

September 8, 2020

## Week 4 Presentation Notes

### Plan for Week 4:

1. Misak's rational reconstruction of the pragmatist tradition, and her complaints about Rorty's understanding of that tradition and his influence on it.
2. Classical American Pragmatism, Natural Science, and a Second Enlightenment.
3. A Rortyan critique of objectivity based on the 'vocabulary' vocabulary.

### **Part 1: Misak's rational reconstruction of the pragmatist tradition.**

1. Kuklick "Who Owns Pragmatism?" on the three contesting subdisciplines:
  - Historians of philosophy, in Philosophy departments,
  - Americanists, in American Studies departments,
  - Intellectual historians, in History departments.

Kuklick has professional credentials in all 3.

He got his philosophy Ph.D. from Cambridge, taught in the American Studies department at Yale, and was for many years Chair of the History department at Penn.

I am not aware of any other subfield of the history of philosophy that has similar competition from other disciplines. (If we move out of the *history* of philosophy, then the place of philosophy of mind in the larger enterprise of cognitive science is an obvious candidate.)

Germanists do read German Idealists, but largely defer to philosophers here.

I think that is true in Germany, too.

[Possibly: Schneewind anecdote.]

[Possibly: Cf. people asking whether religious studies, or anthropology, or economics, or philosophy is a **field or a discipline**. The former is unified by the *objects* addressed, the latter by the *methods* used to address them.]

Kuklick says of Misak, who is a philosopher (whose Ph.D. is also from Cambridge):

Here I focus on **one particularly smart and mildly eccentric treatment by Cheryl Misak** in her important *The American Pragmatists* (2014).

and

**Cheryl Misak is the jewel in the crown of the scholars of American philosophy.** Her latest book, *Cambridge Pragmatism: From Peirce and James to Ramsey and Wittgenstein* (2016) is a tour de force, highly to be recommended in its coupling of Cambridge, Massachusetts and Cambridge, England.

I fully endorse that assessment of Misak's significance.

She has only become more important (and more justly celebrated) with her new big book on Frank Ramsey, which emphasizes Peirce's influence on his thought.

No-one has done more to transform and improve our understanding of pragmatism than Cheryl Misak has done (and is doing).

A propos of this course: She thinks the most important contemporary pragmatist is Huw Price.

2. Misak's great achievement is to have offered a different way of thinking about the pragmatist tradition. Here she has 3 big good ideas:

- a) Distinguishing two substantially distinct strands of American Pragmatism.
- b) Adding Cambridge Pragmatism, principally Ramsey and Wittgenstein. (In a later generation, Huw Price for sure, and maybe Simon Blackburn. Getting into this narrative is part of what tempts Blackburn to call his view 'pragmatist').
- c) Seeing analytic philosophy of the '50s—Quine and Goodman and Sellars—as the result of synthesizing Vienna Circle empiricism and naturalism with pragmatist ideas from their teacher C. I. Lewis. (I want to see these as 2 neokantian streams of thought. Lewis's "conceptual pragmatism" goes with Royce's "absolute pragmatism".) Thus analytic philosophy is just the latest stage of the pragmatist tradition. Here Davidson should be mentioned, and perhaps Dummett (downstream from both Wittgenstein and Ramsey, even though he is Oxford, not Cambridge).

While wholly applauding these three insights, I want to adopt a more skeptical attitude toward a fourth strand of her understanding of the trajectory of pragmatism in Anglophone philosophy.

That is:

- d) Her assessment of Rorty, of whom she is almost unrelentingly critical.

3. Misak's recasting of the history of American Pragmatism.

- a) The inherited narrative she is contesting sees Charles Sanders Peirce as having initiated the pragmatist philosophical tradition, which was then continued by his younger, more popular and successful colleague William James, who was succeeded in a new generation by John Dewey.

[Aside:

The dawn of the twentieth century is marked in their pictures:

Peirce and James with the full beards characteristic of the last half of the nineteenth-century, and Dewey clean-shaven, as was to be the style of the new century.

Compare: Kant and Fichte wore powdered wigs, in the style of the eighteenth century (since some powerful men were bald or had grey hair, all males wore white wigs), while Hegel wore his natural hair, long and unpowdered, in the style of the new century.]

Like James before him, Dewey was the most famous and influential American philosopher of his generation.

But his influence waned in the 1930's, and the Deweyans were swept aside by the rise of analytic philosophy, with its emphasis on technical logic and philosophy of the physical sciences, under the twin influences of the English school of Russell and the German Vienna Circle of Carnap.

Pragmatism became a provincial backwater of the increasingly professionalized world of Anglophone philosophy, even in America—and it had never prospered in England.

During this period of the “eclipse” of pragmatism by analytic philosophy, the few who kept the faith alive got little respect.

[Anecdote about the sociology of knowledge dissertation that addressed the question: What motivates anyone to study pragmatism, given that one gets no respect in the profession for doing so?

The answer offered was: the philosophers who study pragmatism are driven to history because they are bad at logic, and to pragmatism because they don’t want to learn languages.

Well—no wonder they got no respect!

A corrosive dynamic and a self-fulfilling prophecy.

And there was, sadly, some truth to this analysis.]

Rorty’s blockbuster *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* of 1979, and the papers collected in *Consequences of Pragmatism* of 1982 vastly heightened the public philosophical profile of pragmatism.

Here was a first-rate philosopher, at what was then by consensus the best philosophy department in the world (his colleagues included David Lewis, Saul Kripke, Tom Nagel, and Tim Scanlon, with Donald Davidson a regular visitor—among others) championing pragmatism.

b) Misak thinks everything about this story is wrong.

- She points to Chauncey Wright as providing the original intellectual impetus for pragmatism—**Socrates** to Peirce’s **Plato**.
- And she distinguishes sharply between Peirce’s views and those of James and Dewey.
- The true heir of Peirce was C. I. Lewis (and Charles Morris).
- And his heirs were his students Quine and Sellars and Nelson Goodman, who were the best and among the most influential *analytic* philosophers of their generation.
- Like Peirce, they were creative logicians who applied logical techniques to transform philosophical questions.
- All of them were philosophers of science who thought of the task of understanding the best science of their day as a defining philosophical task.
- All of them thought the empirical methods of the natural sciences had been shown to be the best way to find out about the objective world.
- James and Dewey—and, following them, Rorty—didn’t care about logic at all.

- They devalued natural science in favor not only of the social sciences (in Dewey’s case), but of literature and art, as expressions of human spirit alongside which science could (grudgingly) be accorded equal status.
  - And they undercut and even ridiculed the idea of knowledge of objective facts.
  - James’s dictum that “the trail of the human serpent is over all,” was understood as entailing the interest-relativity of all human endeavors, including the natural sciences.
  - Pragmatism was not a philosophical movement in opposition to analytic philosophy, but one of its most important and lasting sources and influences.
  - The *progressive* wing of the movement, the Peirce-Lewis-Sellars-Quine wing was a major contributor to and tendency *within* analytic philosophy.
  - It was only the *regressive* wing of the pragmatist movement, the James-Dewey-Rorty wing, that stood in opposition.
  - And by championing the weakest pragmatist ideas and tendencies, Rorty did not make pragmatism popular, but at most notorious. He succeeded only in giving it a bad name.
  - For Rorty pitched pragmatism as a counter-tradition, in fundamental opposition to the very dominant analytic philosophy of his time, and roused a fire-storm of criticism from those committed to the philosophical programs he sought to undercut: epistemology, philosophy of language, philosophy of science, and the importance of logical methods in philosophy.
- c) I think Misak is absolutely right to distinguish the two strands of American pragmatist thought. And I have no quibbles with the *extension* of the distinction she draws, with Peirce, Lewis, Quine, and Sellars on one side, and James, Dewey, and Rorty on the other.
- i. For Misak, these are, basically, **Good** Pragmatism and **Bad** Pragmatism.
  - ii. Less polemically, we could bring in James’s terminology, and distinguish the two varieties of traditional pragmatism as ***tough-minded*** and ***tender-minded***. (James thought we should be synthesizing these attitudes, or at least find a more comprehensive point of view from which to appreciate them equally.)
  - iii. Though she doesn’t put it this way, the Peirce-Lewis strand that did influence analytic philosophy (for the better) can be thought of as the ***Enlightenment*** tradition in pragmatism, and the James-Dewey strand, which Rorty correctly sees as opposed to fundamental tenets of the analytic movement can be thought of as the ***Romantic*** tradition in pragmatism.
- I have in mind here the privileging of natural science (characteristic of Enlightenment) as opposed to a focus on art and literature (characteristic of Romanticism), expressing a prioritizing of conceptual thought over feelings and their expression.

(The commitment to some form of naturalism and empiricism also runs through the Peirce-Lewis pragmatists, uniting them to analytic philosophers. Here the opposition is less stark, since James and Dewey are also naturalists and endorse different kinds of empiricism. More on this later.)

Distinguishing these two tendencies within pragmatism is a deep, transformative insight. And the addition of the English Cambridge pragmatists, though less significant, is also true and important.

And Misak is right about the underground influence of pragmatism on classical analytic philosophy.

But I do want to contest her characterization of the relations between the two wings of pragmatism she distinguishes, and particularly the terms in which she opposes Rorty's vision to her own, both sociologically, and philosophically. On the latter score, she focuses on the notion of objectivity. Here I think she does not appreciate the nature and force of Rorty's antirepresentationalist objections to traditional ways of understanding objectivity.

4. Here is the line Misak thinks pragmatists need to walk on objectivity:

It is one thing to say a belief is true because the logical consequences that flow from it fit in harmoniously with our otherwise grounded knowledge; and quite another to call it true because it is pleasant to believe. [1909: 186–7]

The essential differences between James's and Peirce's accounts of truth is that the Peirce latches on to the first option of which Pratt speaks. Peircean pragmatism links truth to good and satisfactory consequences—those which are empirically confirmed, fit with our otherwise grounded knowledge, etc. [AIPi 264]

As Jeffrey Stout puts the point today: “getting something right . . . turns out to be among the human interests that need to be taken into account in an acceptably anthropocentric conception of inquiry as a social practice” ([43], p. 18). The norms of truth and rightness are interwoven throughout our practices of assertion, belief, and inquiry. [RPAP 380]

5. Misak **blames Rorty** for the damage his championing of the James-Dewey version of it did to the philosophical reputation of pragmatism.

As Ramberg says:

Misak's dialectical use of Rorty means that she can find nothing in his work that is both distinctive and of lasting value to pragmatism. He represents, in her story, what you get if you put James's psychologism and subjectivism through the linguistic turn and call the result pragmatism. [Ramberg 402]

Here is CM's issue with Rorty:

Rorty was fighting not just against analytic philosophy, but against philosophy in general. In his view, philosophy cannot answer important age-old questions. What it does is dissolve philosophical problems. Philosophy is merely a kind of “therapy”. It is more like poetry than

science. Philosophy must replace the idea of knowledge with the idea of hope and in doing so the value of philosophy is reduced almost to a vanishing point. [RPAP 379]

This description levels out RR's critique by jumping to (a caricature of) its conclusions and ignoring the arguments that lead him there.

But Rorty then takes a step beyond all other pragmatists. Inquirers aim not at truth, but at solidarity or what we have come to take as true. In his most extreme moods, he asserts that "truth" and "objectivity" are merely labels for what our peers will let us get away with saying ([40], p. 176). He would like to see a "post-philosophical culture" in which there are no appeals to authority of any kind, including appeals to truth and rationality ([41], p. xlii; [2], p. 71). Truth is "not the sort of thing one should expect to have an interesting philosophical theory about" ([41], p. xiii). We are to "substitute the idea of 'unforced agreement' for that of 'objectivity'" in every domain of inquiry—science as well as morals and politics ([39], pp. 36–38). [RPAP 380]

### Conclusion:

Whatever the path pragmatism takes from this point onward, one thing is clear. The epistemology and the view of truth that dominated analytic philosophy from the 1930s logical empiricism right through to the reign of Quine, Goodman, and Sellars in the 1950s–60s was in fact pragmatism. The stars of modern analytic philosophy were very much in step with pragmatism during the years in which it was supposedly driven out of philosophy departments by analytic philosophers. It was Rorty who broke with the direction the pragmatist tradition was taking and returned to James, even further radicalizing James's view. Pragmatism, that is, had a strong and unbroken analytic history until Rorty came along and cast aspersions on that kind of pragmatism. [RPAP 380]

From "American Pragmatism and Indispensability Arguments":

*The Debate Continues: Contemporary Pragmatism* I want to turn to some brief and speculative thoughts as to how the debate manifests itself today. Although Quine started off calling himself a pragmatist, [BB: footnote is to *Ontological Relativity*, which is quite late (1968), and was a *pro forma* remark since these were his Dewey lectures at Columbia] he soon grew wary of the label. Perhaps he wanted to seem to not be simply trumpeting his teacher's view, although trumpet Lewis' view he most certainly did. Perhaps he felt that James had captured the pragmatist flag and wanted to distance himself from the position that had attracted so much scorn from Russell, Moore, and others. What-ever the explanation, Quine abandoned the pragmatist camp, leaving the ground wide open to be taken over by a new Jamesian.

That new Jamesian was Richard Rorty, who wanted to "substitute the idea of 'unforced agreement' for that of 'objectivity'" (1991: 38). It is no surprise to find Rorty saying that his own narratives about pragmatism "tend to center around James's version . . . of the pragmatic theory of truth" (Rorty 1995c: 71). For one way of thinking of Rorty's position is as follows: if we need to think *p*, then we ought to believe *p*. There is nothing to say about truth and warrant over and above that. Given that norms are human norms, there is nothing but play and irony left to adjudicate between them. There is no place for the check of experience. All is chosen, if not by individuals, then by communities. By redescribing history and circumstances from our

own point of view, we can say “thus I willed it” and we can make ourselves authors of our own stories (Rorty 2000 [1989]: 40).

6. Some points in RR’s favor (and some not):

0) On the subject of **logic**, Rorty is definitely in the James-Dewey tradition.

Not that he was ignorant:

[Anecdote: In 1956, Rorty (having been drafted into the Army) got a medal for suggesting using Reverse Polish Notation, to a visiting Colonel.

But:

Rorty remark (in conversation):

“Nothing of any philosophical significance has ever happened within 6 feet in any direction of a quantifier symbol.”]

Though Misak is deeply right (and was the first to point out this very important point) about the two wings of pragmatism, I do not accept all of her characterizations of the differences between them.

A) RR was right, I think, about the “eclipse narrative”.

*None* of the analytic philosophers who, CM *properly* identifies as pragmatists, were willing to avow that title.

Pragmatism *was* (and is) marginalized in analytic philosophy (AP).

**Here refer to the ngram on ‘pragmatism’, ‘Rorty’, ‘Quine’, ‘Sellars’, ‘Carnap’, from Handout.**

B) RR himself is the one who realized that Sellars and Quine were making pragmatist arguments.

That is the principal argument of the central chapter of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

I’m pretty sure that unless this claim had been in the air from him, CM would not have picked it up. She just didn’t know where the idea came from.

In fact, **Kuklick** already had this idea in 1970 (when he wrote his Royce book), and it is one of the principal themes of his history of the Harvard philosophy department.

The central argument of the central chapter (Four) of *PMN* is that Sellars and Quine deployed recognizably *pragmatist* arguments against logical empiricism, in the person of Carnap.

Further, he takes Davidson to be their most prominent pragmatist successor.

And he takes S&Q to be the most important analytic philosophers of their generation, and Davidson of his.

So he, too, finds a crucial pragmatist strand at the heart of analytic philosophy.

He does think that it has not been recognized as such.

And he is right about that.

I take it that the objections of S&Q were equally addressed at their common teacher, C. I. Lewis as to Carnap.

I have argued that what these two have in common is that they were the principal *neokantians* in the anglophone philosophy of their age.

So on Rorty's story, the trouble with C. I. Lewis is that he is not pragmatist *enough*.

He let the neo-Kantianism he saw as background for his teacher Royce get the better of the pragmatism of his teacher James.

None of Sellars, Quine, and Davidson (nor Dummett, whom I would include), nor, for that matter, Wittgenstein or Heidegger, ever accepted the label "pragmatist."

So Rorty is doing important work in finding and characterizing such a strand.

And that is an enterprise in which he is at one with Misak.

They *both* want to contest the self-understanding of late TwenCen analytic philosophy, which does not consider itself pragmatist *at all*. And that is not something the analytic philosophers "learned" from Rorty—that is, it is not because they (like Misak) were recoiling from Rorty that they abjured the title "pragmatist."

C) She does not appreciate the extent to which RR is, was, and remains an analytic philosopher, of just the pragmatist sort she identifies. Analytic philosophy, too, has two strands of thought, one of which is *pragmatist*, and one of which is *representationalist*.

Jerry Fodor thought that philosophical ideas that Misak and I are calling "pragmatism" had taken over his generation of philosophy, in the persons of Quine, Davidson, and Dummett. What he objected to was precisely the decentering of representation as the axial concept of semantics and the philosophy of mind.

D) Ramberg, in "Being Constructive: Misak's Creation of Pragmatism," makes the distinction within philosophy generally in a different, more general way.

His essay begins by using Rorty's 'vocabulary' vocabulary.

BR uses it first to point out that one *uses* some vocabulary in addressing any philosophical issue. In the philosophical use-vocabulary one formulates the issue, refines it, applies distinctions, compares and contrasts it with others, and so on.

BR then divides philosophers into those who do *not*, and those who *do* worry about the historical process that generated and shaped that philosophical use-vocabulary.

[Here could offer the two descriptions of my teacher Gil Harman—who typically urged graduate students never to read anything written more than 5 years ago. His rationale: Anything written earlier will have been written about further recently, if there are any ideas of any value in it. And you might as well start with the latest, most informed and up-to-date take on it.

Two ways to think about this:

1. He is the most ahistorical philosopher imaginable.



2. Wrong, he is steeped in the history of philosophy, and his reading of that history informs and directs everything he does: the questions he asks, the methods he uses, and the criteria of adequacy he applies to responses.

It is just that he thinks the history of philosophy begins with Quine.]

E) Later on, I want to say something about Rorty's *arguments* for rejecting classical *representationalist* conceptions of objectivity.

CM does not engage with the arguments, drawn from Quine's pragmatism, that lead RR to disparage objectivity.

They do not have James-Dewey antecedents, except insofar as Quine does.

They come from the 'vocabulary' vocabulary.

7. First, I'd like to say something about the Enlightenment wing of pragmatism, by talking about Peirce's insights.

This is partly to set up a resonant and suggestive contrast between *two senses in which pragmatism can be seen to complete the Enlightenment*:

- a) Peirce's original sense, and
- b) Rorty's late, pragmatism as antiauthoritarianism Girona-era view (foreshadowed earlier, but not emphasized), which *does* come out of the Romantic James-Dewey wing of pragmatism, even though it takes the form of a way of understanding *Rorty's* (Romantic) pragmatism as completing the Enlightenment project.

On this view, the two wings end by contesting the legacy of the Enlightenment.

Note that we Hegelians are in the business, *inter alia*, of synthesizing the insights of the Enlightenment with those of Romanticism. [That is what I will eventually do—Week 7—in wheeling in Hegel to reconcile Rorty's insights and a rehabilitated notion of objectivity (in my Spinoza lectures).]

**Part Two: Classical American Pragmatism, Natural Science, and a Second Enlightenment.**

**Classical American Pragmatists, Natural Science, and  
the Reconciliation of Naturalism and Empiricism**

Because classical American pragmatism is the topic of the controversy between Rorty and Misak, I want to say something about how I see it. Here I want to talk principally about Peirce's vision.

**I. A Second Enlightenment**

Classical American pragmatism can be viewed as a minor, parochial philosophical movement that was theoretically derivative and practically and politically inconsequential. From this point of view—roughly that of Russell and Heidegger (Mandarins speaking for two quite different philosophical cultures)—it is an American echo, in the last part of the nineteenth century, of the British utilitarianism of the first part. What is echoed is a crass shopkeeper's sensibility that sees everything through the reductive lenses of comparative profit and loss. Bentham and Mill had sought a secular basis for moral, political, and social theory in the bluff bourgeois bookkeeping habits of the competitive egoist, for whom the form of a reason for action is an answer to the question "What's in it for me?" James and Dewey then show up as adopting this conception of a *practical* reason and extending it to the *theoretical* sphere of epistemology, semantics, and the philosophy of mind. *Rationality* in general appears as *instrumental intelligence*: a generalized capacity for getting what one wants. From this point of view, the truth is what works;

knowledge is a species of the useful; mind and language are tools. The instinctive materialism and anti-intellectualism of uncultivated common sense is given refined expression in the form of a philosophical theory.

The utilitarian project of founding morality on instrumental reason is notoriously subject to serious objections, both in principle and in practice. But it is rightfully seen as the progenitor of contemporary rational choice theory, which required only the development of the powerful mathematical tools of modern decision theory and game theory to emerge (for better or worse) as a dominant conceptual framework in the social sciences. Nothing comparable can be said about the subsequent influence of the pragmatists' extension of instrumentalism to the theoretical realm. In American philosophy, the heyday of Dewey quickly gave way to the heyday of Carnap, and the analytic philosophy to which Carnap's logical empiricism gave birth supplanted and largely swept away its predecessor. Although pragmatism has some prominent recent heirs and advocates—most notably, perhaps, Richard Rorty and Hilary Putnam—there are not many contemporary American philosophers working on the central topics of truth, meaning, and knowledge who would cite pragmatism as a central influence in their thinking.

**(Huw Price** is an important exception.)

But classical American pragmatism can also be seen differently, as a movement of world historical significance—as the announcement, commencement, and first formulation of the fighting faith of a second Enlightenment. For the pragmatists, like their Enlightenment predecessors, reason is the sovereign force in human life. And for the later *philosophes*, as for the earlier, reason in that capacity is to be understood on the model provided by the forms of

understanding distinctive of the natural sciences. But the sciences of the late nineteenth century, from which the pragmatists took their cue, were very different from those that animated the first enlightenment. The philosophical picture that emerged of the rational creatures who pursue and develop that sort of understanding of their surroundings was accordingly also different.

Understanding and explanation are coordinate concepts. Explanation is a kind of *saying*: making claims that render something intelligible. It is a way of engendering understanding by essentially discursive means. There are, of course, different literary approaches to the problem of achieving this end, different strategies for doing so. But there are also different operative conceptions of what counts as doing it—that is, of what one needs to do to have done it. It is a change of the latter sort (bringing in its train, of course, a change of the former sort) that the pragmatists pursue. For the original Enlightenment, explaining a phenomenon (occurrence, state of affairs, process) is showing why what *actually* happened *had* to happen that way, why what is actual is (at least conditionally) *necessary*. By contrast, for the new pragmatist Enlightenment, it is possible to explain what remains, and is acknowledged as, *contingent*.

Understanding whose paradigm is Newton's physics consists of universal, necessary, eternal principles, expressed in the abstract, impersonal language of pure mathematics.

Understanding whose paradigm is Darwin's biology is a concrete, situated narrative of local, contingent, mutable practical reciprocal accommodations of particular creatures and habitats.

In addition, the nineteenth century was “the statistical century,” which saw the advent of new forms of explanation in natural and social sciences. In place of deducing what happens from exceptionless laws, it puts a form of intelligibility that consists in showing what made the events *probable*. Accounts in terms both of natural selection and of statistical likelihood show

how observed order can arise, contingently, but explicably, out of chaos—as the cumulative diachronic and synchronic result respectively of individually random occurrences.

## II. Two Models of Nature and Science

The mathematical laws articulating the basic order of the universe were for enlightened thinkers of the seventeenth and eighteenth century the ultimate given, the foundational unexplainable explainers—structural features of things so basic that this explanatory residue might even (as it did for the transitionally post-religious Deists) require and so justify a final, minimal, carefully circumscribed, nostalgic appeal to the Creator. Charles Sanders Peirce, the founding genius of American pragmatism, elaborated from the new selectional and statistical forms of scientific theory a philosophical vision that sees even the laws of physics as contingently emerging by ***selectional processes—the structure common to evolution and individual learning***—from primordial indeterminateness. They are *adaptational habits*, each of which is in a statistical sense relatively stable and robust in the environment provided by the rest. The old forms of scientific explanation then appear as special, limiting cases of the new. The now restricted validity of appeal to laws and universal principles is explicable against the wider background provided by the new scientific paradigms of how regularity can arise out of and be sustained by variability. The “calm realm of laws” of the first Enlightenment becomes for the second a dynamic population of habits, winnowed from a larger one, which has so far escaped extinction by maintaining a more or less fragile collective self-reproductive equilibrium. It is not just that we cannot be sure that we have got the principles right. For the correct principles and laws may themselves change. The pragmatists endorse a kind of *ontological fallibilism* or *mutabilism*. Since laws emerge only statistically, they may change. No Darwinian adaptation is final, for the environment it is adapting to may change—indeed *must* eventually change, in response to *other* Darwinian adaptations. And the relatively settled, fixed properties of things, their *habits*, as

Peirce and Dewey would say, are themselves to be understood as such adaptations. The pragmatists were naturalists, but they saw themselves confronting a new sort of nature, a nature that is fluid, stochastic, with regularities the statistical product of many particular contingent interactions between things and their ever-changing environments, hence emergent and potentially evanescent, floating statistically on a sea of chaos.

The science to which this later enlightenment looked for its inspiration had changed since that of the earlier in more than just the conceptual resources that it offered to its philosophical interpreters and admirers. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the impact of science was still largely a matter of its *theories*. Its devotees dreamed of, predicted, and planned for great social and political transformations that they saw the insights of the new science as prefiguring and preparing. But during this period those new ways of thinking were largely devoid of practical consequences. They were manifestations, rather than motors, of the rising tide of modernity. By the middle of the nineteenth century, though, technology, the practical arm of science, had changed the world radically and irrevocably through the Industrial Revolution. From the vantage point of established industrial capitalism, science appeared as the most spectacularly successful social institution of the previous two hundred years because it had become not only a *practice*, but a *business*. Its practical successes paraded as the warrant of its claims to theoretical insight. Technology *embodies* understanding. The more general philosophical lessons the pragmatists drew from science for an understanding of the nature of reason and its central role in human life accordingly sought to comprehend intellectual understanding as an aspect of effective agency, to situate knowing *that* (some claim is true) in the larger field of knowing *how* (to do something). The sort of explicit reason that can be

codified in principles appears as just one, often dispensable, expression of the sort of implicit intelligence that can be exhibited in skillful, because experienced, practice—flexible, adaptable habit that has emerged in a particular environment, by selection via a learning process.

Like their Enlightenment ancestors, the pragmatists were not only resolutely *naturalist* in their ontology, but also broadly *empiricist* in their epistemology. For both groups, science is the measure of all things—of those that are, that they are, and of those that are not, that they are not (as Sellars put it). And for both, science is not just *one* sort, but the very form of knowing: what it knows not, is not knowledge. But in place of the atomistic sensationalist empiricism of the older scientism (which was later rescued and resuscitated by the application of powerful modern mathematical and logical techniques, to yield twentieth century logical empiricism) the pragmatists substituted a more holistic, less reductive, practical empiricism. Both varieties give pride of place to experience in explaining the content and rationality of knowledge and agency. But their understandings of that concept are very different, corresponding to the different characters of the science of their times.

The older empiricism thought of the unit of experience as self-contained, self-intimating events: episodes that constitute knowings just in virtue of their brute occurrence. These primordial acts of awareness are then taken to be available to provide the raw materials that make any sort of learning possible (paradigmatically, by association and abstraction). By contrast to this notion of experience as *Erlebnis*, the pragmatists (having learned the lesson from Hegel) conceive experience as *Erfahrung*. For them the unit of experience is a Test-Operate-Test-Exit cycle of perception, action, and further perception of the results of the action. On this model, experience



is not an *input* to the process of learning. Experience *is* the process of learning: the statistical emergence by selection of behavioral variants that survive and become habits insofar as they are, in company with their fellows, adaptive in the environments in which they are successively and successfully exercised. (This is the sense of 'experience', as Dewey says, in which the job ad specifies "Three years of experience necessary.") The rationality of science is best epitomized not in the occasion of the theorist's sudden intellectual glimpse of some aspect of the true structure of reality, but in the process by which the skilled practitioner coaxes usable observations by experimental intervention, crafts theories by inferential postulation and extrapolation, and dynamically works out a more or less stable but always evolving accommodation between the provisional results of those two enterprises. The distinctive pragmatist shift in imagery for the mind is not from mirror to lamp, but from telescope and microscope to flywheel governor.

These new forms of naturalism and empiricism, updated so as to be responsive to the changed character and circumstances of nineteenth-century science, meshed with each other far better than their predecessors had. Early modern philosophers notoriously had trouble fitting human knowledge and agency into its mechanist, materialist version of the natural world. A Cartesian chasm opened up between the activity of the theorist, whose understanding consists in the manipulation of algebraic symbolic representings, and what is thereby understood: the extended, geometrical world represented by those symbols. Understanding, discovering, and acting on principles exhibited for them one sort of intelligibility, matter moving according to eternal, ineluctable laws another.

On the pragmatist understanding, however, knower and known are alike explicable by appeal to the same general mechanisms that bring order out of chaos, settled habit from random variation: the statistical selective structure shared by processes of evolution and of learning. That structure ties together all the members of a great continuum of being stretching from the processes by which physical regularities emerge, through those by which the organic evolves locally and temporarily stable forms, through the learning processes by which the animate acquire locally and temporarily adaptive habits, to the intelligence of the untutored common sense of ordinary language users, and ultimately to the methodology of the scientific theorist—which is just the explicit, systematic refinement of the implicit, unsystematic but nonetheless intelligent procedures characteristic of everyday practical life. For the first time, the rational practices embodying the paradigmatic sort of reason exercised by scientists understanding natural processes become visible as continuous with, and intelligible in just the same terms as, the physical processes paradigmatic of what is understood. This unified vision stands at the center of the pragmatists' second Enlightenment.

### III. Pragmatism and Romanticism

A number of these master ideas of classical American pragmatism evidently echo themes introduced and pursued by earlier romantic critics of the first Enlightenment. Pragmatism and romanticism both reject spectator theories of knowledge, according to which the mind knows best when it interferes least and is most passive, merely reflecting the real. Knowledge is seen rather as an aspect of agency, a kind of doing. Making, not finding, is the genus of human involvement with the world. They share a suspicion of laws, formulae, and deduction. Abstract principle is hollow unless rooted in and expressive of concrete practice. Reality is revealed in the first instance by lived experience, in the life world. Scientific practice and the theories it produces cannot be understood apart from their relation to their origin in the skillful attunements of everyday life. Pragmatists and romantics accordingly agree in rejecting universality as a hallmark of understanding. Essential features of our basic, local, temporary, contextualized cognitive engagements with things are leached out in their occasional universalized products. Both see necessity as exceptional, and as intelligible only against the background of the massive contingency of human life. Both emphasize biology over physics, and see in the concept of the organic conceptual resources to heal the dualistic wound inflicted by the heedless use of an over-sharp distinction between mind and world. Where the European Enlightenment had seen the “natural light of reason” as *universal* in the sense of *shared*, or *common*, so that what one disinterested, selfless scientist could add as a brick to the edifice of knowledge, another could in principle do as well, the pragmatists, looking at the division of labor in what had become a modern industrial economy, saw the enterprise of reason as *social* in a more genuine, articulated, *ecological* sense, in which the contributions of individuals are not interchangeable or fungible, in

which each has potentially a unique contribution to make to the common enterprise, which requires many different sorts of skills, responses, ideas, and assessments, all collectively serving as the environment in which each adapts and evolves. Here too they made some common cause with the romantics on some general issues, while offering their own distinctive blend of rationalism, naturalism, and Darwinian-statistical scientism as a way of filling in those approaches.

Nonetheless, pragmatism is not a kind of romanticism. Though the two movements of thought share an antipathy to Enlightenment intellectualism, pragmatism does not recoil into the rejection of reason, into the privileging of feeling over thought, intuition over experience, or of art over science. Pragmatism offers a conception of reason that is practical rather than intellectual, expressed in intelligent doings rather than abstract sayings. Flexibility and adaptability are its hallmarks, rather than mastery of unchanging universal principles. It is **the reason of Odysseus rather than Plato**. But both are thought of as part of the natural world—in the sense in which natural science is acknowledged to have final authority over claims about nature. The pragmatists are also materialists—though theirs is Darwinian, rather than Newtonian materialism. Evolutionary natural history aside, the biology that inspires them is the result of the shift of attention (largely effected in Germany in the first half of the nineteenth century) from *anatomy* to *physiology*, from *structure* to *function*. The climate of German romanticism may have provided an encouraging environment for this development, but the vitalistic biology that provided their organic metaphors was only a by-then-embarrassing, prescientific precursor of the recognizably modern sort of biology pursued in the German laboratories in which William James trained.

In fact, romanticism had almost no direct influence on American pragmatism—another point of contrast with the various forms of nineteenth-century materialism in Europe. There was an indirect influence, through Hegel’s idealism (which was particularly important for Peirce and Dewey)—but Hegel’s rationalism mattered as much for them as his romanticism. The Transcendentalism of Emerson is another conduit for idiosyncratically filtered and transfigured romantic ideas. It was pervasive, though perhaps not dominant, in the Boston milieu in which Charles Peirce, William James, and Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. (who was a pragmatist, even though he disavowed the label because he associated it with James’s “sentimental” attempt to find a place for religion in the modern world-view) were first acculturated, and it clearly affected their thought in complex ways. But the pragmatists thought of themselves as continuing the Enlightenment philosophical tradition of Descartes, Locke, Hume, and Kant—all of whom thought that being a philosopher meant being a philosopher of *science*, understanding above all what the new science had to teach us not only about the world, but about us knowers of it and agents in it. The advances of nineteenth century science were to provide the corrective needed to remedy the conceptual pathologies to which the giants of the Enlightenment had fallen prey. Those advances, properly understood, would make it possible to reconcile its central rationalist and materialist impulses in an irenic empiricist naturalism. Although pursuing some elements of the anti-Enlightenment agenda of romanticism by quite other means, the pragmatists always thought of themselves as offering friendly amendments in support of the basic philosophical mission of rethinking inherited ideas of rationality, understanding, agency, and self, in the light of the very best contemporary scientific understanding of the natural world.

**Part Three: A Rortyan critique of objectivity based on the ‘vocabulary’ vocabulary.**

These considerations about objectivity (as vocabulary-independence) of some sort will take us forward to the second half of the semester: to Price’s global expressivism.

8. Rorty first enforces Kant’s distinction between claims about what is going on in the *objective, causal* order and claims made in the *normative* order of *justification* and reasons (reason relations, one consideration being a reason for another).

He then understands the latter in *social* terms.

He then introduces the ‘vocabulary’ vocabulary. Think here of Ramberg’s distinction between philosophers who do, and philosophers who do not, think about the *historical antecedents and credentials* of their use-vocabulary.

Rorty is asking a question not about specifically *philosophical* vocabularies, but about the ground-level descriptive and explanatory vocabularies we use in empirical investigation.

Vocabularies will be in the normative order: they are articulated by reason-relations.

But the acts of using vocabulary, in accord with the norms implicit in social practices, are also in the causal order.

9. Some issues Rorty has with conceptions of objectivity, rooted in considerations about vocabularies:

- a) I have mentioned before Rorty’s suspicion of any claim or argument that requires *quantifying over all vocabularies*.
- b) The *PMN* concern for the nature of the ***epistemologically and semantically privileged representations***—which understands their content as having to be both possessed, semantically, and understood or grasped epistemologically in an *immediate* and so *atomistic* way (independently of the contentfulness or capacity to grasp others—shifts to concern for the nature of ***ontologically or metaphysically privileged vocabularies***.

A principal issue is about the nature of this privilege.

**What determines what is a better vocabulary: us, or the world?**

A certain conception of objectivity insists that it must make sense to say: the world.

This is the thought that one has gone wrong if one is committed to there being “**Nature’s own vocabulary.**”

This is a vocabulary that is privileged, relative to other actual and possible vocabularies (cf. the worry about this sort of quantification over vocabularies, in (a)) just by its representational relation to what it is about, construed as itself an objective, vocabulary-independent or vocabulary-transcendent affair.

And there would seem to be two possibilities about representational relations:

- i) either the relation between a vocabulary and what it represents (supposing it does) is itself vocabulary-relative, or
- ii) it is vocabulary-independent.

The issue is: is the relation between represented and representing objective or represented becomes is the ontological privileging of some vocabularies *objective* or *vocabulary-relative*?

Is the privileging of one vocabulary over another intelligible in objective, causal, natural-scientific terms vocabulary? Or does it require vocabularies of social practice?

c) In the case of objectivity in the sense of vocabulary-independence, what sort of dependence is being denied?

What is ultimately at issue in either case is how we understand what is *really* a reason for what, a *justification* for what.

(Here concern with *truth* rather than *justification* is at worst a *distraction*, and at best a *detour*. It is only a detour iff there is a route from the account of truth to an account of justification and what is a reason for or against what. For, Rorty reminds us, giving and assessing reasons is what we actually *do*, the practices we actually engage in. To be sure, in making claims (using declarative sentences in a free-standing, force-bearing way) we are *taking* some claims to be true. But the real business is defending, challenging, and assessing such claims. A theory of truth (e.g. a causal, objective, scientific one) illuminates our practice, in the sense of being normatively relevant to it, only if at some point we can bring it to bear critically to assess those practices of justification, of giving, challenging, and defending reasons. )

d) Skepticism about *the Kantian idea of apportioning responsibility for some aspects of our vocabulary-in-use* (RR's use of 'vocabulary' never addresses uninterpreted calculi. That is part of the Quine-Wittgenstein point about natural language use: vocabularies include their use, 'vocabulary' is a way of talking about the use of linguistic expressions = sign designs.) to what we are talking *about* (building in the assumption that representation is an appropriate model) and some of it to *us* and *how* we are talking about it. This is apportioning responsibility for some features of our talk (say, the preference for *simple* theories) to representings rather than representeds.

This is the idea that is behind the neoKantian Carnapian division of labor between fixing *meanings* and fixing *theories* (language and belief). For Carnap takes the first to be up to us (metalinguistic pragmatism) and the second to be dictated by the world. We are *wholly authoritative* about what language to adopt, and then how things objectively are is *wholly authoritative* about what is true in that language. This is a distinctively TwenCen version of the Kant bifurcation thought, and it is a particularly sharp and extreme version of it. In effect: the concepts are our responsibility, the intuitions the world's.

(Kant himself has a much more complex and nuanced view.)

Rorty is extremely suspicious of this entire question. He is often mistaken (for instance by Misak) as claiming that *all* of it is up to us, and *none* to be attributed to the world we are talking about. But in fact, he rejects the demand to apportion responsibility this way, as a pathology of representationalism. He considers the search for “Nature’s own vocabulary,” as in his colleague David Lewis, as a *reductio* of representationalist ways of thinking about vocabularies.

Misak assumes that this is a good question, and takes RR to have a subjectivist response to it. In fact he rejects the question.

This is the biggest complaint I have with her attitude toward Rorty.

It is of a piece with Ramberg’s diagnosis: Rorty is critical about the neokantian representationalist vocabulary, based on his reading of its historical antecedents. Misak is not—though she *is* a critical, rationally reconstructive reinterpreter of the *pragmatist* tradition.

Goodman: you don’t think the world speaks English, do you? Surely that our theories are in English is a feature we are responsible for, not the world?

But then what about the fact that Galileo found it useful to express by saying that “the book of Nature is written in the language of mathematics”?

There is at least a compare-and-contrast job to be done on this heading w/res to the two claims:

- i) our theories are written in English, and
- ii) our theories are written in mathematics. Is it a fact about the world that mathematics is the right (a good?) way to describe and explain it, in a way that the fact that English is good for formulating our theories is not?
- iii) Another consideration in the vicinity of the Goodman one, like it, pumping our intuitions that there must be *some* sense to be made of the Kantian bifurcation of responsibility thought, is provided by **Cambridge properties and Cambridge changes**. For they are genuine “action at a distance.” Something changes (really changes, we want to say) in Provo Utah, and I am changed in Pennsylvania (instantly), without causal influence. For I now no longer have the property of having the same eye color as the oldest living inhabitant of Provo Utah. (The old, brown-eyed dear passed on, and the currently oldest living inhabitant has blue eyes.)

Consider cases like these in connection with Enlightenment ideas about activity, passivity, and causation.

The Rorty line of thought denies the ultimate intelligibility of a distinction between Cambridge changes and real changes, denies that there are any properties that are ontologically more basic (in a non vocabulary-relative way) than any others. Of course, *relative to a vocabulary*, some properties and so changes are more basic. The question is whether we can make sense of such a thing in a non-vocabulary-relative way.



David Lewis gets his metaphysical-ontological enterprise off the ground by assuming that there is such a distinction, since there *must* be, according to these intuitions. He doesn't tell us how to draw it, does not respond to the pragmatist challenge to the very idea of such a vocabulary-independent bifurcation of properties into natural or basic ones and unnatural, gerrymandered, or artificial ones. He really thinks some properties are "merely disjunctive" and others not. Assume that, and one can work in his metaphysical vocabulary. But how can one make sense of the distinction? How must one be thinking about vocabularies to do so? Rorty might not be right about **the ultimate vocabulary-relativity of all such questions**. But the challenge he is presenting is a real one, not a frivolous or silly one.

10. Again, responsibility is a *normative* notion. Social pragmatism about normativity is going to think that these facts the neokantian interrogates about apportioning responsibility to us or to what we are talking about, cannot be objective. They must be social. Perhaps not a matter of utility for us, but dependent on *something* about our activity. And the overarching question for this bit of the session is whether and in what sense such apportioning of responsibility to representeds and representers or the activity of representing (expressing in a vocabulary, or by deploying or using a vocabulary) is itself a vocabulary-relative or vocabulary-dependent activity.

Here:

a) The fact that (view of) representation as itself a normative matter (of authority of representeds over representings, responsibility of representings to represented in the sense that the latter provide the standard for normative assessments of the correctness of the latter, in a distinctive semantic sense of 'correctness') connects

b) the view of social pragmatism about norms

Here the social-pragmatism-about-norms thought that privilege is a normative concept, and that all normative statuses are social statuses, hence not something objective

c) Combines with

The idea of Kantian bifurcation of responsibility: the claim that it makes sense to attribute responsibility for *some* features of our talk to us (our embodiment, history, contingencies of our communities and practices) and *some* to what we are talking *about*.