain concepts to other people. This

phenomenon is often governed by grammatical rules and other accepted rules of communication. However, through the process of using language we can inadvertently communicate and interpret meaning that wasn't actually there. I will be proving this assertion through three key concepts (thick word concepts, halo effect and leading questions).

In our first discussion under this section, we will be discussing thick concepts. Thick concepts or thick words are those words that are not only descriptive in nature i.e. that not only fulfil the condition of appropriately communicating meaning to the other person but also have an evaluative notion or attitude attached to them. For example, when I say that a woman is promiscuous, I am not only referring to the fact that that woman has several sexual partners, but also communicate that that tendency of having several sexual partners should be condemned. Promiscuity is a thick concept, it carries a negative connotation attached to it. Similarly, racial slurs, homophobic slurs etc are all thick concepts. In theory, they only communicate that a certain person has a certain attribute, however in practice, they are associated with an evaluative notion that has now become indistinguishable from the theoretical meaning itself. This is the backbone of why certain words can cause harm, or why certain words are considered inappropriate. Extending this theory of language adaptation, one can also say that the meaning of words can change, and indeed it does, and that is why often times literary examination requires us to pay attention to the connotative or denotative meaning of a certain thing.

Next, coming to the halo effect. This effect is relatively simple to explain. This indicates that often times people take certain qualities of an individual to mean the occurrence of other qualities- for example, when I see someone who might be considered attractive, I might also assume that that person is charming. Being charming and attractive of course have no correlation, however, people have the tendency to assume certain other things about other people even without the demonstration of that quality. There is an obvious advantage to this- we are able to form some sort of notion of the other person even when we immediately meet them, which enables us to inform our behavior appropriately. However, this does not mean that what we do is indeed correct, but it just demonstrates in another way how language and other ways people tend to condition themselves to derive more meaning than what is actually there.

Briefly discussing the effect of leading questions, we can conclude that not only words but sentence structure itself can radically effect the kinds of interpretation one may undertake. For example, in an experiment done by psychologists, when different groups of people were asked 'what speed did the car pass you by?' instead of 'what speed did that car race you by?' people gave extremely different responses. Even similar questions, trying to elicit the same piece of information, can lead to widely different responses simply due to a change in language.

We can conclude our discussion of the effects of language here, while there are certainly more ways that language influences meaning interpreted like the similitude theory of meaning, due to paucity of time, we will have to limit our discussion to these concepts that demonstrate how individuals can extend meaning through the use of language.

On Emotion

Coming to the crux of this section- the ability to form concepts and then interact with them using emotions, especially when it comes to abstract thought or reading or art. The most fundamental argument that I will be putting forth is that art, or literature in this case, has the capacity to induce emotions. People feel a wide variety of emotions when they encounter a certain piece of art- they can feel disgust, happiness, sadness, sympathy and so much more. Why do people feel these emotions?

An answer to this question can be found in Rand's notion of sense of life- the fact that individuals consciously or subconsciously integrate their notions of man and his existence and use this sense of life as a guide to their actions. When the sense of life is appealed by a painting, the viewer might feel uncomfortable for it questions their fundamental nature of existence and the importance they attribute to it. The way that Ayn Rand describes this concept is that any work of art, including literature, is essentially a selective re-creation of an individual's metaphysical truths. When viewing a work of art, an individual, abstracts the meaning of the work of art into more relatable percepts and these percepts and process of abstractions are effected by one's sense of life. And whether the meaning of art is indeed in favour of or in favour against the work of art leads to which emotion will be invoked - for example happiness or validation if favourable.

This is one explanation of how emotions are invoked when we are reading something. An objection however can be that these are pseudo-emotions. They are not actual emotions but induced emotions, they may be emotion-like but are not emotions in its truest sense. The argument against this can be that emotions, for them to be real, do not to be grounded in reality. The emotions may concededly be more fleeting, but that does not make them any less real.

We must also acknowledge the sense of personal significance that individuals often attach to events. For example, a lady who has had a miscarriage and is unable to get pregnant or a lady who now bears a child as a consequence of rape will have very different notions on abortion. They will ascribe different values based on different experiences. This is to say that individuals can only have vicarious experiences of their emotions and these emotions often lead to different interpretations or different views on a reading per se. I cannot experience emotions the same way that you do and that fundamentally alters our emotional capacity to be similar in terms what we value, thus our reading of texts can be extremely different. (Note that I will be discussing logic, reason in the next section to also deeply understand what can and cannot emotions effect and what it means to be true)

Section 3: What does it mean for something to be true? And are there certain things that cannot be misread, re-read etc?

In our discussion thus far, we saw how our sense of life, emotions, language etc can influence our interpretation. However, it is now important to deeply understand the meaning of what it means to be true, in this case what does it mean to correspond exactly.

I will be putting forward a definition of truth that contain two components 1) Truth can be the property of a belief 2) This property however must be wholly independent of the belief itself. For example, when I say that This is my brother, truth can be a property of my belief- the belief can or cannot be true. However, what I actually need to determine its truthfulness is not how strongly I believe that to be true or how justifiable my belief is but what biological relation I have to the individual that I am proclaiming to be my brother. This biological relation, which manifests in perhaps my DNA, indeed is not contained in the sentence itself but rather on something external.

Now, how does this relate to our discussion? This is where I would like you to consider logical propositions or propositions that are based in reason. For example, when I say

Humans are mortal.

Socrates was a human.

Hence, Socrates is mortal.

No matter how much I want Socrates to be immortal, I cannot reasonably not interpret this syllogism to mean exactly what it seems to—that Socrates is mortal. Similar is the case with rational judgements and how certain beliefs or ways of reasoning or contemplation must not give way to emotional surges lest they dilute the meaning of the judgment itself. Hence, there is a clear distinction between reading something that might come under more subjective notions of fiction or fantasy, but not when it comes to academic readings or academic assertions. There thus is a distinction between how I read or interact with certain texts and how I read others.

This notion that logical and rational thought must not be affected by emotion also saliently rests on the assertion that rational thought, logic or arithmetic are universals i. e. that they do not belong to a mental state or the physical states (both states as we have seen can be influenced by human contribution and problems in integrating or abstracting sense data). How are logical thoughts different from emotional thought? When we talk about logical thought, we appeal to something that exists outside of us. $2 + 2 = 4$ is a truth, that while brains are able to grasp, is not dependent on the brains' recognition of it. Similarly, the syllogism that we discussed is not dependent on any man's recognition of it. It constitutes what is called universals. Plato explained this idea in terms of another realm, one where ideas exist as concretes and not simply as abstracts. And the real world is just a reflection of this so-called world. What this means to say is that when one says that rewarding those who work hard is justice, the act itself is not just, but rather the act partakes in the concrete of justice that seems to exist in this other world.

The way that this notion of universals ultimately connects to my essay is that it showcases how all readings do not (or should not as we will discuss further) be susceptible to a man's sense of life, his or her emotions, or 'hopes' and 'practices', that there is indeed, in some cases, where truth can be determined through an external relation that is independent of the belief itself, that every interpretation is not ultimately valid.

The objection that this line of reasoning can be that individuals often determine what is good or bad especially in cases of justice or morality (which form a part of such universals) based on feelings i.e. emotion. The counterargument to that can be that if concepts such as justice or morality could be determined based on 'hopes' or 'emotions' then it would be possible for a thing to be at the same time right as well as wrong. It is evident that in a society, people don't often have the same feeling toward a particular action. Take affirmative action for example, if morality (a universal) could be determined by emotion (our own mental state, not a universal), then affirmative action would have been right and wrong at the same time. The people in whose favor the policy actually works have a feeling of 'rightness', however, it's the opposite for the other class of people. Does that mean that affirmative action is at the same time bad as well as good? Surely, that's not possible. The same action, at the same instance and in the same context cannot be both good and bad. This argument was used by G.E. Moore to demonstrate that morality cannot indeed stem from emotional considerations of what feels right and what feels wrong. Similarly, no matter how strongly I hope or believe something to be true does not make it to be true. $2 + 2$ would not equal 5, because such truths are irrespective of emotional considerations and contended practices.

Some, however, may argue that even in such cases people will read what they *want* to read. That reading of a text, in this context, is done so that people can ultimately validate their already strengthened opinions. We can now at this point refer them to the is-ought problem. Having demonstrated that there are certain notions that can be interpreted in only a single way regardless of the emotional state or practices of the reader, we can say that just because this happens, doesn't mean it ought to.

In the next section, I will discuss whether this injection of contended practices or hopes is indeed something that is good or bad, finally I will discuss which is more important the audience's

interpretation or the artist's meaning, and I will conclude whether this practice of not being able to read/perceive things exactly as they are is beneficial in our ultimate goal or not.

Section 4: Good or Bad

Having discussed the notion of abstract concepts, the difference between those which originate form within us, and those which indeed are present outside us, but we continue to interact with, now equips us to discuss whether this action, that every interpretation can be enmeshed with contended practices and hopes is good for society or not. First and foremost, I would like to re-iterate my distinction between how we interact with reading or literature that can be considered art while how we interact with reading that is academic or deals explicitly with universals through logic.

Firstly, we will deal with literature that can be considered art that can be susceptible to enmeshed hopes and practices. In this case, one might consider the difference between the audience interpretation and the artist intention, and the question of which is more valid? In this case of such questions, we can revert back to our discussion of the metaphysical sense of life. In this case, the emotional value of a piece of artistic literature is as valid as the artist's intention. Emotion in this case, or rather the presence of it, can be taken as a good sign. The metaphysical sense of life, as we saw, evokes emotion and the way we react to art inherently corresponds to our own personal process of internal introspection, and then the consequent interpretation of whether our own notions of man, his existence and purpose are indeed correct. This enables one to challenge one's view, broaden horizons and be exposed to new ideas through which we can determine the validity of our own views. Finally, this process of being able to hold one's hopes and aspirations at the same time as contrast them with situations or characters such as present in a literature that can be considered art, enables one to grasp abstracts as if they were percepts. What I mean to say is that having a character which exemplifies a certain moral code is far more effective in helping one understand that moral code in abstracts. And this process of having one's hope and practices while interacting with the reading enables one to undergo the process of internal introspection as we noted before.

Now coming to the question of more academic pursuits, that we dealt with at length in the previous section. We could then conclude that all readings are not open to the injection of contended practices or hopes as Haraway supposed before. We also dealt with the notion that people could steal read what they want, but that doesn't mean that they should (is-ought). We can say that propositions that deal with logic or rationality should not be subject to emotions or contended practices, for then they cease to be rational. Rationality should entail a consideration of evidence, logic and reasoning. However, even in these cases, it does not mean that one can completely disregard emotion. Understanding why one's emotions conflict or agree (even if co-incidentally) gives one immense insight to why those emotions were present in the first place, and how one can avoid this formulation of emotion-based or society-based beliefs in the future.

Another question that can be raised to this is- why is reason important in the first place? Why should one, even while reading these texts, give precedence to reason? The answer to this is fairly self-evident. Our inability to reason or to accurately foresee the consequences based on certain logical considerations can harm us. For example, if it is given that my city may be flooded, and I make an irrational decision to go out shopping, the fact that the city may be flooded and I can be left stranded on the street will still affect me. One's inability to acknowledge reason or pursue it actively does not render one to be immune to it.

Conclusion

In my essay, I have first and foremost analysed the basic assumption of the quote and deemed it to be true. Then I have analysed how language and emotion can change the interpreted meaning of a particular reading or thought. Next I have analysed how all thought doesn't (or shouldn't) experience the same sense of constant contention between the interpretation as other thought might be by analysing another domain of universals (as opposed to the mental and physical domain). Finally, I have concluded what the value of this thought is.