

September 15, 2020

## Week 5 Textualism Notes

Plan:

In 6 parts

**Part One:**

Beginning of session:

- **(1)** Begin with RR on romanticism, as mediating between idealism and pragmatism. Here the point is the opposition between romantic view of conversation as redescription, invention of new vocabularies, transforming by opening up new possibilities, vs. realist, objectivist, representationalist views of converging to the One, True Vocabulary. Note that historically, *Hegel's* idealism synthesizes Enlightenment and Romanticism. But RR thinks romanticism didn't really get going until Hegel, and that idealism is Kantian scientism. This is seriously revisionist, but a very interesting perspective.

This is the vision of 19I&20T, and SO both. So rehearse the passages from Handout.

- **(2)** Then criticism of Derridean quintessentially textualist “Il n’y a pas de hors-texte”, as pre-Kantian, pre-Fregean, pre-Wittgensteinian.

Use this to introduce the idea of *category* structure (facts, objects-with-properties-and-relations) being imposed by vocabulary we use. (Will undercut this at the end of the session, giving reasons to think the wholesale critique of the Kantian problematic is misguided, or at least, overdone.)

World of facts (WoF) *seems* more vocabulary-relative (-sensitive, -dependent) than World of objects (WoO), but it is not.

- **(3)** Two senses of “vocabulary-dependence.” Punchline of this segment is distinction between **sense-dependence** and **reference-dependence**, introduced by the counterfactuals that Heidegger and Rorty fail on about gravity and electrons (from my “Vocabularies of Pragmatism”).

(Last bit before break):

- **(4)** On **retrospective** vs. **prospective** practical (pragmatic), technological conceptions of progress. This is a pragmatist way of funding assessments of progress, hence normative comparison of vocabularies, without representationalist baggage. (This is not Rorty's idea. It is my response to a question he is raising.)

**Part Two:**

After break:

- **(5)** (1)-(5) from Handout, unpacking and filling in fine-structure of Rorty's implicit argument against representationalism.

We have five claims or moves Rorty might be seen to be making:

1. Rejecting two-stage talk of two activities, one of instituting meanings and the other of applying them to justify beliefs.
2. Rejecting the language/theory distinction entirely, in favor of the 'vocabulary' vocabulary. All we do is use vocabularies, and those practices *both* institute meanings and apply concepts to undertake commitments (endorse, take-true, some claimables).
3. Rejecting the Kantian problematic of assigning responsibility for some features of our discourse (vocabulary-use) to what we are talking about (what is represented)—the authority of the objective—and responsibility for other features of our discourse to us—the authority of the subjective.
4. Rejecting as ultimately unintelligible the idea that our thought is normatively constrained (as opposed to causally constrained) by an objective world via the representational semantic dependence of representings on representeds that consists in representeds providing normative standards of assessment of the correctness of representings (in a distinctive sense of "correctness.").
5. Social pragmatism about normativity: all normative statuses (responsibility, authority, being a standard of correctness) are social statuses.

Some questions:

Does (1) require (2)?

Does (2) imply (3)?

Does (3) imply (4)?

Does adding (5) to any of these claims make the implications go through?

- **(6)** Engineering rebuttal with Wittgensteinian Sprachspiele.

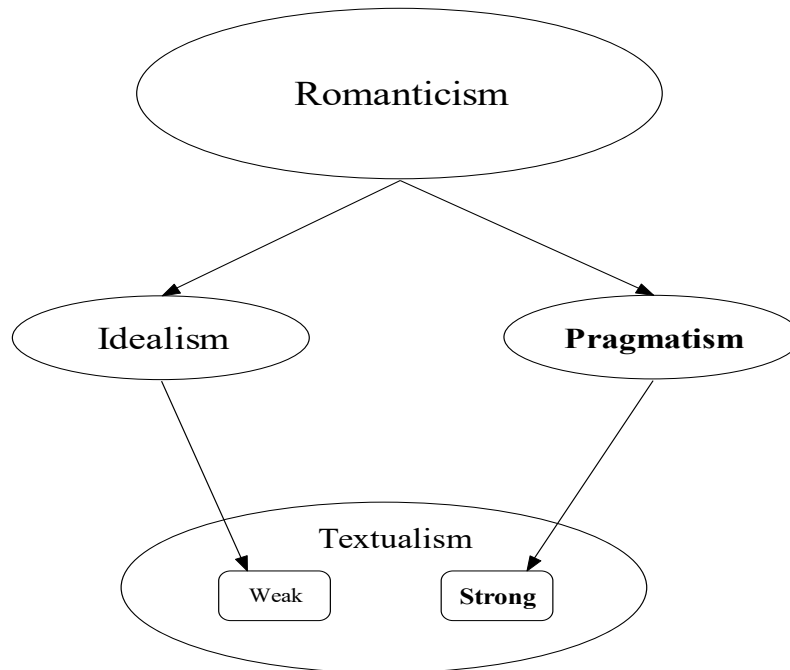
There *are* prospects for making sense in *pragmatist* terms of *normative* constraint by how things are in a vocabulary-independent way.

(This is not Rorty's idea. It is my response to a question he is raising.)

**(1) Rorty on Romanticism, Idealism, Pragmatism, Textualism**

*PMN* was about the Enlightenment and its legacy.

RR now addresses Romanticism and its legacy.



Distribute Handout “Rorty on Romanticism”

Re “Nineteenth Century Idealism and Twentieth Century Textualism”

1. Distinguish the job of intellectuals from that of researchers in particular *Fachs*.

The intellectual is concerned with how the whole culture, or at least the high culture charged with understanding and advancing it, hangs together.

The idea of philosophy as a discipline that Rorty has become disillusioned with, Kant’s idea, is the idea of a kind of research that *uniquely* qualifies one to be an intellectual.

Note that the genre he is practicing is well described in the text:

The textualist may brush aside the notion of the text as machine which operates quite independently of its creator, and offer what Bloom calls a "strong misreading." The critic asks neither the author nor the text about their intentions but simply beats the text into a shape which will serve his own purpose. He makes the text refer to whatever is relevant to that purpose. He does this by imposing a vocabulary—a "grid," in Foucault's terminology—on the text which may have nothing to do with any vocabulary used in the text or by its author, and seeing what happens. The model here is not the curious collector of clever gadgets taking them apart to see what makes them work and carefully ignoring any extrinsic end they may have, but the psychoanalyst blithely interpreting a dream or a joke as a symptom of homicidal mania. [166]

But the text that Rorty practices on is the history of philosophy generally.

Cf. Kevin Baker:

Not content to simply be mad at the present, the historian goes to the archives, an endless repository of old things to be mad about, then assembles these maddening things into new diachronic objects, all of which afford new opportunities for being mad and being driven mad.

The following is the purest example of Rortyan *Geistesgeschichte* I know of (it might be relevant to mention that this is RR's Berkeley Howison lecture—which McD and I have also done—and that it is for a wider academic audience, not just philosophers):

That is why I think we need to say, despite Putnam, that "there is only the dialogue," only *us*, and to throw out the last residues of the notion of "trans-cultural rationality."

- But this should not lead us to repudiate, as Nietzsche sometimes did, the elements in our movable host which embody the ideas of Socratic conversation, Christian fellowship, and Enlightenment science.
- Nietzsche ran together his diagnosis of philosophical realism [BB: He means representationalism here] as an expression of fear and resentment with his own resentful idiosyncratic idealizations of silence, solitude, and violence.
- PostNietzschean thinkers like Adorno and Heidegger and Foucault have run together Nietzsche's criticisms of the metaphysical tradition on the one hand with his criticisms of bourgeois civility, of Christian love, and of the nineteenth century's hope that science would make the world a better place to live, on the other.
- I do not think there is any interesting connection between these two sets of criticisms.
- Pragmatism seems to me, as I have said, a philosophy of solidarity rather than of despair.
- From this point of view, Socrates's turn away from the gods, Christianity's turn from an Omnipotent Creator to the man who suffered on the Cross, and the Baconian turn from science as contemplation of eternal truth to science as instrument of social progress, can be seen as so many preparations for the act of social faith that is suggested by a Nietzschean view of truth. [179]

Rorty never wrote, I think, even a single essay just about Nietzsche.

But he has here the core thesis of a really insightful analysis that finds a crucial fault-line in Nietzsche.

Nietzsche is right to see philosophical representational realism—devotion to impersonal, objective truth, as a form of trans-cultural rationality based on a non-human authority—as the products of fear and resentment. He is in so far such an antirepresentationalist pragmatist.

But we should *not* follow him in *therefore* rejecting three pillars of *our* culture, which Rorty thinks Nietzsche (and following him Adorno, Heidegger, and Foucault) is wrong to see as inseparably implicated with that Platonic objectivity urge:

- Socrates's turn away from the gods, and towards human conversation with its *internal* standards of rationality, lined up (why?) with “bourgeois civility”,
- Christianity's turn from an Omnipotent Creator to the man who suffered on the Cross, and (so) to Christian fellowship, and Christian love,
- the Baconian turn from science as contemplation of eternal truth to science as instrument of social progress, so Enlightenment science, the nineteenth century's hope that science would make the world a better place to live.

At least Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault make this mistake, Rorty thinks, because of a **reactionary romanticism**, “idealizing silence, solitude, and violence.”

2. The big idea here (191&20T) is:

Rorty reconstructs a progression from *idealism* to *romanticism* to *pragmatism*.

Hegel left Kant's ideal of philosophy-as-science a shambles, but he did...create a new literary genre, a genre which exhibited the relativity of significance to choice of vocabulary, the bewildering variety of vocabularies from which we can choose, and the intrinsic instability of each. [164]

Claim 1: that all problems, topics, and distinctions are language-relative—the results of our having chosen to use a certain vocabulary, to play a certain language-game. [155]

Claim 2: that the idea of method presupposes that of a privileged vocabulary, the vocabulary which gets to the essence of the object, the one which expresses the properties which it has in itself as opposed to those which read into it. Nietzsche and James said that the notion of such a vocabulary was a myth—that even in science, not to mention philosophy, we simply cast around for a vocabulary which lets us get what we want. [168]

Claim 3: the vocabulary of science is merely one among others—merely the vocabulary which happens to be handy in predicting and controlling nature. It is not as physicalism would have us think, Nature's Own Vocabulary. [155] the current scientific vocabulary is one vocabulary among others, and that there is no need to give it primacy, nor to reduce other vocabularies to it.

Claim 4: , I defined 'romanticism', unromantically, as the thesis that the one thing needful was to discover not which propositions are true but rather what vocabulary we should use. [163]

**Danger:****Carnapian language/theory pragmatism vs. post-Quinean vocabulary-pragmatism:**

As I remarked in an earlier session, Rorty sails very close to the wind here, in the sense of accepting Carnap's language/theory distinction, but treating vocabularies as if they were languages and being a Carnapian pragmatist about choice of languages, in the form of free choice of vocabularies.

This is a Bad Idea, and Rorty often veers close to arguing this way.

This is the bad, backsliding Carnapian fallacy-of-lost-contrast Rortyan argument mentioned above, which must be firmly rejected as a misuse of the 'vocabulary' vocabulary, because violating Quine's anti-Carnap point that motivates it.

It is a bad idea, because it depends on the Kantian problematic: dividing up responsibility for various features of our talk, and seeing the "choice of vocabulary" as up to us, a "free choice."

**Idea:****The criticism of representationalism is a criticism of the idea of *objectively privileged vocabularies*.**

Already in PMN, Rorty endorsed "hermeneutics with polemical intent" (PMN:365) deployed on behalf of **the Romantic idea that what matters most is which vocabulary we employ, and the possibilities of self-transformation by adopting new-vocabularies, redescribing ourselves and our world,**

**and against the representationalist idea that there is an idiom where truths may be stated that are prior to any optional or contingent evaluative stance or commitment,** that constrain our adoption of vocabularies or permit their comparison as more or less accurate.

The strong textualist is trying to live without that comfort. He recognizes what Nietzsche and James recognized, that **the idea of method presupposes that of a privileged vocabulary, the vocabulary which gets to the essence of the object, the one which expresses the properties which it has in itself as opposed to those which read into it.**

Nietzsche and James said that the notion of such a vocabulary was a myth—that even in science, not to mention philosophy, we simply cast around for a vocabulary which lets us get what we want. [168]

Here we see the connection between the concept privileged vocabulary, (the successor in Rorty to the privileged representations of PMN) and the undercutting of the Kantian problematic of assigning responsibility for some features of a vocabulary-in-use to what we are talking about (what is represented) and responsibility for other features to our activity of representing it.

The idea he is opposing is that some vocabularies are *better* than others (there is a dimension of normative assessment such that this holds), that is determined just by how things anyway are.

In textualist terms, this becomes the claim that **the vocabulary of science is merely one among others—merely the vocabulary which happens to be handy in predicting and controlling nature. It is not as physicalism would have us think, Nature's Own Vocabulary.** [155]

Hegel...began treating the vocabulary of Galilean science as simply one among dozens of others in which the Idea chose to describe itself. [162]

Rorty's summary:

I can summarize what I've been saying as follows.

- Metaphysical **idealism** was a momentary, though important, stage in the emergence of **romanticism**.
- The notion that **philosophy** might replace **science** as a secular substitute for **religion** was a momentary, though important, stage in **the replacement of science by literature** as the presiding cultural discipline.
- **Romanticism was aufgehoben in pragmatism**, the claim that **the significance of new vocabularies was not their ability to decode** [BB: or represent with objective accuracy] **but their mere utility**.
- Pragmatism is the philosophical counterpart of **literary modernism**, the kind of literature which prides itself on its autonomy and novelty rather than its truthfulness to experience or its discovery of pre-existing significance.
- **Strong textualism** draws the moral of modernist literature and creates genuinely **modernist criticism**. [168]

**Idea:**

In 19I&20T, one of the issues between idealism, romanticism and pragmatism, on the one hand, and Enlightenment objectivism, on the other, is about

**the relative status of science and literature.**

It is more than a little unclear just what status is at issue. Rorty describes it variously as:

twentieth-century **textualism wants to place literature in the center and to treat both science and philosophy as, at best, literary genres**. [157]

Idealism and textualism have in common an opposition to the claim of science to be **a paradigm of human activity**[157]

The principal legacy of metaphysical idealism is **the ability of the literary culture to stand apart from science, to assert its spiritual superiority to science, to claim to embody what is most important for human beings....**

The romanticism which Hegel brought to philosophy **reinforced the hope that literature might be the successor subject to philosophy—that what the philosophers had been seeking, the inmost secrets of the spirit, were to be discovered by the new literary genres which were emerging**. [165]

There was, however, a third step in the process of establishing **the autonomy and supremacy of the literary culture**. This was the step taken by Nietzsche and William James. Their contribution was to **replace romanticism by pragmatism**. [166]

The notion that philosophy might replace science as a **secular substitute for religion** was a momentary, though important, stage in the **replacement of science by literature as the presiding cultural discipline**. [168]

Hegel...began treating the vocabulary of Galilean science as simply one among dozens of others in which the Idea chose to describe itself. [162]

In connection with these passages should tell the Rortyan story about what corner of the culture we look to to understand ourselves, the kind of being we are, and that rebellious teenagers looked to in response to their dissatisfaction with the world they were born into:

Protestantism,

Science,

Literature as Poetry, then as Novels.

We could add, by the end of TwenCen: film. (Cf. Hegel on opera as the ultimate synthetic art form. Hugo Munsterberg [as Kuklick documents, painted out of the department portrait of the Harvard philosophy department] on silent, black and white film as the final, only, best, expression of the Absolute.)

And perhaps by now, computer games and their virtual worlds.

## (2) Derrida's textualism: "There is nothing outside the text."

This segment is on "How not to be an Antirepresentationalist."

Exhibit one would be Derrida's "**Il n'y a pas de hors-texte.**"

Rorty agrees, classifying this Derridean claim as "weak textualism," and seeing it backsliding into ultimately representationalist philosophy.

"Il n'y a pas de hors-texte":

If this just seems *crazy*, remember McDowell's central claim in *Mind and World*:

"The conceptual has no outer boundary."

[Should I at some point introduce the Hegelian reading of "being in conceptual shape" that I appeal to in explaining and justifying McDowell's claim? Or is that just too much, and so ultimately distracting for the discussion in the course session? Does it or would it help with the underlying issue I am trying to unpack?]

Here rehearse my resistance to the line of thought that starts from **de Saussure's signifier/signified model**, and rejects it by restricting itself just to the signifier side.

This is a linguistic version of Berkeley's "it's representings all the way down," idealism.



I should take this occasion to rehearse *categorial antirepresentationalism*, which is antirepresentationalism based on the primacy of the propositional.

‘Fido’-Fido, or ‘horses’-horses representationalism is vulnerable to the charge of being preKantian, in failing to appreciate the sense in which the most basic category (semantically, pragmatically, and syntactically) is picked out by **the “iron triangle of discursiveness.”**

That is the triangle that has declarative sentences on the syntactic side, assertion-inference on the pragmatic side, and claimables or propositions on the semantic side.

Q: What does it have on the ontological side?

A1: Facts [but we are into a square now].

A2: Beware of thinking of the relation between declarative sentences and facts on the name-bearer model. This is **representational nominalism**.

[Idiosyncratic demurrer: Davidson’s “slingshot” argument.]

Cf. Frege on truth-values as the *Bedeutungen* of sentences, as objects are of names.

Thoughts, including the true ones (=facts) are expressed by sentences, not represented by them.

PreKantian view fails to appreciate that (and why)

judgments are the smallest units of experience or awareness (**Kant**),

the only units to which pragmatic force can attach (**Frege**),

the smallest expressions with which one can make a move in a language game (**LW**).

**Peirce** is vulnerable on this point, with his triadic representational scheme and regress of interpretants.

His follower **Charles Morris**, the founder of **semiotics**, clearly succumbs to the failure to appreciate what is special about sentences.

Contemporary semiotics is crippled by this failure.

De Saussure is just one more *nominalistic* representationalist, in the sense of taking the name-bearer representational relation as the semantic model for understanding sentences.

Structuralists followed him,

and post-structuralists failed to free themselves from this picture.

**Nominalistic representationalism** assumes that the relation between sentences and facts is to be understood on the model of the relation between names and what they name, or predicates and the extensions (intensional variant: properties) they “stand for.”

Note that one version of this pathology is to combine

a) **semantic declarativism** about sentences, in the sense of treating all declarative sentences as on a par semantically (I follow Carnap and Sellars in thinking that many of them should be given metalinguistic expressive analyses, indeed, following Sellars, should be understood as object-language expressions of *pragmatic* metalinguistic thoughts.) with

b) **semantic nominalism**, in not only using a one-size-fits-all representational model, but using a nominalistic, name-bearer one.

If one addresses the question of what propositions are within the scope of these commitments, one gets either a promiscuous metaphysics of represented facts, or restricts the strictly representational ones by endorsing also *descriptivist* representationalism: the assimilation of all speech acts to describing.

LW broke out of the nominalism in the representationalism of TLP, and out of the descriptivism of that work for sentences formed using specifically *logical* operators.

So my complaint about Derridean (T)heory is that it is based on a bad philosophy of language, one that is mired in preKantian, preFregean, preWittgensteinian categorial (specifically nominalistic) representationalism.

**Tarskian model theory**, and following it

(in a way: Etchemendy's sharp distinction between models and possible worlds should be mentioned here)

possible worlds theories is *not* nominalistic in this sense.

It is at most *methodologically* nominalistic representationalist.

It adopts an order of explanation that starts with representational semantic relations understood nominalistically, but builds representational readings of sentences, as sets of models or sets of possible worlds, that are categorially different from the semantic interpretants of the subsentential expressions, out of which they are built functionally, or on the basis of which they are defined by introducing functions.

Might mention here Lewis's essentially two-sorted General Semantics formulation using categorial grammars.

This tradition does *not* make the nominalistic mistake that Peirce, Morris, semiotics, structuralism, and post-structuralism all make.

It's vulnerability is rather that it fails to match the semantic categorial distinctiveness of sentences with its source: their *pragmatic* distinctiveness.

It is that primacy in the *use* of declarative sentences that motivates the primacy-of-the-propositional revolution that unites separates Kant from his predecessors, and ties him to his successors Frege and Wittgenstein.

The Tarskian acknowledgment of the distinctiveness of sentences is different in kind from Frege's. For he distinguishes the relation of sentences to what they *express*, thoughts, which are in the realm of sense, from what they *represent*, in the realm of reference or Bedeutung. And for him, facts are true thoughts (thinkables, not thinkings).

So facts are *expressed* by sentences, not represented by them.

This way into the Sinn/Bedeutung distinction is *Fregean expressivism* about *facts*. We should keep it in mind when looking at Pricean expressivist antirepresentationalism.

### World of facts or world of things?

It is at this point that we can:

- a) raise the issue of whether we should think of the world as consisting of things (**nominalistically, reistically**) or of facts (as in *TLP*). Sellars stumbles here (IMHO).
- b) revert to the issue of Rorty's insistence that to talk about facts is always implicitly to invoke a *vocabulary* in which they are stated. Physical facts are facts statable in the vocabulary of physics, nautical or culinary facts are those statable in nautical or culinary vocabularies, financial facts, psychological facts, neurophysiological facts....

A world-of-facts view must answer the question: what vocabulary *expresses* (don't *assume* that the relation is representational) or represents those facts?

(This is the good Rorty view, not to be confused with the bad, backsliding Carnapian fallacy-of-lost-contrast Rortyan argument mentioned above, which must be firmly rejected as a misuse of the 'vocabulary' vocabulary, because violating Quine's anti-Carnap point that motivates it.)

**Goodman** gets his **many-worlds** view from assuming there is a world of facts for *every* (suitably well-behaved, descriptive) vocabulary.

But if we don't say that, and still have a world-of-facts view, we have to ask about the nature of the *privilege* of the possible vocabulary that picks out those facts.

Or we need to make vocabulary-independent sense of the notion of "fact."

(Good luck, but Lewis offers a broadly Tarskian, methodologically nominalistic effort, that starts with a vocabulary privileged by ultimate fundamental physics.)

### Can we avoid this issue of vocabulary-relativity by insisting on a world-of-things view?

(Sellars might have thought this was the advantage that spoke for ontological nominalism.)

Not really. We still need singular terms to pick out things, and need sortals to identify and individuate them.

**Quine** needed to specify the **domains** of his Tarskian models in a more expressively powerful semantic metalanguage, which he kept carefully off-stage by talking just about "objects".

But you can't even *count* "objects."

To count requires criteria of identity and individuation, which are expressed by *sortals*.

'Thing', 'object', 'unit' are pseudo-sortals.

Frege in his *Grundlagen* teaches this lesson superbly.

So the question becomes: in what vocabulary are the sortals specified, for the “objects” that make up the world?

Exactly this point enforces the **Etchemendy** point about the difference between **Tarskian models** and **possible worlds** (though this is not how he makes the point, which has to do rather with the understanding of the necessity of logical consequence relations, which looks different if you quantify over models than if you quantify over possible worlds).

You might think that you can avoid the issue of vocabulary-relativity of the objective world by opting for a world of objects (WOO) rather than a world of facts (WOF).

But that is wrong.

Objects need to be individuated by sortals, which are as conceptual, hence as potentially vocabulary-relative, as sentences are.

**The issue of vocabulary-relativity arises for world-of-objects representationalism as well as for world-of-facts representationalism, but here it comes via the sortals used to pick out objects and the predicates used to pick out properties.**

Can think of all of the foregoing remarks as conceptual ground-clearing and sharpening of conceptual tools for addressing the issue of how to think about **privileging some vocabularies for expressing (or representing) objective facts** (or picking out the objects via objective kinds, and the properties for a Tarskian methodologically nominalistic picture of the objective world).

Is it an **objective privileging**?

**Is the privilege itself vocabulary-relative**, and in that sense not objective?

Note that another issue in the vicinity is that if one is not a descriptivist declarativist, that is, does not take it that the job of all declarative sentences is to describe, or that only the ones that do are genuine, then one must pick out which vocabularies or uses of vocabulary *do* describe, and which do not. That is the bifurcationist responsibility Price will focus on in his argument that local expressivisms are unstable.

Here the claim at issue is **the potential vocabulary-dependence of fundamental *categorial* features of the objective world**: that it comes in the shape of facts, of objects of various kinds, with properties and standing in relations, that there are laws relating those facts (object, properties, kinds, relations...).

But the Derridean slogan says “Il n’y a pas”: there is nothing.... That seems like an existential claim about what there is, a claim about the order of being, not just the order of understanding.

(German Idealism, especially Hegel, is antirepresentationalist in a sense that deeply denies the possibility of certain kinds of decoupling of the “order of being” and the “order of knowing-understanding.”)

One way of separating the issues is to ask: Does it follow (is it intended to follow) from the Derridean slogan that:

Sub 1): If there were (or had been) no text, there would (or would have been) nothing? (Because there is nothing “else”?).

For that counterfactual seems fairly straightforwardly false.

After all, before there were humans, there was no language, so no “text.”

And the antecedent of the subjunctive conditional is not inconceivable.

We think about the time before humans often. (Inferences about the first few minutes of the universe are a triumph of human reasoning.)

d). One issue here is the one I raise in “Rorty on Vocabularies,” in connection with the Heidegger quote about there being no gravity before Lincoln. Where Rorty is tempted to argue that there were no truths before there were sentences, and therefore no sentences were true, that is mistaking thoughts as thinkings for thoughts as thinkables. Thinkables were true (there were facts) before there were thinkings.

e). Abraham Lincoln’s modal logical point: “Q: If we were all to agree to call the tail a ‘leg’, how many legs would horses have? A: Four. You can’t change how many legs horses have by deciding to talk differently.” This is the correct answer.

Semantic uses of two dimensional modal logic in the service of philosophy of mind (by Jackson and Chalmers, supported by Stalnaker) purports to make sense of counter-semantic counterfactuals. But in the end, this story depends on an absolutely untenable reductive (foundationalist) semantic phenomenalism. (Cf. my criticisms of Jackson’s Locke lectures, in my lecture notes from the “Philosophical Naturalism” course.).

f

### (3) Sense-dependence vs. Reference-dependence

Q: Is the relativity to vocabulary a matter of sense-dependence, or reference-dependence?

#### Explain the difference.

Use response-dependent properties:

Something is beautiful\* iff<sub>df.</sub> If an ideal observer *were* to view it, she *would* respond with pleasure.

A: It is sense-dependence that is at issue.

Facts, objects, properties, laws :: declarative sentences (or only descriptive ones?), singular terms (hence sortals), predicates, modally quantified conditionals.

One is frightened of claims of vocabulary dependence because one is thinking of reference-dependence claims.

What is arguable is sense-dependence.

Rorty does not make this distinction.

Sometimes he draws conclusions that at least flirt with the reference-dependence claim.

(Example: there was no gravity before Newton, no electrons before Rutherford.

Heidegger as dirty on this point.)

But his best (Quinean) wisdom entitles him to and (so) draws conclusions from only sense-dependence.

Objection: If we read Derrida's claim as not going beyond sense-dependence, isn't it anodyne (Pippin's term)?

Doesn't it amount to no more than that we can only conceive what we can conceive? If what is conceivable, graspable, understandable, is what is "in conceptual shape," then it seems to follow quickly (but to be trivial) that we can only conceive (is it trivial here to reformulate this as "think about"? That is a formulation in representational language.) what we can conceive.

And then it still seems possible that there is more "out there" than we can conceive, even though we can't "jump outside our own skin."

"As usual with pithy little formulae, the Derridean claim that "There is nothing outside the text" is right about what it implicitly denies and wrong about what it explicitly asserts. The only force of saying that texts do not refer to non-texts is just the old pragmatist chestnut that any specification of a referent is going to be in some vocabulary. Thus one is really comparing two descriptions of a thing rather than a description with the thing-in-itself. This chestnut, in turn, is just an expanded form of Kant's slogan that "Intuitions without concepts are blind," which, in turn, was just a sophisticated restatement of Berkeley's ingenuous remark that "nothing can be like an idea except an idea."

These are all merely misleading ways of saying that we shall not see reality plain, unmasked, naked to our gaze.

Textualism has nothing to add to this claim except a new misleading image—the image of the world as consisting of everything written in all the vocabularies used so far. [169]

Textualism adds nothing save an extra metaphor to the romanticism of Hegel and the pragmatism of James and Nietzsche...[170]

So

i) the “order of being” reading of the Derrida (Derrida-McDowell?) claim, at least as unpacked so as to entail the truth of counterfactuals like (Sub 1), is unsustainable. Rorty was wrong to support Heidegger on this point. They were both confused. That reference-dependence claim is wrong.

ii) The objection remains that on the “order of understanding”, sense-dependence reading of the claim, it is anodyne, a platitude.

This is the dilemma.

It remains to ask, then, is there *any* sense in which the vocabulary-relativity of objectivity is a claim that is both true and interesting?

#### ((4) Retrospective/Prospective (technology))

One issue in the vicinity is how to get some successor notion to the nature/vocabulary versions of “coping”, coping from below (with nature) and coping from above (cultural self-transformation by adopting new vocabularies).

These are the two sides that line up with the public/private split in *CIS*, and so line up with solidarity/irony. (Both of these are big moves that deserve to be contentious. Here, as so often, Rorty is rushing ahead of his arguments, making big conjectures with the potential to transform our attitudes by confronting us with unforeseen alternatives.)

Passage from “Solidarity or Objectivity”:

In the final sentence of his book, Putnam says that, "The very fact that we speak of our different conceptions as different conceptions of *rationality* posits a *Grenzbegriff*, a limited-concept of ideal truth." But what is such a posit supposed to do, except to say that from God's point of view the human race is heading in the right direction?...

To say that we think we're heading in the right direction is just to say, with Kuhn, that we can, by hindsight, tell the story of the past as a story of progress. To say that we still have a long way to go, that our present views should not be cast in bronze, is too platitudinous to require support by positing limit-concepts. So it is hard to see what difference is made by the difference between saying "there is only the dialogue" and saying "there is also that to which the dialogue converges." [174]

This is my excuse for talking about *retrospective* judgments of progress vs. *prospective*, technological ones.

Positing *Grenzbegriffe* seems merely a way of telling ourselves that a nonexistent God would, if he did exist, be pleased with us. If we could ever be moved solely by the desire for solidarity, setting aside the desire for objectivity altogether, then we should think of human progress as making it possible for human beings to do more interesting things and be more interesting people, not as heading toward a place that has somehow been prepared for humanity in advance. Our self-image would employ images of *making rather than finding*, the images used by the Romantics to praise poets rather than the images used by the Greeks to praise mathematicians. [174]

This passage is romantic backsliding from rejection of the Kantian problematic of asking which features of our vocabularies-in-use are **made** and which **found**.

More specifically, we can think about the case of the institutions of empirical science being taken over by, say, religious fanatics, who pervert them away from their objective



representational “finding” role, by incorporating standards of assessment such as “pleasingness to God” or “pleasingness to the Maximum Leader, the Caudillo.”

Rorty points out that it is not that hard to get a tradition to look progressive *retrospectively*.

For the standards of assessment are those of the latecomers. The winners write the history.

**But I have pointed out that a constraint on standards of *retrospective* progressiveness *can* be supplied by *prospectively* available standards of progressiveness.**

Standards of progress are prospective to the extent to which *earlier* members of the tradition have genuine authority over the progressiveness of developments.

My thought is that this is a good thing to mean by specifically *technological* progress. The image is the requirement that theoretical advances be compatible with keeping the old machines running.

Famously, it was this sort of measure that persuaded the conquering Arabs to keep Greek learning. They *knew* that Greek medicine could save people from battlefield wounds that were otherwise surely fatal. When the Greek doctors said that to understand how, you needed to think about how the microcosm and the macrocosm were related, the Arabs had little choice but to think that all that Greek literature and philosophy must be valuable and should be preserved. Aristotle would not be able to appreciate how accurately we can measure the mass of the electron. But he would be impressed by our medicine, by our ability to blow large holes in the ground, move things rapidly over great distances, build large, stable structures...and so on. The demand for technological conservation and progress, understood by prospective normative standards set by earlier practical attitudes and assessments puts a genuine constraint on what counts as theoretical progress, understood by retrospective normative standards set by later practical attitudes and assessments.

**Part Two:**

(5)

The question is: what should we say about various objectivity claims, if we accept sense-dependence of all sorts of claims about the categorial structure of the objective world on claims about the practices of using sentences, singular terms, subjunctive conditionals, etc. ?

1. Suppose we accept the sense-dependence of talk of the categorial structure of the objective world (both structurally and particularly) on talk of our discursive practices. (We can acknowledge *reciprocal* sense-dependence of the two kinds of discourse (vocabulary) here.)

The challenge is to know what follows from that insight when we combine it with:

2. Understanding representation in Kant-by-Hegel normative terms of the *authority* of representeds over representings (the responsibility of representings to representeds), and
3. Rejecting the Kantian problematic of trying to assign responsibility for *some* features of our practices (some categorial-structural, others more particular) to the objective world we are talking about (describing, representing) and some to features of us practitioners. We would reject this problematic based on adopting the ‘vocabulary’ vocabulary, and doing that and understanding the significance of that because of Quinean arguments against the Carnapian two-stage story, from TDE.

The question is, if we accept all of (1), (2), and (3), what should we then say, how should we then talk, what is a good vocabulary to use to discuss the “objectivity” of the world we conduct our discursive practices in?

Further, what do we say if we throw into the mix:

4. Social pragmatism about norms: the claim that *all* normative statuses (paradigmatically, responsibility and authority, commitment and entitlement) are ultimately *social* statuses. This is the thought that talk of normative statuses of authority and responsibility (etc.) is talk about functional roles items can play in social practices—significances things can have (or be practically taken to have or treated as having) in the practices of some community.

2. Rorty seems to think that, once we have

a. moved to the ‘vocabulary’ vocabulary, so rejected the language/theory, meaning/belief dichotomies, and

b. further rejected the Kantian-Carnapian problematic about assignment (apportioning) of responsibility for features of our experience-discourse-vocabulary to us representers or the objective world represented [and we must ask more thoroughly and carefully whether rejection of all forms of the Kantian question really are ruled out as unintelligible by the good pragmatist reasons there are to adopt the ‘vocabulary’ vocabulary]

This is a making/finding distinction: we are responsible for what we make, the world for what we find.

So to reject the Kantian problematic of assigning responsibility is to reject a version of the making/finding distinction.

(Cf. Kant’s idea that what we have ourselves done (synthesis) is in some strong sense transparent to us. Hence the a prioricity of the results of analysis, which just consists in picking apart what we ourselves have put together. This is a residual Cartesian transparency thesis.)

that it follows that

c. we should not think (can no longer treat it as intelligible) that our thought is normatively constrained (as opposed to causally constrained) by an objective world via the representational semantic dependence of representings on representeds that consists in representeds providing normative standards of assessment of the correctness of representings (in a distinctive sense of “correctness.”).

Is that right?

We have five claims or moves Rorty might be seen to be making:

1. Rejecting two-stage talk of two activities, one of instituting meanings and the other of applying them to justify beliefs.
2. Rejecting the language/theory distinction entirely, in favor of the ‘vocabulary’ vocabulary. All we do is use vocabularies, and those practices *both* institute meanings and apply concepts to undertake commitments (endorse, take-true, some claimables).
3. Rejecting the Kantian problematic of assigning responsibility for some features of our discourse (vocabulary-use) to what we are talking about (what is represented)—the authority of the objective—and responsibility for other features of our discourse to us—the authority of the subjective.
4. Rejecting as ultimately unintelligible the idea that our thought is normatively constrained (as opposed to causally constrained) by an objective world via the representational semantic dependence of representings on representeds that consists in representeds providing normative standards of assessment of the correctness of representings (in a distinctive sense of “correctness.”).

5. Social pragmatism about normativity: all normative statuses (responsibility, authority, being a standard of correctness) are social statuses.

Some questions:

Does (1) require (2)?

Does (2) imply (3)?

Does (3) imply (4)?

Does adding (5) to any of these claims make the implications go through?

(6)

**(3-c) below, on Wittgensteinian language games is a way of operationalizing these questions, in terms of the *pragmatics*, that is, the *use* of descriptive vocabularies (whether or not we are *declarativists* about *description*, or representation, generally).**

3. On undercutting the making/finding distinction and undercutting the Kantian assignment-of-responsibility problematic:

a) the making/finding distinction is at most undercut for specifically discursive, concept-mongering activity.

b) Can transform the question, in a way Rorty *sometimes* does. For sometimes he talks as though some vocabularies aim at consensus and incorporate practices or methods for achieving it that do permit persuasive coercion, coercion by the force of the better reason, while others do not. His picture is that those coercive vocabularies institute the “force of the better reason” by having social practices with a distinctive shape (or maybe there are many ways to do this). Cf. Peirce “The Fixation of Belief.” He does this polemically when he distinguishes metaphilosophies that think the *best* vocabularies “aim to end conversation” from metaphilosophies that think the *best* vocabularies “aim to keep the conversation going.”

But we can ask the *engineering* question: what features of vocabularies make it possible to end conversations by the persuasive coercion of the better reason?

We can think here of jurisprudential institutions, which by their social function *have* to (are obliged functionally to) *end* conversations by arriving at verdicts—both on the criminal side and on the civil side.

Or we can think of the special role played by observation reports in vocabularies that count as “empirical” just in virtue of having something playing that special role. We should reconceive that role as Quine does in “Epistemology Naturalized”: i) observationality is a matter of degree, ii) it is construed in terms of role in the practices of a community, by amount of agreement on verdict “under concurrent stimulation.” iii) Observationality in this sense depends on (is localized within the community according to) training, including theoretical training. But there is (must be?) some concepts that are nearly universally observable, for physiologically normal speakers who have been minimally “brought up right” (and so can tell green from purple, arms from legs...).

In general, we can ask what features of a vocabulary(-in-use) is it in virtue of which (that make it possible) it can *find* things (truths, sentences agreed upon), precipitated out of the great mix of finding-and-making.

(Note that here we would like a term that stands to the making/finding distinction as “vocabulary” aims to stand relative to the language/theory distinction. It must acknowledge an

activity of applying concepts that both applies and institutes them, “determines” contents and commitments together.)

c) [This should be the final section of the session:]

Think in terms of Wittgensteinian language games, about this *engineering* question of what features of practices underwrite Kantian distinctions of responsibility underwriting objective representational accounts:

So we could think of practices of counting apples (assuming we can identify and individuate them). We have a routinized set of expressions, maybe letters in an alphabet (Stephen Wright: why is the alphabet in that order? Others: It’s Ozzies: “Abba ga day”). Or one might use verses of a memorized poem.

(Being able to recite these “in order” is like the Quinean capacity to respond the same way “under concurrent stimulation” in his pragmatic specification of observationality.)

One says one expression each time one moves an apple from one bin to the initially empty one. Then sees what the last expression one uttered is. Here, games that used different sequences of expressions would be practically equivalent, in that we would get the *same* result (in a specified sense) when asked “How many apples?”.

So the bit “up to us” includes the counting terms I use, while how many apples is not (holding fixed the practices of identifying and individuating apples).

For *what* I am counting depends at least on what I would do (what I *should* do) if: I pick an orange out of the bin, or a scrub-brush, or a hedgehog, or a leaf. Do I “increment my count”? If not, have I made a mistake—according to the norms implicit in the practice? (Compare: snakes, when one can only see one bit of the snake.) How this works for weights (ounces vs. grams). Measure-theoretic issues about the kind of scale (negative temperatures, but not weights).

Other examples:

We pick balls out of a bin, offer a description and replace them. Then count not the balls but the descriptions. In this way we might tell the proportion of red to yellow balls, or dark-colored to light-colored, or light to heavy, or round and cornered, or spherical, tetrahedral, cubical....

Doing this with replacement could be measuring the objective proportions of things that have one property to things that have another. But we would have to control for how long we went on, or realize that, supposing we used alphabetic ordering to count, ‘d’ to ‘b’ results are “the same as” ‘z’ to ‘m’ results (just less “accurate”).

There are genuine complexities here. But it is not clear we could not botanize *kinds of objectivity*, kinds of cases where we *can* assign responsibility for *some* features of the result of our procedures to what is described/represented, and assign responsibility for others to our practices of describing/representing (the differences between *equivalent* procedures, according to some equivalence relation).

All these are cases where we could see the terms used as not mattering, in the sense that games could be “measuring” the same objective property (what the world is responsible for) using different terms. But not *every* such game *is* “measuring” something objective.

What are the differences between those that do and those that don't?

So we could ask in general: what stage-setting is necessary to fund such distinctions of “up to us”/ “not up to us”? Is there a *general* answer to that question?

It would have to take the form of a criterion of equivalence of practices, i.e. the form of an *equivalence relation* across practices.

And we would be assuming a *lot* about how things actually work to set up such equivalences.

That is, what I am describing is, *in pragmatist terms* of the shape of the discursive practices (so in terms of *use*, of *pragmatics*), how we can underwrite ultimately *semantic Kantian*

assignments of responsibility for features of the discourse to representeds and activities of representing.

In the end, then, the question is how we could define equivalence for *description* in general, i.e. for *attributing objective properties*, where what varies across games that *describe* the world as having the *same* objects-properties-relations-facts-laws...involve equivalence relations that make what is *described* the *same*, across *differences* in the practice of *describing* them.

If we are *declarativist descriptivists*, the claim, is, no such specification will exist. But even with a more restricted notion of description (representation), it is not clear that we can make *general* sense of such equivalences.

But I don't see a knock-down argument that there *cannot be* such criteria.

Does the idea of defining such an equivalence across all *descriptive* games make sense?

How could we make it more definite?