

August 25, 2020

Plan for Week 2:

Part One:

Rorty's basic idea articulated, in three parts:

- 1) History: neokantianism vs. socialized, historicized, naturalized alternative.
- 2) Functional epistemological assimilation of two kinds of privileged representations: sense impressions and representings of meaning (meanings thought of representationally, instead of functionally).
- 3) The holist and pragmatist common core of Sellars's arguments against sense-givenness and Quine's arguments against meaning-givenness (2 myths).

Part Two:

Issues and consequences raised by the basic idea, in three parts:

- 4) Relations of
 - α) epistemological foundationalism and
 - β) semantic representationalism.

Relation of these two to causes/reasons distinction (what Locke got wrong and Kant got right).

- 5) Metaphilosophical view:
 - Kant's version of the classic Platonic view of philosophy, as sitting in judgment over, and having a distinctive kind of authority over, all other attempts to understand—in virtue of its understanding of understanding, its knowledge of what knowledge consists in.
 - The relations of this view to α) epistemological foundationalism and β) semantic representationalism, as in (4).
- 6) Why the Kantian version of the Platonic metaphilosophical view is undercut by *pragmatism*, which historicizes, socializes, and naturalizes the practices in which understanding consists, and thereby gives sociologists, historians, journalists, and the like equal authority in understanding understanding. We return to (1) above.

Part One:

1. RR sees the history of philosophy since Kant as a Manichean struggle. He sees the struggle between them as dominating the 19th century, and then being re-enacted in the 20th century.

The two camps are:

- a) Neokantianism, going through Marburg (Cohen and Natorp) and Freiburg (Rickert and Windelband) neokantians to C.I. Lewis (fan of givenness, and Sellars's particular target) and Carnap. [See handout on neokantians.]
- b) (From remarks in Introduction): Hegel had socialized and historicized philosophy, and Marx had naturalized it. By the end of the century you could see the possibility of this bringing of philosophy back down to earth—in a way that connects it to the rest of the high culture in much different ways than the Plato-Kant claim to sovereign authority did—as the way forward. That is what Rorty's pragmatist heroes did.

It was not to be:

- c) But Russell and Husserl, each in his own way (Husserl much more directly motivated by Kant, Russell in part by Frege, whose relationship to Kant is complicated and really important to sort out), found something for philosophy to be apodictic about, a vantage-point from which philosophy could survey and sit in judgment over the attempts at knowledge by other parts of the high culture (the elements that try to *understand* and *develop* or advance the culture).
- d) This picture underwrites the first of Rorty's astonishing claims: that analytic philosophy is just the latest phase of neokantianism.
Rorty's contemporary analytic philosophers would have been (and were) astonished to be told that they were **neokantians**.

After all, Kant had been read out of the analytic canon by Russell, who took it that the Hegelian rot had set in already with Kant's idealism. He saw, presciently, that one cannot open the door wide enough to let Kant in, and then shut it quickly enough to keep Hegel out. But Kant *had* been excluded. Even Sellars, who unlike Carnap explicitly avowed his Kantianism, took it that the predominant tenor of his times in Anglophone philosophy was *empiricism*—specifically, the *logical* empiricism of Carnap, and its development by Quine, uneasily packages together with a kind of pragmatism. Sellars thought that they way forward for philosophy in the second half of the twentieth century was to “move analytic philosophy from its Humean to its Kantian phase.”

But Rorty saw Kant's fingerprints all over contemporary philosophy.

- i. The idea that philosophy of language is “first philosophy” (as Dummett put it), and that it and a suitably linguistically inflected philosophy of mind could serve as successor subjects to epistemology as the *general* theory of *representation* is through and through Kantian methodologically.
- ii. And Rorty saw the specific emphasis on understanding the *language semantically*, and the possibility of *knowledge epistemologically*, in terms of the two species of representation Kant had distinguished, sense experience and logically-elaborated meaning-analytic reason-relations, as structuring that methodological commitment.

Rorty's diagnosis of the situation is strengthened by the mutual incomprehension with which Sellars and Quine regarded each others' pragmatist critiques of *one* kind of epistemically privileged representation (which, in order to exercise that distinctive kind of epistemic authority must be understood as *semantically* privileged in a distinctive way: namely, as contentful independently of collateral *epistemic* commitments).

Sellars's emphasis on modality distinguished him from empiricists and put him in the Kantian camp. But he, like Quine, put the necessary/contingent distinction in a box with the analytic/synthetic distinction, and shrugged off Quine's TDE argument. Rorty unfortunately follows his two heroes in this assimilation. It was not thoughtless on the part of any of the three, though the reasons each had are quite different (Rorty's being in no small part historical). But unlike the others, Rorty was writing after his colleague Kripke's *Naming and Necessity* lectures, and should have been more critical.

Not by coincidence, Rorty would say, the pragmatist critics attack the latest form of neokantianism by picking up on the two Kantian kinds of representations: Husserl on the sensory-phenomenological, Russell on the concept-analytic, using logic. So Husserl is subject to Sellars's objections to the Myth of the Given and Russell is subject to Quine's objections to the Myth of the Museum. (Carnap is subject to *both* of them.)

Since RR synthesizes these by discerning a common *pragmatist* core to their holist critiques, he sees things as reverting to the socialized, historicized, naturalized pragmatism of Dewey, with the 20th century having been, in effect, one long detour. The detour led to an increase in technical sophistication about logic and language, but left us back pretty much where we were at the end of the 19th century in terms of general philosophical outlook, Rorty think: back where Peirce came in.

- e) Note that for RR, Lewis synthesizes his teachers James and Royce by retreating to a neokantianism they had both moved beyond (in favor of type (b) views).

For Rorty, accordingly, Lewis is *not* a true heir of American pragmatism. For Misak, as we'll see, Lewis is *exactly* that, and Dewey (and following him, Rorty), is the aberration and degeneration of pragmatism.

Lewis taught both Sellars and Quine, and both were hugely influenced by Carnap. (Quine snuck off from Harvard to consort with him, and it is Carnap who made the scales fall from Sellars's eyes and converted him to what he called "the new way of words.") Both Quine and Nelson Goodman (his best friend at Harvard since graduate-student days, and for his whole career) were students of Lewis who synthesized him with Carnap. (Goodman's *The Structure of Appearance* was his version of Carnap's *Aufbau*.)

- f) This division between traditions has *metaphilosophical* consequences, for the view of philosophy RR claims Plato shares with Kant. See his Introduction, and point (5).

2. Summary of the core argument:

- RR sees a common genus to analytic meaning-articulating claims and sensory given: privileged reps.
- He sees a common origin for them, in their functional explanatory roles as regress-stoppers.
- And he sees a common theme to S&Qs otherwise disparate critiques: ep behaviorism, or pragmatism.

This combination of moves articulates a fabulous, insightful, suggestive, intricate idea.

It is the core of the chapter and the book.

Wrapped around that idea is a relation between foundationalism and representationalism, that comes with a reading of the history of philosophy. That is the second, larger circle.

Outside that is a metaphilosophical idea of the existence, nature, and origin of a unique cultural authority philosophy exercises over the rest of the culture, and so of the unique role it appropriately plays in that culture. Rorty associates that vision initially with Plato, but sees Descartes's epistemological revolution, and Kant's distillation of it, under the banner of "representation," as distinctively *modern* forms of that metaphilosophical idea.

For the core Rortyan insight of *PMN* (the innermost circle): What Rorty saw (I think, working backwards from the commonality he first saw in S&Q's critiques) was that Kant's two sorts of representations had something in common. Each *had* to have *some* of its kind that were alike in having a distinctive kind of *privilege*, a kind of *authority* that was *immediate*, not derived from the authority of something else. The story he then told about it derives from the common role *some* representings of each kind *must* play, in order to perform their common explanatory function w/res to foundationalist epistemology: namely, functioning as regress-stoppers of the two fundamental kinds.

He then, as I would reconstruct the line of thought, asked how it is that this explanatory functional role in epistemology came to be connected to this privileged semantic role for representings. That is his Descartes-to-Locke-to-Kant story (largely told in Chapters 2 and 3).

The essential, most important lesson everyone should learn from this week is this core idea and move of Rorty's. For it is the basis for the concentric, wider circles of implication he then builds on top of the core (extends outwards from the core).

The core argument:

a) the Agrippan trilemma of alternatives to skepticism:

Either

- i. entitlement to commitments, positive justificatory status (needed for knowledge) must be inherited inferentially from other commitments to which the agent is entitled, or

- ii. not: i.e. there are unjustified justifiers, commitments whose entitlements are *not* inherited inferentially from other commitments. They are the *foundations* of knowledge.

On alternative (i) there are two possibilities:

- A. The root-first search for premises entitling one inferentially to a conclusion goes around in a circle, in that it repeats some earlier position, or
- B. The root-first search for premises entitling one inferentially to a conclusion never terminates, resulting in an infinite regress.

Both these alternative lead to *skepticism*, since it follow that *no* commitments are ever justified.

- b) This line of thought leads to a preference for the foundationalist alternative (ii), since it alone escapes skepticism about the very *possibility* of knowledge.
- c) On the foundationalist alternative, there is a need for *two* kinds of regress-stopper.
 - i. First, we need *premises* that *have* authority that can be inferentially inherited by other commitments, but which do not themselves need to inherit that authority: unjustified justifiers.
 - ii. Second, we need some justification for the inferential *transitions*, by which warrant, entitlement, or justification is inherited. Here we can *repeat* the Agrippan trilemma: *either* all such justification of transitions is inherited from the justification of *other* transitions—for instance, *logical* ones (this is the view of the *Tractatus*)—in which case we have the paired unpalatable alternatives of circularity or an infinite regress, *or* there are some *licit* entitlement-transferring reason relations of implication, licensinig transitions whose *authority* is *not* inherited from that of *other* reason-relations.
- d) These two sorts of regress-stoppers, on the side of premises and on the side of inferences or implications, correspond to the two kinds of representation that Kant treated as species rather than as ends of a single continuum, as *both* the Enlightenment Empiricist *and* the Enlightenment Rationalists had done: sensuous intuitions and inference-licensing concepts.
- e) These are the two species of what Rorty calls “privileged representations.” They are “privileged” in that
 - i. they are *authoritative*, possessing a positive justificatory status or entitlement that can be passed on to or inherited by others, and
 - ii. their possession of that authority is *immediate*, in the sense that it is *not*
 - α) inherited from or
 - β) otherwise dependent on
 The authority of any *other* representations.

This is an *independence* condition that entails, or at least invites, a kind of *atomism* about their privilege.

- f) These are the two kinds of “privileged representations” in terms of which the two local avatars of the analytic philosophy of their generation, Carnap and C.I. Lewis, divide the labor of semantic and epistemological semantic explanation. (Carnap in his *Aufbau*, and Lewis in *Mind and the World Order*, and *An Analysis of Knowledge and Valuation*.) For this reason, they deserve to be thought of as continuing the *neokantian* tradition.
- g) Further, he sees all of analytic philosophy downstream from these two as *also* (neo)Kantian. Rorty’s *PMN* diagnosis of then-contemporary analytic philosophy as through-and-through (neo)Kantian would have astonished his colleagues. After all, Kant had been read out of the analytic canon, with Hegel, as *idealist*. But RR sees that Carnap and C. I. Lewis *are* the neoKantians of their generation, and that Quine and Sellars are criticizing that neoKantianism on *pragmatist* grounds, which is to say (after Dewey), naturalized *Hegelian* grounds.
- h) Here Rorty’s conceptual innovation is to assimilate these two otherwise quite different sorts of representation, as having the distinctive sort of *normative* status (being *immediately authoritative*) needed to play the explanatory role in epistemological theory of *foundationalist regress-stoppers*, on the side of premises and inferences, respectively.
- i) Sellars’s arguments against sensory givenness as playing a fundamental *justificatory* role (Myth of the Given), criticizes *sensory givenness* as unfit to serve as epistemological regress-stoppers on the side of premises. This is not because noninferential perceptual judgments or observation reports are not authoritative, but because their authority is not in the required sense *immediate*.
- j) Quine’s arguments against a distinctive kind of justification by appeal to *meanings* (Myth of the Museum) available independently of lots of substantive belief-knowledge, similarly undercuts knowledge of meanings (or logical truths) as fit to serve *their* role as foundationalist regress-stoppers, on the side of reason relations of implication underwriting inferences.
- k) Here RR’s conceptual innovation is discerning a common theme in their counter-arguments: pragmatism, or what he in Chapter Four of *PMN* calls “epistemological behaviorism. This is point (3) below, the third major point of Part One.

So Rorty’s core argument depends on two assimilations, and one further insight:

- i. He sees the two Kantian and neoKantian kinds of representation as having subspecies playing distinctive kinds of epistemological role, role in justification. Both function as **foundationalist regress-stoppers**.
- ii. He sees Sellars’s and Quine’s arguments as having a common source: a **pragmatist** (“epistemological behaviorist”) view of justification. This, too, needs to be unpacked. Both are *holist* arguments. And he sees the holism as underwritten by a view that justificatory status is ultimately a matter of playing a certain role in *social* practices. The holism is at least a *semantic* holism. But it is also holistic in claiming that semantics and epistemology cannot be conducted independently of one another, and then bolted together. (That holism will be important at the next layer out from

- the core, at the middle layer, where we ask about the relations between foundationalism in epistemology and representationalism in semantics.) It is *that* holism that motivates the diagnosis of an underlying pragmatism (seeing normative statuses as always social statuses, positive justificatory status as a matter of role in social practices).
- iii. The insight that mediates between them is Rorty's seeing that for some instances of the two Kantian species of representation to play their *common* appointed functional explanatory role as foundationalist regress-stoppers on the side of premises and inferences respectively, they must have a distinctive kind of normative *privilege*. They must:
- A) be ones the epistemic subject is entitled to
 - B) be authoritative, in that that entitlement can be *inherited* by others suitably related to the index representation, and
 - C) that entitlement and authority must not be α) derivative from or β) in any other way dependent on the authority of any other representations. [The difference between these is significant. S&Q's arguments *both* attack (β) and allow that condition (α) might be met, at least in some sense.
- Here the line of thought, I think, is this:
- In order to play their *epistemically* privileged role of being *immediately* authoritative, regress-stopping representations must be *semantically* privileged in a specific sense:
 - their content, and the possibility of grasping or understanding that content, must not depend on any collateral *epistemic* commitments. That is, their content must not be conditioned on anything else one knows or believes about the world.
 - Why not? Because then the entitlement to the epistemic subject's commitment to those contents would be challengeable by asking about the entitlements of those collateral commitments, without which the commitments in question could not so much as *mean* what they mean (or be understood to do so).
 - It is this final requirement, of *semantic* independence of any collateral *epistemic* commitments, that both Sellars and Quine will impugn as *practically* unintelligible—that is, as a requirement we can see cannot be fulfilled, when we think about what one must be able to *do* in order to qualify as grasping the contents in question.
3. Rorty's assimilation of Sellars's argument against *sensory* givenness and Quine's argument against *semantic* givenness (epistemically transparent analytically true claims: claims that are true in virtue of the meanings of the terms or the contents of the concepts), as both being *holist* (on two levels, at least in Quine's case), and ultimately, *pragmatist* ("epistemological behaviorism").

The main points of Rorty's core argument are on the table now. But we can look in a bit more detail at Sellars's and Quine's arguments.

a) Sellars in *EPM*.

RR sees Sellars as diagnosing Locke's confusion (which Kant identified and rectified) between *causation* and *justification* is the main source of the problem with sensory givenness.

There is, and must be, sensory states we are wired-and-trained to get into, exercising RDRDs, that do *not* presuppose possession of concepts, but are presupposed by it. Without them, we could not come to have empirical knowledge. But they are a *causal* condition.

Mere being in such a state does not *constitute* knowledge, and cannot *justify* belief. They are not *conceptually* contentful, in the sense of standing in *reason relations* of implication, justification, providing evidence, and, in general, altering the *normative* status of our commitments as justified or not (ones we are or are not *entitled* to).

Playing that sort of role requires standing in reason relations to *lots* of other claimables, so "possessing" lots of other concepts (being able to use lots of other words).

This is the *semantic holist* point.

Further, mastering those other concepts essentially involves making (and even having made) a lot of *judgments*, undertaking other commitments. (Cf. LW on having to agree on judgments to agree in the use of a word.)

This is *holism* at a higher level, about the relation between the subjects of semantics and epistemology, meaning and commitment. Practically mastering reason-relations requires actually taking up some positions in the "game of giving and asking for reasons." One cannot qualify as mastering a believable (claimable, grasping a content) unless one has undertaken a number of believings.

This does raise an issue about how it is possible to *acquire* concepts. Sellars has a pragmatist response. (See below.)

But serving as an *unjustified justifier* (hence a regress-stopper on the side of premises) cannot presuppose other commitments, and cannot presuppose mastering implicational relations about which one might be wrong. For one is supposed to be *incorrigible* about the sensory given. One is to take it in without making any risky applications of concepts, which might be *misapplications*. That is the Cartesian thought. It is a requirement of playing the foundationalist regress-stopping role.

All this is argued for by thinking about what one must be able practically to *do* in order to count as being *entitled* to a *commitment*, justified in a belief (entitled to believing a believable).

That is *pragmatism* about normative statuses. They must be understood in *practical* terms, of what one can *do*.

As to the *acquisition* question, how one can get into the “game of giving and asking for reasons” in the first place: LW’s phrase (that McDowell is fond of repeating): “The light dawns slowly over the whole.” Every subject comes into an always-already (“immer noch”) up-and-running discursive enterprise. We need to become good enough at making the “right” moves (‘right’ according to the adults) to *count* as able to commit ourselves, and be *entitled* to some of those commitments. The transition is a transition in social status, like achieving one’s legal majority.

b) Quine in *TDE*.

Topic and target is the idea of “analytic truths.” These are claims that are “true *ex vi terminorum*,” that is, true just in virtue of the meanings of the terms involved—the contents of the concepts one grasps in understanding them.

These are supposed to be truths that one can know *a priori*, that is, without knowing anything else.

They accordingly underwrite inferences or implications (which Rorty’s colleague Harman taught us not to run together): *If Sumba is a cat, then Sumba is a mammal.*

But, Quine asks, what is the *practical* difference between claims supposedly true in virtue of *meaning* and claims true because of the obtaining of very general facts—such as that there have been black dogs.

He considers *immunity to revision*. But that doesn’t seem right. Couldn’t we discover that cats are *not* mammals? Putnam considers discovering that they are really cunningly contrived robots sent from Mars to spy on us. (They *are* sneaky.) Would we say that they are not cats (but what have come to be called ‘Hilarys’)? Or that cats are not mammals? Is there a fact about the matter that we would be getting *wrong* by talking one way rather than the other?

We *could* decide to hold onto them “come what may.” But that is true of *many* generalizations. (Story of St. Paul bitten by a snake the locals knew was fatal to humans. Instead of giving up that belief, they decided he must be a god, and not human.)

Quine offers the specifically *holist* diagnosis of the difficulty that the meaning of a claim must at least determine its inferential role: what it is evidence for and against, and what would be evidence for and against it. But what follows from a claimable depends on what else you are committed to—what other collateral commitments are available to serve as auxiliary hypothesis. So the meaning depends on reason-relations to a *lot* of other claimables, and depends as well on what else one actually *believes*.

Some more (optional) discussion downstream from this core argument:

- c) This is double-barreled holism:
- i. *semantic holism*, and
 - ii. *holism about the relations between meanings and beliefs* (languages and theories), the subject-matters of semantics and epistemology, respectively.

The unit of meaning, he concludes, is not the concept or the sentence, but the whole “web of belief.”

He derives this double-barreled, multileveled holism from thinking about what one must be able to *do* in order to count as *understanding* the meaning, *grasping* the content, *practically mastering* the use of a word. This is a kind of *pragmatism*.

Note that Fodor thinks that treating the concepts of meaning and understanding as two sides of one coin is *contaminating* semantics with epistemology, and that doing this is the Great Bad of his generation of philosophers—initiated by Quine in *TDE*, and then seconded and compounded by Davidson and Dummett. This, Fodor thinks, is a great fork in the methodological road of philosophy.

There is a kind of master-argument, that Rorty discusses elsewhere under the heading of “transcendental arguments.” It attacks the *semantic* presuppositions of some *epistemological* undertaking. We can see this in the diagnosis of Michael Williams’s *Unnatural Doubts* (following on from his crystal-clear setting-out of Rorty’s *PMN* arguments in *Groundless Belief*). One considers the epistemological credentials of some *kind* of discourse: about the external world, about other minds, about modal connections and inferences. One has a core, base vocabulary that is taken to be unproblematic: discourse about the current contents of our own minds, or *non-modal*, extensional discourse. And one demands that *either* one show how to (re)*construct* the problematic target discourse in terms of the base vocabulary alone (using logical vocabulary, for free), *or* acknowledge one is forced to *skepticism* about the target vocabulary. This is *semantic foundationalism* as the demand for this sort of *rational reconstruction* of problematic discourses. It is pressed into the service of *epistemological* foundationalism, but the analytic-philosophical project is at base *semantic*.

The contrary argument then attacks the semantic presuppositions of this epistemology-via-semantic-reconstruction. For it denies the *semantic autonomy* of the base vocabulary. In “Phenomenalism” Sellars makes clear his adherence to this strategy. Discourse restricted to discussing the current contents of our minds is not autonomous, not an *autonomous discursive practice* (an ADP), a language-game one could play though one played no other. And discourse about “the external world” (one of Williams’s “unnatural kinds”) cannot be constructed from it.

This semantic undercutting of an epistemological project (“transcendental argument”) is also the form of Putnamian BiV (“Brain in Vat”) arguments.

As to what we would say today about epistemological foundationalism, why we don't worry about it and are *right* not to worry about it:

- a) I have suggested the normative-pragmatist “default-and-challenge” structure as a way of avoiding the Agrippan trilemma.
- b) It should be compared-and-contrasted with *Bayesianism* as a non-foundationalist response. The Bayesian sees all justification as *comparative*. The issue is never the justification-status of one's *prior* commitments. Justification has to do with the *process* of *improving* one's epistemic situation by taking account of new evidence.
- c) Note that the Bayesian (like the reliabilist), too, in general takes for granted (imports) the *semantic contents* of the claims involved in the process of conditionalizing on evidence. *If* and insofar as those contents must themselves be understood in terms of reason-relations, there is a substantial question whether and how those reason-relations can themselves be understood in Bayesian terms. Bayesian epistemology is hostage to a semantics.
 - Is it a forced choice within this program either
 - i. to take a representationalist semantics for granted or
 - ii. to construct a *Bayesian* inferentialist semantics?

Recap of Rorty's core argument:

Rorty sees that Kant's division of representations into two kinds, sensory and conceptual, fits perfectly with the needs of foundationalist epistemology (arrived at by rejecting both skepticism and epistemological coherentism among the options in the Agrippan trilemma). Foundationalism in epistemology requires two sorts of regress-stoppers:

- something functioning to stop regresses on the side of *premises* of justifying inferences—that is, respond to challenges to justify the premises from which entitlement is to be inferentially inherited, and
- something functioning to stop regresses on the side of entitlement-conferring (transferring) *inferences*—that is, respond to challenges to justify inferences.

Rorty sees that Kant's two kinds of representations are (apparently) perfectly adapted to play those functional explanatory roles in epistemology.

And he sees that both Carnap and C. I. Lewis are the great neokantians of the twentieth century precisely in adapting Kant's two sorts of representation for these purposes, to play these roles in foundationalist epistemologies. Both add twentieth-century logical tools to articulate the meanings that are regress-stoppers on the side of inferences (that is, to elaborate the reason-relations that stop those regresses), but this just makes them *logistic* neokantians.

Carnap and Lewis were *both* teachers or principal influences on *both* Sellars and Quine.

And Rorty sees that there is a deep commonality between the critiques that Sellars and Quine offer of the logistical neokantianism of Carnap and Lewis:

- i. Both are *doubly holist*:
 - α) semantically and

- β) about the relation between semantics and epistemology,
- ii. Both are broadly pragmatist, or “epistemologically behaviorist.” They see normative “privileging,” matters of authority or entitlement, as conferred by or consisting in the role normatively significant items play in social practices of giving and asking for reasons.

Part Two:

4.

Relations of

- α) epistemological foundationalism and
- β) semantic representationalism.

Relation of these two to causes/reasons distinction (what Locke got wrong and Kant got right).

RR does *not* object to representations playing a role, even a central and essential role in a *causal* story. It is only if they are on the norm-reason side (privilege and immediate authority are normative notions) that he has a problem with it. So he does not object to cognitive science use of “representation” in principle. (Dreyfus does.)

Functionalism divides as *causal* functionalism and *normative* functionalism. Normative functionalism is distinguished from representationalism. On the causal side representationalism and functionalism *might* be made to work well together—but one needs a story about how.

The underlying issue here seems to concern the proper order of explanation between the *semantics* and the *epistemology*.

- i. Should we read *reason-relations* (material implication and exclusion), which define inheritance of commitment and entitlement in epistemology, off of representational content, or
- ii. should we understand content *functionally*, in terms of reason relations?

A further issue then is whether the functional roles that determine or at least articulate reason relations should be read off of social practices. (Rorty, emphasized more later: “what your fellows let you get away with.”) This, too, is a matter of order of explanation. Do functional roles determine *proper* practices? Or do the *actual* practices determine functional roles?

(Note that my Hegel has a third alternative, depending on *historical* perspectives of *Erinnerung*: the prospective and retrospective perspectives on the process of *determining* conceptual contents. *Both* actual practice *and* pre-existing norms exercise authority and are *each* responsible to each other. But that is a story for later.)

So there are *two* issues of order of explanation here:

- a) (representational) semantics w/res to (foundationalist) epistemology—where the parenthetical qualifications *both* indicate *bad* species of the genuses (about which only the *distinction* between them is controversial, for pragmatists, as Quine saw). This is the divide between (i) and (ii) just above.
- b) Explanatory priority of *either* or *both* of those relative to actual practices (and the norms implicit in those practices, if such can be imputed over and above dispositions to behavior specified in *nonnormative* terms).

Rorty's pragmatist claim is that for (a), the *holistic* reason relations that epistemology depends on should be prior in the order of explanation to the *atomistic* representation relations that (a bad) semantics insists on. As for (b), the social practices should be prior in the order of explanation to *both* the reason relations of the epistemology *and* the theory of content in the semantics. But, really, these latter two should be done *together*, as Quine has it in *TDE*.

Dummett's (later) Wittgenstein is a semantic *nihilist* on *pragmatist* grounds. He argues that the point of postulating *meanings* or *content* (the point of doing *semantics*) is to codify proprieties of *use* or *practice*. In this sense, *semantics* must answer to *pragmatics*. But, Dummett's LW argues, practice is a *motley*. (Hans-Julius Schneider's account of this.) It is *in principle* impossible to codify proprieties of use, because of their in-principle *plasticity*: the fact that almost every *use* *alters* the *proprieties* governing the use, every application further determines and so alters the norms governing proper application. This is a *pragmatism* that eschews *semantics* entirely. Whatever Rorty's views in *PMN* might be, his later, more radically pragmatist persona agrees with this consequence (and agrees with Dummett in attributing it to LW—though Dummett is more explicit in unpacking the reasoning behind it).

Note that while I think there is something important in this argument, it is for LW part of a rejection of postulation (Sellars's sense of 'theorizing') in philosophy. "Philosophy is not one of the natural sciences" is the only claim that appears *verbatim* in both *TLP* and *PI*. And as Sellars argues in detail in *EPM*, it is a mistake. See my "Wittgenstein's...."

Rorty sees two Kantian distillations of Enlightenment epistemology and philosophy of mind: foundationalism in epistemology and representationalism in semantics. He sees them as complementing one another, and Kant as having shown them to be two sides of one coin. This is the Kantian grand synthesis. He sees it as having dominated twentieth century philosophy, in the paired neo-Kantians, Carnap and C. I. Lewis (the latter of particular significance for Misak). We can ask about the relations between these. Does refuting one refute the other?: Does semantic representationalism make epistemological foundationalism inevitable? Does epistemological foundationalism require semantic representationalism?

5. Stepping out even further in RR's concerns in *PMN*, he sees epistemological foundationalism (EF) and semantic representationalism (SR) as paired *functionally* in that they are twin strategies for a *third* Kantian commitment: to philosophy as the queen of the sciences. According to this conception, philosophy sits in judgment (as a tribunal) over the epistemological claims and semantic hygiene of the other disciplines of the high culture, *because* philosophers are in the unique position of assessing claims of *justification* and *meaningfulness* **generally**. Foundationalism and representationalism are the specific commitments that *ground* that distinctive philosophical *authority* over the other disciplines.

At the largest structure of *PMN*, it is *this* Kantian and neoKantian aspiration for philosophy, this claim of and rationale for a distinctive kind of (semantic and epistemic)

authority over other disciplines—incomparable to the metaconcerns of historians, sociologists, or political theorists—to which Rorty *most* objects.

[Here a discussion of the passages from the Introduction to *PMN* that are in the handout (especially first page).]

The Introduction invites us to think that:

- i) what RR really objects to is the view of philosophy as the Queen of the Sciences.
 - ii) He sees that as backed up, no less in Plato than in Kant, by the idea that we understand understanding or know what knowledge is.
 - iii) On a proper, pragmatist view of things, where the notion of understanding or knowledge has been historicized, socialized, and naturalized, philosophers do not have that sort of disciplinary privilege.
6. Thought of this way, *representationalism* only comes in at the very last stage of the argument. For RR also claims that
- a) Representationalism, as we have inherited it from what Kant made of Descartes and the post-Cartesian Enlightenment philosophers, both Empiricists and Rationalists, is just the distinctively modern form of the Great (defining) Conceit of Philosophy, the Platonic Conceit of Philosophical Sovereignty. Kant shows how to use Enlightenment representationalism to institute a new, distinctively modern, form of the Great Platonic Philosophical Conceit—one that Russell and Husserl saw how to take over for the twentieth century, and that the neokantians C. I. Lewis and Carnap brought together in a distinctive but shared form.
 - b) On this view, *foundationalism* is not particularly important. But that fact just underscores another: what Sellars's and Quine's critiques *directly* cut against is foundationalism. Though they both think of themselves as critics of *empiricism*—it is in their titles, EPM and TDE—that is because Carnap is most proximally in their sights, and he calls himself a “logical empiricist.” And in those days, all respectable philosophers were empiricists. With a little more distance, we can see, with Rorty's help, that for at least the 15 years bookended by “Truth by Convention” and “Carnap on Logical Truth” on one end, and TDE on the other, Quine had in fact been attacking the Russellian semantic given, which is the heir of *rationalism*, once it has been filtered through Kant.
- Now we can applaud Rorty having seen what no-one else did: the common thread connecting Sellars's and Quine's critiques. As he points out, Sellars and Quine themselves did not see it. Sellars continues to be comfortable with analyticity and necessity, and Quine with sensory givenness.

And Rorty sees further, as part of his pairing of S&Q, that between them they divide the labor in a devastating critique of foundationalism, since each undercuts a different one of the two crucial sorts of regress-stoppers foundationalists need. So together, they demolish foundationalism's pretensions.

And furthermore, he realizes, they do so in ways that can be seen to rest on a common sort of *pragmatism* about the reason relations that articulate justification as studied by epistemology. This common root idea sees reason-relations, and so the normative significance (authority, entitlement to) of doxastic, cognitive commitments, and those commitments themselves, as at base matters of social practice.

But this *antifoundationalist* epistemological argument (underwritten in no small part by holism in semantics) can seem quite disconnected from the argument against the Platonic pretensions of philosophy in their modern, *representationalist* Kantian guise, in (a).

What does the one have to do with the other?

Have two really independent strands of thought just been bolted together in Rorty's book?

In particular, what do the critiques of foundationalism, by S&Q, really have to do with the metaphilosophical critique of representationalism as the modern, Kantian form of Platonism?

- c) Here the crucial point seems to be Rorty's observation that the two sorts of regress-stoppers that, he has realized, S&Q divide the labor in offering critiques of—and furthermore, critiques that have in common a semantic *holism* (not itself necessarily antirepresentationalist—cf. Spinoza's holist insight about Descartes) rooted in a kind of *pragmatism*—are just the two sorts Kant identified, in articulating his definitive sort of representationalism.

And Rorty realizes further that the neokantians Lewis and Carnap (whom no-one else groups together, or thinks of as neokantians) adopted Kant's semantic representationalism to foundationalist epistemological purposes.

Surely this is not just a bizarre coincidence!

Still, we should ask, exactly how should we understand the relations between these lines of thought? How are S&Q's critiques of twentieth century foundationalism related to representationalism?

- d) Without other philosophers having as nuanced an account of how it worked as Rorty offers in *PMN*, the net effect of S&Q's critiques was to drive a stake through the heart of empiricism.

In my Locke lectures, published as *Between Saying and Doing*, I argue that analytic philosophy always aimed at reconstructing some *target* vocabularies, thought to be particularly philosophically puzzling or problematic, by means of the purely *logical* elaboration of some *base* vocabularies, thought to be *unproblematic*, either epistemologically or ontologically.

Typical target vocabularies are modal, normative, semantic, or intentional vocabularies.

And I claim that the two great master-programs of analytic philosophy were *empiricism* and *naturalism*.

- Empiricism is distinguished by picking an *epistemologically* privileged base vocabulary: phenomenal vocabulary, secondary-quality vocabulary, observational vocabulary, or just empirical vocabulary.
- Naturalism is distinguished by picking an *ontologically* privileged base vocabulary: the vocabulary of fundamental physics, or of natural science generally.

Of the two great programs of analytic philosophy, since Rorty's time, *empiricism* faded, while *naturalism* flourished.

And *foundationalism*, too, lost its appeal—even before Bayesian approaches gave a good theoretical alternative, much more popular than the sort of pragmatism Rorty offered as an alternative.

(Both are revived in Jackson's and Chalmers's philosophical use of two-dimensional modal semantics, which remain no less vulnerable to suitably broadened versions of S&Q's critiques.)

- e) I think that philosophers who paid some attention to Rorty's arguments thought he had well codified critiques of empiricism and foundationalism (usefully dividing the labor between Sellars and Quine) which justified a change in philosophical interests that was well underway in any case.

By the time Rorty wrote (when the owl of Minerva took wing), almost all philosophers had moved on and were not interested in empiricism or foundationalism anymore. And they didn't see how the well-taken critiques of those philosophical programs that Rorty rehearsed bore on the representationalist semantic framework they continued to employ.

If one is not an empiricist foundationalist, one does not care about *epistemically privileged* representations. But if one gives up that idea, why can't one continue to employ representationalist semantic ideas elsewhere?

The S&Q pragmatist argument was directed to the semantic *independence* of epistemic commitments that was an essential aspect of the "*privilege*" that the two sorts of representations had to be thought of as displaying, in order to play their role as *foundationalist* regress-stoppers. For to play that role, they need to be *immediately* authoritative, in a sense that precludes *semantic* dependence on collateral *epistemic* commitments. That is why the double-barreled, multilevel semantic and semantic/epistemic holisms undercut the ultimate intelligibility of this sort of privilege. But if we don't care about foundationalism, it seems these arguments get no grip.

- f) What Rorty seems to need is an argument that thinking of content in representationalist terms (which Spinoza's example and perhaps Kant's shows need not in principle be

atomistic) commits one to (inevitably leads to) the kind of foundationalism that calls on immediately epistemically authoritative (that is the kind of “privilege” in question) representations?

And it is not clear that it does.

- g) If that is right, one cannot argue for pragmatism by presenting it as the only alternative to a semantic representationalism that has been shown to be untenable because it entails an untenable epistemological foundationalism.

For one cannot argue against representationalism just by arguing against foundationalism.

That, I think, is where Rorty found himself—without explicitly realizing it—in the mid-80s.

- i. An alternative is to argue independently for pragmatism, and use pragmatism to argue against representationalism in a way that does not pass through foundationalism.
- ii. Or, one might argue independently against representationalism, and then once again propose pragmatism as the best alternative approach.

Rorty goes on to do both—and independently and for quite different reasons (though recognizing that he has ended up in Rorty’s camp), so does Huw Price.

- h) As for the Kantian rebooting of the Platonic Great Conceit of philosophy, how large a role does that conceit play in the self-conception of today’s professionalized (perhaps, hyper-professionalized) philosophers? Do most philosophers attribute a significance and most importantly, an authority to their subdisciplines that is *in principle*, and because of its nature as *philosophical*, of a different kind and magnitude than that other academics or creators of the high culture would claim for *their* subdisciplines? I don’t see it generally.

I would and do claim such a significance for philosophical study of language and discursive practices. That is one dimension along which I am Hegelian. But i) that is unusual, and ii) it is the cause of a lot of pointed and well-taken criticism. On this score Rorty holds the high ground, and my apostasy from him on behalf of the significance of systematic philosophy is on the whole probably a weakness, not a strength.