THE CLASSICAL MODERN VOCABULARY

To be sure, so far one has not been so modest. With a stiff seriousness that inspires laughter, all our philosophers demanded something far more exalted, presumptuous, and solemn from themselves as soon as they approached the study of morality: they wanted to supply a *rational foundation* for morality - and every philosopher so far has believed that he has proved such a foundation.

Friedrich Nietzsche,
Beyond Good and Evil

The will to truth which will still tempt us to many a venture, that famous truthfulness of which all philosophers so far have spoken with respect – what questions has this will to truth not laid before us! What strange, wicked, questionable questions! That is a long story even now – and yet it seems as if it had scarcely begun.

Friedrich Nietzsche,
Beyond Good and Evil

If we are to examine Rorty's recontextualization as an attempt to replace the classical modern vocabulary with a neo-pragmatist vocabulary, we need to examine the particular questions housed in the modern vocabulary and the functions adherents think those questions address. By breaking the modern vocabulary down like this, we set the stage for an analysis of Rorty's recontextualization in relation to the function-positions occupied by the modern vocabulary. This chapter, then, begins our analysis by outlining the key questions in the modern vocabulary and the function-positions associated with those questions.

Vocabularies house many questions. Rorty claims, however, that the modern vocabulary is shaped in large measure by two influential orientations: moral universalism and representationalism. We can translate this claim into Blumenbergian, by saying that two primary questions (among others) for adherents of the modern vocabulary are: (1) "how are our (contingent) cultures and selves grounded in a universal ethical sensibility?"; and (2) "how can we accurately picture the way the world really is?" The first question is the sort of thing a *moral universalist* wants to ask, while the second question is the sort of thing an *representionalist* wants to ask. Rorty's claim is that people who think through the modern vocabulary typically are both moral universalists and representationalists.[1]

This chapter, then, surveys the modern vocabulary from Rorty's standpoint with a spotlight on these two question orientations. Whereas Rorty develops his account of these modern questions by outlining the answers, the historical doctrines that have addressed them, I am going to proceed by explicating the form of these *questions* and the specific *functions* these questions are associated with. Part of my contribution to the dialogue is to try to specify - *in terms* of questions and functions - what modernism is in the Rortyian perspective. I am interested in taking these questions and trying to distill their distinguishing characteristics, so that we can have an understanding of the orientation of someone who thinks like a moral universalist or a representationalist. Understanding

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[1] I would hesitate from saying that we can reduce the modern vocabulary to only these questions, but I would say that these questions are key, fundamental questions in the modern vocabulary. There are other fundamental questions supported by the modern vocabulary. Probably the most important of these, at least according to Blumenberg's analysis of the modern epoch, is: "how can we make the world a better place?" Despite the existence of other important questions in the modern vocabulary, Rorty's presentation is adequate, because it focuses our attention on influential questions that he has suspicions about.

these orientations will allow us to see what functions these questions are supposed to perform - which will, in turn, provide us with an understanding of what rhetorical constraints shape Rorty's recontextualization. Abstracting these questions away from the historical, event-laden story Rorty embeds them in, this chapter ventures to show us why moral universalists and representationalists think they get so much mileage out of asking these questions. Understanding these orientations will aid us in our attempt to understand how Rorty's recontextualization works, the topic of chapter three.

In addition, I'll probe the issue of how influential these orientations have been on modern, contemporary sensibilities. Do people really behave as if they asked these questions? Rorty has a tendency to caricature philosophical camps, to lump philosophers under broad labels like "metaphysicians" or "pragmatists." This mythologizing technique makes our philosophical options seem very clear, but it often obscures the nuances of the issues involved. One often wonders how realistic Rorty's stories are. Surveying the philosophical and cultural population to see if we can find any live metaphysicians, moral universalists or representationalists is an important step, then, in evaluating Rorty's recontextualization. Even if Rorty makes interesting arguments for jettisoning these questions (and the vocabulary they are housed in), if these questions aren't running around in people's heads, influencing their behavior, then the importance of Rorty's philosophical project is in doubt.

The Obsession with Metaphysics

Before we begin to flesh out the moral universalist and representationalist questions, we should look at a related question, the metaphysicist question – "what is the essence of reality?" This question, related to other questions like "what truly is?", "what is being?", "what is real?", has defined the metaphysical orientation. Philosophers, and intellectuals in general, who buy into metaphysics buy into the appearance/reality dichotomy. They think that there must be a way of finding out what truly is, what the essence of reality is - there must be someway of bypassing the flux of change and the deception of our senses thereby connecting to the permanence of being.

Rorty suggests, as have many other philosophers,[2] that this question has driven much of western philosophy. In Heidegger's terms, ever since the early Greeks (notoriously Plato) started focusing on the "being" side of the being/becoming dichotomy, we have been enraptured with the idea that reality has a permanent essence that can be known. Knowing this essence, for the Greeks, would put one in harmony with the world. During the Christian epoch, having faith that this essence was God was the sign of a true believer. Rorty claims that modernists have not been able to escape the

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[2] Metaphysics bashing has been a common pastime for continental philosophers such as Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida as well as the logical positivists in the analytic tradition, though it meant different things for each tradition. For the continental philosophers metaphysics was an attempt to specify the true nature of the world, whereas for analytic philosophers metaphysicians were philosophers who got caught up in confused and artificial ontologies. Rorty's understanding of metaphysics, however, is closer to the continental understanding of metaphysics. A metaphysician for Rorty is someone who wants to escape the contingency of our coping position by trying to specify a universal, ahistorical reality that underlies our relative, historical experiences of reality.

long shadow of metaphysics, despite their fascination with our senses, becoming, history and progress, and thus continue to want access to metaphysical truth.

From Rorty's perspective, metaphysics in the modern vocabulary has most noticeably taken the form of the universalist and representationalist questions. Both these questions, in key ways, are modern derivatives of this more fundamental metaphysicist question. While moral universalists believe that we can learn something interesting about morality by discovering the true essence of the human, representationalists believe that if we can figure out how our beliefs can mirror reality, we can learn something about the essence of reality. According to Rorty, these two questions define the "two great themes" in modern metaphysical thought (DSP, 1996: 27). The first representationalist theme revolves around "the idea of an unconditional demand for absolute truth. . . the attempt to attain outside of mathematics, the apodicticity associated with mathematical truth," while the second, moral universalist theme resolves around the "Kantian notion of an unconditional moral law" (DSP, 1996: 27). They have both sought to find the intrinsic, universal, ahistorical truth underneath our experiences of epiphenomenal, relative, historical truth. They are both unable to envisage "a repudiation of the very idea of anything - mind or matter, self or world - having an intrinsic nature" (CIS, 1991: 4).

Metaphysicians refuse to assume the challenge of making the best of our contingent, historically-mutable views. They have a "common urge to escape the vocabulary and practices of one's own time and find something ahistorical and necessary to cling to" (CP, 1982: 165). Metaphysicians want something unconditional, necessary, eternal. Embracing our vocabularies, as human creations, is out of the question, because

our vocabularies seem conditional, contingent, historical.   The metaphysician's hope is that we can get beyond these arbitrary starting points and come to a final resting point, a place where we know what truly is.

Inquiry, in this view, is the attempt to connect to this truth. Both moral universalists and representationalists hope to ultimately be able to clear away the biases that have infected our vision of the world.   Once we have the true framework for seeing the world, we will be able to conduct all further inquiry in a more gradual way. We will be able to simply fill in the missing details of a big picture we already have grasped. Knowing this big picture will make smaller disagreements easily resolvable. Frameworks of inquiry will no longer be open to serious debate.   Metaphysically oriented inquiry "is the search for a way in which one can avoid the need for conversation and deliberation and simply tick off the way things are" (CP, 1982: 164).

This ideal of inquiry has been reflected in how metaphysicians think about language. Modern metaphysicians see language as the bridge that connects us to this metaphysical reality. Moral universalism and representationalism both want to relink the conceptual associations we had between language and God to something else. Both views think of language as *medium*. They think that there "are relations such as 'fitting the world' or 'being faithful to the true nature of the self' in which language might stand to nonlanguage" (CIS, 1991: 13). Modern philosophy has attempted to connect language to something more important than itself. Either language must express the "intrinsic nature of the self" or it must represent the "real world."

So what motivates this metaphysical obsession? What need does this question address? Rorty suggests that this desire to know the ahistorical, unconditional nature of ourselves and the world is motivated by a fear of contingency and change. Like metaphysicians in general, modern metaphysicians want to provide some relief, some metaphysical comfort as Nietzsche put it, from a chaotic and surprising world. Having this sort of metaphysical knowledge will allow us to control our world and bend it to our wills. We will be able to eliminate the possibility that we could be seriously surprised. We can formalize this function-position as:

> **(1) The stability function: answering the metaphysicist question will provide us with security against a changing and surprising world.**

Metaphysicians hope to end our haphazard adaptation to a changing world. They hope to bypass the contingency of our communities and the chaos of the world by resting our communities and our actions securely on a foundation of metaphysical truth.

This need for stability overlaps with Bernstein's notion of *Cartesian anxiety*. Bernstein suggests that the desire for objectivity, here a close synonym for metaphysics, was motivated by a sense of Cartesian anxiety.   This sort of anxiety motivates a "quest for some fixed point, some stable rock upon which we can secure our lives against the vicissitudes that constantly threaten us" (Bernstein, 1983: 18). The fear that animates this quest is the "dread of madness and chaos where nothing is fixed, where we can neither touch bottom nor support ourselves on the surface" (Bernstein, 1983: 18).   The hope for what Rorty would call the metaphysician "is the belief that there are or must be some fixed, permanent constrained to which we can appeal and which are secure and

stable" (Bernstein, 1983: 19).   Metaphysicians wished to find a "north star" - a fixed, permanent and universally accessible Archimedian point.   This point would permit us to transcend our contingency, the traditions that we have been socialized into, so that we could find our bearings in a shifting world of anxiety and suffering.   This star would point us all in the right direction, would give us all our own ethical and epistemological compasses.

So, both the universalist and representationalist questions, as derivatives of the metaphysics question, are supposed to furnish a way of transcending the mutability and instability of our perceptions of the world.   Both question orientations want to connect to an obscured metaphysical reality, an intrinsic nature, a north star.   Both involve the hope that we can find some immutable and universal nature, either through the search for the true self or the search for the true world, to which we can appeal in order to create stability in ethics and knowledge.   Both are premised on the assumption that we can burn away the contingent biases of tradition thereby connecting to something more transcendent than tradition, something more like God. Now, let us delve into Rorty's specific characterizations of these two question orientations.

Moral Universalism

Rorty traces *moral universalism* - the tendency to see the self as having some morally important intrinsic nature - all the way back to its Platonic roots. Different universalist theories, like Kant's or Plato's for example, all answer the question "What is the human?" This question means "something like 'how does the human species differ from the rest of the animal kingdom?' or 'among the differences between us and the other animals, which ones matter most'" (MUET, 1996: 1). Moral universalists claim to have answers to this universalist question. They think they have morally crucial "knowledge about the nature of human beings" (HRRS, 1993: 117). In other words, these universalists think that there is something peculiar in being human which makes us moral, something unique to human beings. All humans, if they are really human and not merely pseudo-human, will share in this ethical nature.

One of the central jobs of philosophy, from this perspective, is to uncover the inherent traits that characterize the human, to show us who we really are underneath our odd socializations. Philosophical schools were built around the claim to have access to this intrinsic nature. Moral universalists think that answering this cluster of questions will be the same thing as uncovering the impress that makes us truly "human." Rorty recommends we:

> think of finding such an impress as being the discovery of the universal
> conditions of human existence, the great continuities - the permanent, ahistorical,
> context of human life. This is what the priests once claimed to have done. Later
> the Greek philosophers, still later the empirical scientists, and later still the
> German idealists, made the same claim. They were going to explain to us the
> ultimate loci of power, the nature of reality, the conditions of the possibility of

experience. They would thereby inform us what we really are, what we are compelled to be by powers not ourselves. They would exhibit the stamp which had been impressed on *all* of us. This impress would not be blind because it would not be a matter of chance, a mere contingency. It would be necessary, essential, telic, constitutive of what it is to be a human. It would give us a goal, the only possible goal, namely, the full recognition of that very necessity, the self-consciousness of our essence (CIS, 1991: 26).

The moral universalist question has been the motor for much of modern ethical philosophy. Attempting to unearth, typically by a priori philosophizing, the true nature of humanity, universalists have suggested, at one point or another, that we all have the same "rational faculty," or "moral sensibility" or "imaginative/creative abilities." Despite the variability in the answers, the question remained uniform and constraining - philosophers wanted to claim to have unearthed the inherent foundation of morality.

To discover our inherent nature was to discover the rational aspect of the human. Notions of rationality have typically been intimately tied up with the notion of a universal essence possessed by all humans. Rational ethical norms were those that abided by the intrinsic nature which defined the human. Further, rational arguments - arguments that logically appealed to this true essence - were the mechanisms for getting individuals to connect to their inherent essence. These arguments could remind us of who we really are.

Detecting our inherent moral nature, according to moral universalists, will permit us to do a lot of interesting intellectual and ethical work. It will explain why certain people act morally and why others don't. Immoral people act immorally, because they either aren't in touch with their true selves (something we can correct by illuminating those true selves) or they aren't really human, despite seeming to be so. If we can

unearth the essence of being human, we will be able to figure out why people act the way they do. We will find the motor that drives ethical decisions and actions.

Additionally, discovering this moral nature will allow us to underwrite our ethical intuitions, thereby providing a universal foundation for our morality. The hope is that this essence will give us reasons to think that *our* moral sensibilities are better than the savages, or reasons why our form of government is better than the Nazis or the communists. A knowledge of this universal nature not only is going to show us how we should act, it is also "supposed to *justify* our" moral "intuitions, by providing premises from which the content of those intuitions can be deduced" (italics added, HRRS, 1993: 117). These premises are "capable of being known to be true independently of the truth of the moral intuitions" (HRRS, 1993: 117). These premises, indisputable and obvious, will provide a legitimate foundation for our moral intuitions thereby making them more than mere intuitions. This "universalism presupposes that the discovery of traits shared by all human being suffices to say who, why, and perhaps how, all human beings should organize themselves" (MUET, 1996: 2). According to universalists, this essential nature, if found, will provide the ethical *foundation* for a moral and political culture.

Traditionally, this search for a philosophical foundation for morality took place within the Enlightenment. Enlightenment humanists - tolerant of difference, against violence, and advocates of brotherly love - wanted some philosophical ground to claim that their norms should be everyone's norms. Wanting to transcend the mere colloquialism of European cultural ethics, these humanists wanted to discover something fundamental to all humans that would justify their ethical intuitions. They turned to

philosophy as a method of inquiry that could - a priori - demonstrate how the Enlightenment ethical matrix naturally fit with the true nature of human beings.

It is important that this foundation be universal, because its universality would provide us with a means for turning unethical individuals into ethical individuals.   If all individuals, even ones who acted unethically, have the same moral nature, universalists suppose that when dealing with unethical individuals we can appeal to their intrinsic nature. Universalists think that through the use of rational arguments we can convince bad people they should be good. Further, if they don't get these rational arguments, we can presume that they are not really human - they are more like beasts. This justifies us in treating them as pseudo-humans who don't really deserve moral respect, treating them like mad men or beasts.

This ethical foundation would also furnish us with a critical standpoint with which to evaluate our own ethical standards. By discovering our underlying nature, we can get in touch with our ethical compass, a compass that will point us towards morally correct beliefs, actions and institutions. "It is essential to this idea of moral knowledge that a whole community might come to know that most of their most innate intuitions about the right thing to do were wrong" (HRRS, 1993: 118). These intuitions can be exposed as unethical if we can prove that our intrinsic moral nature doesn't sit well with our intuitions. In this sense, we can strive to be a purely moral community, conscious of the universal moral respect due all individuals.

Typically, these ideas were influential on discourses about ethics and politics. Ever since Plato, we've assumed that philosophers would help us to understand how to

act ethically and which political institutions were ethically grounded. A set of ethical intuitions or a set of political institutions is superior if it fits with our true moral natures. Knowing our true ethical compass will let us know how to act ethically and what political institutions are appropriate. The job of the philosopher was to provide us with knowledge of this universal nature and develop the arguments that would prove that we have this knowledge.

So, these common assumptions define a family resemblance that we can label "moral universalism."   These common assumptions, while not necessarily upheld by each and every universalist, define a general orientation.   While different, particular sets of doctrines have tried to answer this universalist question, they have been constrained by the assumptions that shape the universalist question.   These assumptions, seemingly obvious and natural to a moral universalist, delimit the sorts of ideas a universalist will cook up, while also providing a common framework for evaluating the varied ideas different universalists cook up. Insofar as Rorty has problems with moral universalism, he will have problems with these assumptions.

Note that these assumptions are informed by the metaphysical preoccupations mentioned in the last section.   The form of this moral universalist question assumes that we have an underlying intrinsic reality, a metaphysical nature that can be unearthed through a priori philosophizing.   As we suggested in the last chapter, the modern vocabulary has a general metaphysical tone that has infected most of the central questions adherents have considered interesting.

Answering this universalist question is supposed to perform a cluster of functions. Moral universalists think that this is an important question, because they think that the question successfully occupies certain function-positions. We can specify these function-positions as:

(1) The explanative function: answering the moral universalist question will explain why individuals act ethically or unethically (in both the social and the political domains) ; and

(2) The legitimacy function: answering the moral universalist question will legitimatize our set of values; will explain why we should continue to possess these commitments, intuitions, institutions; and

(3) The persuasion function: answering the moral universalist question will suggest the right sort of arguments for persuading other people, people who don't hold these commitments, to adopt this set of ethical and political behaviors, intuitions and institutions; and

(4) The critical function: answering the moral universalist question will allow us to criticize, through the use of an independent critical leverage point, our own ethical beliefs, intuitions and political institutions.

In regards to (1), by finding out that we each had a common ethical motor, we could explain why we - if we were not corrupted, not dysfunctional - did things like love our neighbors, avoid murdering, and help the poor. In regards to (2), finding this common ethical nature also provided us with reasons to think that these ethical intuitions were normatively superior. It wasn't like we had a merely contingent motor that propelled us towards certain ethical patterns; those patterns were necessary, because they were rational. And, in regards to (3), knowing the inherent rationality of our intuitions lead us to think we could confront individuals or groups who did not uphold these intuitions with indisputable arguments that could force them to behave correctly. We could make them acknowledge their true selves. And lastly, in regards to (4), knowing which value set was

rationally superior to all others would provide us with a yardstick to measure ourselves. We could criticize our own behavior if we could establish what we should be doing. This set of function-positions defines one set of issues Rorty has to address when comparing his neo-pragmatist vocabulary against the modern vocabulary.

So, are moral universalists really out there?   That is a difficult question to answer, because it involves an analysis of our western culture in general.   In some ways, it's the sort of question a social scientist, someone who could spend a lot of time observing our social world, would be better at answering than a philosopher. Nevertheless, I will hazard a few observations about our intellectual and general culture and then look at one of the most interesting versions of moral universalism in contemporary philosophy: the version presented by Habermas.

In many respects, it seems that our interest in the moral universalist question is fading. Ever since we began receiving reports of the social behaviors of other communities, cultures and ethnicities, it has been harder and harder to explain why our ethical sensibilities are not ubiquitously represented. It came to seem that we, as modern liberal intellectuals, were in the ethical minority, which made it harder to claim that we had some privileged access to a universally shared moral nature. As Rorty himself notes "there is a growing willingness to neglect the question 'what is our nature?' . . . We are much less inclined than our ancestors were to take 'theories of human nature' seriously. . . We have come to see that the only lesson of either history or anthropology is our extraordinary malleability" (HRRS, 1993: 115).

Though it seems as if science has unearthed universal rules governing the

behavior of the natural world, these rules don't seem to provide much ethical comfort. With exposure to other cultures that diverged from our expectations, it appeared that the social conduct of humans was not really regulated by ethical laws as the natural world seemed to be regulated by scientific laws. Or, if it was, those laws didn't overlap neatly with Judeo-Christian or Greek intuitions. The expectations of moral universalists were disappointed by their experiences, which lead them to be suspicious of the universalist orientation.

And yet, moral universalism still exerts a powerful influence on our culture, manifested in the desire to find a universal basis for human rights and our tendency to think that immoral individuals are irrational and/or biased (whereas we are rational and clear-headed). Rorty suggests that "the residual popularity of Kantian ideas of 'unconditional moral obligation' - obligation imposed by deep ahistorical noncontingent forces - seems to [him] almost entirely due to our abhorrence for the idea that people on top hold the future in their hands, that everything depends on them, that there is nothing more powerful to which we can appeal against them" (HRRS, 1993: 130). In other words, because we want to find a way of forcing those we consider immoral not to be, we think that there is some intrinsic moral faculty that we can point to, demanding that they recognize it, and as justification for us forcing them to recognize it. So, when talking about these sorts of issues - i.e., when talking about human rights, civil rights, genocide, discrimination, etc. - we still, as a culture, tend to think in terms of moral universalism. These things are "wrong" no matter what public opinion is.

While we do generally observe and acknowledge the historical and cultural

differences among ethical values, we still tend to think that there is some neutral, trans-cultural yardstick with which we can evaluate are own culture and other cultures. We still tend to think that there is some intrinsic moral core that we can employ when dealing with ethical differences. This universalism may be less prevalent in intellectual circles, where doctrines of moral relativism have been gaining momentum, but it still has its advocates even in intellectual circles. Even if we have to admit that some of the more refined intellectuals have given up moral universalist pretenses, "most nonintellectuals" (at least) "are still committed either to some form of religious faith or to some form of enlightenment rationalism" (CIS, 1991: xv).

One place we can look for intellectual versions of moral universalism is in philosophical discourses. Probably the most seductive answer to the moral universalist question is provided by Habermas. This version of moral universalism has been highly influential on discourses in moral philosophy as well as political theory.

Habermas claims that we can find a moral north star if we look to the necessities of communication. He thinks that we can find a transcending ideal immanent in how we communicate with each other, an ideal that we can apply to all humans who communicate. This ideal is universal, because it "is based on a transcendental-pragmatic demonstration of universal and necessary presuppositions for argumentation" (Habermas, 1990: 116). In other words, if communicative exchanges do not adhere to this ideal, communication itself cannot happen. Habermas claims to have discovered something morally interesting in the process of communication from which we can deduce normative rules about what sorts of communication are morally sanctioned. As a

process, these rules of discourse, if followed, ensure morally good decisions.

This *ideal* form of communication suggests that communication, including discussions about ethical and political behaviors, should be undistorted by threats of force or other sorts of manipulations. The normatively valid sort of communication is one in which participants "provide rational ground for the recognition of validity claims" such as "explanations and justifications" (Habermas, 1975: 107) - reciprocally, the valid sort of communication involves "no force except that of the better argument," which means that manipulation, threats, and physical coercion are inappropriate (Habermas, 1975: 108). Moral norms decided in a process that adheres to these normative rules of communication are morally binding.

One of Habermas' overriding concerns (born from his experience of World War II) is to provide some sort of universal claim to superiority for liberal, democratic societies. Habermas thinks that his analysis of communication offers us a means of grounding both the set of liberal, democratic values and the political institutions those values have been associated with. When it comes to our political institutions, for example, "Habermas wants to 'ground' democratic institutions in the same way as Kant hoped to - but to do the job better, by invoking a notion of 'domination-free communication' to replace 'respect for human dignity' as the aegis under which society is to become more cosmopolitan and democratic" (CIS, 1991: 63). Since democratic governments, at their best, are the political extension of these norms of communication, democratic governments are normatively privileged over other sorts of government like dictatorships, totalitarian regimes or communism.

In grounding this normative ideal in an analysis of the pragmatic nature of

communication, Habermas avoids some of the typical moral universalist assumptions.

His most important innovation on the moral universalist position is his avoidance of

trying to find the marks of the impress somewhere *in* us humans. Unlike moral

universalists of the Kantian stripe, Habermas does not try to "spin moral obligation out of

our own vitals, to find deep within us, beyond historical contingencies and the accidents

of socialization, the origins of our responsibility to others" (CIS, 1991: 62), but rather

grounds this obligation in the nature of social interaction. In effect, Habermas

collectivizes the Kantian project.   He tries "to construe reason as the internalization of

social norms, rather than as a built-in component of the human self."

Despite this difference from traditional forms of universalism, Habermas is still

preoccupied with the moral universalist question and the need to fulfill moral universalist

needs. He still wants to find something universal about humans that fulfills the functions

listed above.   Habermas' form of moral universalism is still a product of the

Enlightenment hope "that philosophy would both justify liberal ideals and specify limits

to liberal tolerance by an appeal to transcultural criteria of rationality" (ORT, 208). It is a

product of the hope that philosophy will be able to disentangle rational attitudes towards

certain moral, ethical and political claims from attitudes informed by bias (cultural,

racial, national, religious, etc.).   For people like Habermas, "their rationalism commits

them to making sense of the distinction between rational judgments and cultural bias"

(ORT, 207).

Habermas, then, is still looking to prove that there is something universal about

humans which has crucial moral significance. He insists "that 'the transcendent moment of universal validity bursts every provinciality asunder. . . the validity laid claim to is distinguished from the social currency of a de facto established practice and yet serves it as the foundation of an existing consensus'" (CIS, 1991: 68). He still wants to find a way of saying that a certain moral understanding is the universally and necessarily right sort of understanding, which means that he "still wants an Archimedian point form which, for example to criticize Foucault for 'relativism' . . . .He still wants to say that 'the validity claimed for propositions and norms transcends spaces and time, 'blots out' space and time'" (HDFP, 1995: 449). The goal is still to find the ruler with which to judge the "difference between 'invariant regularities of social action as such' and ideologically frozen relations of dependence that can in principle be transformed'" (HDFP, 1995: 451). This leads Habermas to suggest that their is a universal test which we can apply to other cultures and our own that will allow us to criticize ourselves and convince others. He thinks he has an understanding of a universal "test for the presence of 'ideology' and 'distortion of communication'" (HDFP, 1995: 455). In other words, he thinks his theory of communication provides us with insights about a morality that is universal to all human beings. Habermas, then, is still focused on the moral universalist question. He thinks that he has come up with a new way to answer that question.

If we take Habermas as an indicator, it seems that moral universalism is still a powerful force in at least a philosophical context. And in light of Habermas' impact on political and general social science theory, we can say that moral universalism is still an influential orientation in the broader academy. Despite the growing popularity of moral

and ethical relativism, a more conservative camp persists in maintaining the modernists' interest in moral universalism.

In sum, with regards both to intellectuals and nonintellectuals, moral universalism still exerts its pull. Though there is definitely a suspicion towards these moral universalist questions, there is still a strong faction which finds such questions vibrant, necessary and important. This suggests that for Rorty to get beyond this question, he either has to therapeutically dissolve the associated function-positions associated with the universalist question, or show how he can reoccupy those function-positions. The next couple of chapters will examine these issues. For now, let's turn to the other question which, Rorty claims, has defined the modern epoch: the representationalist question.

Representationalism

Besides being universalists, according to Rorty, modernists are also typically representationalists. A representationalist is interested in the question: "how can we make sense of knowledge as a correspondence between our beliefs about the world and the world itself?" This question has been associated with related questions like "why are certain epistemic practices better indicators of truth?", "why are certain beliefs objectively true and others merely subjective prejudices about the world?", "how does language picture the world?", and "what is the best theory of representation?" among others. While representationalists may disagree on how to answer these questions, these questions provide a common reference point allowing them to disagree constructively. These questions - insofar as they seem natural and uncontroversial - also constrain how the representationalist understands what "knowledge" is.

Rorty claims that this sort of orientation has grown around a set of metaphors that suggest that knowing is a lot like representing. All sorts of metaphors - such as picturing, painting, mirroring, mapping, among others - have lead and enabled us to think of epistemological questions in terms of representationalist questions. As Rorty declares, "the picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a *great mirror*" (italics added, PMN, 1979: 12). Within this paradigm, it makes sense to think of knowing as having a lot to do with possessing beliefs that accurately represent the way the independent world really is. The idea is to have the mind hold a *picture* of the world that gets reality right, which shows us what is the case.

Initially, Rorty thinks, the consummate case of such representation would be a situation where our minds were a perfect mirror so that they naturally reflected things as they really are. Like good mirrors provide a clear, direct and immediate reflection of the world, it was hoped that our minds would provide a clear, direct and immediate reflection of the truth.   The thought was that maybe our minds really were able to see the world exactly as it is, if only we'd start looking in the right way.

Historically, however, this hope was disappointed (we couldn't find a way to get immediate access to the truth) and later recast as a question of how to discern true knowledge from false opinion. This is the question that representationalists ask today. While immediate access to the truth seems unobtainable, representationalists hoped that there still might be a way of showing how some ways of justifying beliefs have a mediated access to the truth. Discovering these truth preserving ways of justifying would then provide us with a mediated access to the truth.   The hope is to find some way to prove that certain ways of knowing, say certain patterns of justification, lead us to picture the world in the right sort of way. In this view:

> to know is to present accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations (PMN, 1979:   3).

And thus, the paramount goal of modern philosophy is to advance a *theory of representation (or later a theory of meaning or reference)* that can explain how the mind (or later language) pictures the external world, and how we can tell when those pictures are justified in such a way that they are true, are accurate.

To use terms recently developed in Analytic philosophy, representationalists

think that a theory of knowledge will explain knowledge in terms of justified true belief, where "true" has the force of a correspondence between our descriptions of the world and the world itself. Representationalists think that there is an important distinction between the categories of "justified belief," beliefs we think we have good reasons for holding, and "true belief," beliefs that really get the world right. While justified beliefs may *seem* the case, true beliefs really *are* the case. These notions are "distinct in the precise sense that although aiming at one is, necessarily, aiming at the other, success in the one aim need not be success in the other" (Wright, 1992: 19). Justification points us toward truth, but it doesn't necessarily mean we have truth. What we need then, is some theory to explain how to think of this concept of "truth," so that we can figure out how certain patterns of justification or a certain level of justification will lead us to truth. We need a theory which provides *substance* to thinking of "truth" as a right relation between beliefs and the world; a theory that would provide us with a means of testing for "truth." Having this sort of theory would allow us to mark certain habits of justification as epistemically connected to truth. We could use these sorts of justifications as pointers to truth.

The representationalist project is to find some epistemic *foundation* which provides a base for further knowledge. This foundation provides a method to attain true claims about the world or a set of indubitable beliefs about the world that can be used to evaluate other beliefs. Discovering this foundation would put us in contact with the world as it truly is - it functions as a way for us to obtain good, true knowledge, which is why epistemology, traditionally the search for this foundation, has been called "first philosophy." The preeminent task of the philosopher is to understand knowledge, which

usually means understanding how we get to Truth.   The discipline of philosophy has traditionally prided itself on this mission. Modern philosophers claimed that philosophy is the queen of inquiry insofar as it is able to do this; insofar as its theory of representation would allow it to "underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion" (PMN, 1979: 3). With a theory of knowledge, philosophers could stand above the other disciplines and govern them.

While modern philosophers have watered down some of these pretensions, representationalists still hope to develop a *permanent*, *impartial and accurate* framework, based on either a theory of representation, cognition, or language, with which to decide between competing understandings of the way the world is.   The hope is that some method, a justification habit based upon an understanding of knowledge, can be isolated as having some innate connection to the real structure of the world.   This method would provide a framework for inquiry. It would make sure that the outcome of inquiry really connected to the nature of the world.   Further, this framework would be settled on (through a priori philosophy) prior to engaging in inquiry so that we could be sure that the inquiry was objectively grounded.

Finding this sort of method or theory, the answer to the representationalist's question, is thought to fulfill some valuable functions.   One of these functions is to guide inquiry in the academy (and culture at large). Representationalists think that there isn't much point in engaging in inquiry unless one is trying to find the Truth, meaning the correct picture of the real world.   The best way to find this Truth is by working out a theory of representation (or cognition, or language) which will explain how certain ways

of knowing are related to the metaphysical truth of the world. The hope is to explain why an increase of the right kind of justification "leads to increased likelihood of truth" (ITGE, 1995: 285). Once we have such an explanation, we will be able to tell which disciplines are really doing useful, interesting inquiry. Disciplines that get at the truth (traditionally: disciplines like physics) are more valuable than more subjective forms of inquiry (traditionally: disciplines like literary criticism), because the former sorts of inquiry are really getting at the metaphysical nature of the world, while the latter produce subjective, confused, vague sorts of claims. The hope is to find some way of telling whether scientific claims more accurate than artistic claims. In this sense, "philosophy's *central concern* is to be a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so)" (PMN, 1979: 3).

Answering this representationalist question will also furnish us with a neutral, ahistorical, universal criterion of progress. Using this framework we can begin to amass true beliefs. Rather than riding the sea of incoming and outgoing dogmatic schools, we can begin to build on an objective foundation of knowledge. We can measure our progress beyond our ancestors or other cultures by remarking on this vast body of knowledge we have gathered – all due to us understanding what truth really is. Representationalists, then, plan to use a notion of correspondence to distinguish between knowledge and mere opinion, in order to maximize the amount of knowledge we have. Philosophical, and cultural, progress is made when we increase upon this stock of true

belief, when we get more and more beliefs that picture things like they really are.

These methods of inquiry will be able to demonstrate their objective validity in such a way that even individuals confused by traditional or personal prejudices will be able to see the truth. The hope is that the set of beliefs that arise from epistemically privileged sorts of inquiry will be obvious and demonstrable so that you can convince people of them. We will be able to say to someone that they should believe a certain belief "because it is true." Saying "because it is true" will have force, because we can demonstrate a connection between the *justification of the belief by a privileged method of justification* to the *way the world really is* (ITGE, 1995: 286). People who don't acknowledge the objective validity of a epistemically privileged claim are prejudiced, irrational or biased. (This connects, of course, to the universalist notions we examined in the last section.) If we take science as an example of an epistemically privileged sort of inquiry, we can say that scientists produce beliefs we should all adopt because they are true, and reciprocally we can say that people who don't accept these beliefs in the face of scientific evidence are prejudiced, irrational or biased.

Getting access to the True picture of the world will illuminate how we can act in the world as agents, because we can begin to understand the causal networks we are acting in. Knowing the objective world will allow us to understand what actions we need to take in order to obtain certain consequences. Understanding the real causal relations between the real objects will enable us to push the right balls into each other. Conversely, knowing how the world really is independent of our opinions about it will clarify which options are not open to us, ways in which the world constrains our

behavior.

Representationalists think that answering this sort of question will payoff practically. Having a set of justificatory habits that produce truth enables us to increase our understanding of the way the world really is, which, in turn, allows us to predict and control the world. So for representationalists, the practical success of science can be *explained* as a result of science amassing a body of true beliefs, which have translated into our ability to increase our standard of living and life expectancy. The reason science works so darn well, the reason why we have microwave ovens and computers, is because science relies on an epistemically privileged method not some half-baked prejudices - which is why a discipline like astrology is not scientific. Having a notion of truth - defined as a correspondence between our beliefs about reality and reality - in addition to a notion of justification helps to *explain* why certain beliefs are useful in predicting and manipulating the world. Justified beliefs that are successful are the ones that connect up with truth, or "our predictions succeed in so far as our beliefs fit reality" (ITGE, 1995: 285).

While lots of different understandings of representationalism have been proposed (variously relying on God, theories of representation, theories of meaning, theories of reference, etc.), the interest in truth as a correspondence between our beliefs and the world has persisted. Each of these views has tried to answer the representationalist question: "how can we acquire knowledge defined as a correspondence between our beliefs about the world and the world itself?" The assumptions in this question have provided a common framework for representationalists. Though representationalists have

often disagreed on how to go about defining correspondence, they have agreed that most

of the above assumptions are pretty obvious and intuitive.

Representationalists expected that once they were able to answer this question

they would be able to do a lot of interesting things.   These function-positions include:

(1) The inquiry function: answering the representationalist question will provide a motive for inquiry, guide our justification practices, delineate the relevant topics of inquiry and allow us to prioritize different sorts of inquiry; and

(2) The criterion of progress function: answering the representationalist question will provide us with a universal, ahistorical standard of progress, with which to judge our achievements; and

(3) The causality function: answering the representationalist question will illuminate the real causal relations in the world so that we know how we can intervene in the world in order to act so that particular consequences occur; we will also know when we can't change our circumstances, when the world determines our actions; and

(4) The utility function: answering the representationalist question will allow us to discern useful sorts of knowledge, the sorts of knowledge that allow us to develop new technologies, make good decisions and predict the world. [3]

Representationalists are reluctant to stop asking the representationalist question, because

they think that one or all of these functions are important things to be doing.   Not being

able to see a clear alternative way of accomplishing these needs, they hang onto the

representationalist question and assumptions regardless of how doubtful they are of being

able to develop a workable theory of representation.

So, how influential is representationalism today?   In some ways, once again, that

is a question better answered by a social science sort of analysis than a philosophical one.

As Rorty tells the story, this sort of concept of truth and knowledge has unfortunately

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[3] Functions (1)-(4), in many ways, are really simplifications of more complex clusters of functions.   For instance, function-position (1) involves a set of sub-function-positions, such as a motivation function, a

been, and still is, very influential in Western Culture -- it has both informed traditional

philosophical views of the modern period, contemporary analytic philosophy,[4] as well as

the common sense of western culture (ITGE, 1995: 299).

In the academy, it seems that two camps have been popular: those who subscribe

to this representationalist orientation, usually the natural scientists and some of the

"tougher" social scientists, and those who think that in addition to the pursuit of

knowledge, or more important than the pursuit of knowledge, there is the pursuit of the

betterment of human beings. This latter camp typically includes a lot of literature

professors, other humanities types and some of the "softer" social scientists.   C.P. Snow

described this situation as a division between two academic cultures, one broadly based

on a paradigm of physics and the other broadly based on a paradigm of literature.

Though the literature-like camp might not be that interested in representationalist

questions (though some of them indeed are), most of the physics-like camp still buys into

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guidance function, etc.   I've tried to group these functions into related sets so that we can have a clearer
understanding of the positions Rorty must address in his recontextualization.

[4]   While Rorty suggests that most analytic philosophers are still representationalist, many analytic
philosophers disagree.   Rorty seems to suggest that though analytic philosophy is not as
representationalists as it was during the days of Russell and the early Wittgenstein, it is still - by an large - a
representationalist discipline. As Rorty sees it:

> analytic philosophy is still committed to the construction of a *permanent, neutral
> framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture*. It is the notion that human activity
> (and inquiry, the search for knowledge, in particular) takes place within a framework
> which can be isolated prior to the conclusion of inquiry - a set of presuppositions
> discoverable a priori - which links contemporary philosophy to the Descartes-Locke-Kant
> tradition (Italics added, PMN, 1979:   8-9).

And in this respect, "the difference between 'analytic' and other sorts of philosophy is relatively
unimportant - a matter of style and tradition rather than a difference of 'method' or of first principles"
(PMN, 1979:   8).

However, recently analytic philosophy has seemed to move in a non-foundationalist, non-
representationalist direction.   See Aron Edidin's "What's an Epistemologist To Do?" *American
Philosophical Quarterly,* (Oct 1, 1994 v31 n4) p285.

representationalism.   Despite some inroads made with the popularization of Kuhn's The Structure of Scientific Revolutions, scientists and people who aspire to be scientists typically trade in metaphors of representation, regardless of how deeply thought out these conceptions of representation are.   The goal of science and some social scientists is still to map the natural world or the social world, respectively.

We also find this tacit sort of representationalism is culture in general.   Thomas McCarthy has suggested that these representationalist and metaphysical assumptions are thoroughly ingrained in our western culture (and probably other cultures as well). He claims that:

> whatever the sources, our ordinary, nonphilosophical truth talk and reality talk is shot through with just the sorts of idealizations that Rorty wants to purge. In everyday talk we normally mean by 'true' nothing like 'what our society lets us say' but rather something closer to 'telling it like it is, like it really is.' And by 'real' we normally mean nothing like 'refereed to in conformity with the norms of our culture' but rather something closer to 'there anyway, whether we think so or not.' (McCarthy, 1991: 16).

Though McCarthy makes this point in order to suggest that Rorty's position departs from necessary idealizations of communication (i.e., in the Habermasian line of philosophizing),[5] if he is right, then we also have some indication that Rorty's reform of the modern vocabulary is a radical and significant one.

So, it seems then that representationalism does structure a lot of how we view the world, both in the assumptions that shape the questions we ask and the reasons why we want to ask those questions. This forces Rorty to perform certain tasks in his

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[5]   McCarthy is responding to an earlier Rortyian claim that philosophers have somehow duped us into using this metaphysical language when really all we want to say (and all that people uncorrupted by philosophers do say) is pretty mundane.   This argument has been dropped, as far as I can see, when Rorty

recontextualization, in his advocacy for his neo-pragmatist vocabulary. Namely, it forces

him to either dissolve some or all of the function-positions this representationalist

question position is associated with, or reoccupy some or all of those function-positions

with neo-pragmatist sorts of questions.

In Summary

By understanding the positions of metaphysicians, moral universalists and

representationalists and the force of those questions for modernists, we can begin to

understand the felt-needs that participants in the modern vocabulary hold.   Insofar as

metaphysical comfort still seems to be a valuable commodity, Rorty will be unable to

persuade us to adopt his post-metaphysical vocabulary.   Insofar as moral universalist and

representationalist questions are seen as performing valuable intellectual work in our

culture, work that we want to do even if we find the proposed answers ill-suited to doing

the work, Rorty's neo-pragmatist vocabulary will have to provide us the resources, the

new sorts of questions, to do that work - or, illustrate to us how to stop wanting to do that

sort of work.   This discussion, then, points to the power and influence of this modern

vocabulary, and the questions and function-positions associated with it; a power and

influence that Rorty must either deflate or accommodate.   Examining the ways in which

Rorty tries to deflate and respond to these function-positions will be the topic of chapter

three.

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acknowledged that most of us, philosophers and nonphilosophers alike, are commonsensically
representationalist.   Rorty's goal now is to reform our common sense through his recontextualization.