

Handout for Week 2

Plan for Week 2:

Part One:

Rorty's basic idea articulated, in three parts:

- 1) History: A Manichean retrospective rational reconstruction of two philosophical traditions: neokantianism and 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* perspective:
 - 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.

Some Passages from Rorty's *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*

From the Introduction:

- a) Philosophy as a discipline...sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion.
- b) It purports to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and of mind.
- c) Philosophy can be **foundational in respect to the rest of culture** because culture is the assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims.
- d) It can do so because it understands the foundations of knowledge, and it finds these foundations in a study of man-as-knower, of the "mental processes" or **the "activity of representation"** which make knowledge possible.
- e) To know is to represent accurately what is outside the mind; so to understand the possibility and nature of knowledge is to understand the way in which the mind is able to construct such representations.
- f) **Philosophy's central concern is to be a general theory of representation,**
- g) a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, those which represent it less well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretense of doing so). [3]

In the nineteenth century, the notion of philosophy as a foundational discipline which "grounds" knowledge-claims was consolidated in the writings of the neo-Kantians.[4]

...the three most important philosophers of our century Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey. [5]
Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey are in agreement that the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation, needs to be abandoned.[6]

...to assert the possibility of a post-Kantian culture, one in which there is no all-encompassing discipline which legitimizes or grounds the others.[6]

The aim of the book is to undermine the reader's confidence in "the mind" as something about which one should have a "philosophical" view, in "knowledge" as something about which there ought to be a "theory" and which has "foundations," and in "philosophy" as it has been conceived since Kant. [7]

[T]he kind of philosophy which stems from Russell and Frege is, like classical Husserlian phenomenology, simply one more attempt to **put philosophy in the position which Kant wished it to have-that of judging other areas of culture on the basis of its special knowledge of the "foundations" of these areas.** "Analytic" philosophy is **one more variant of Kantian philosophy, a variant marked principally by thinking of representation as linguistic rather than mental, and of philosophy of language rather than "transcendental critique," or psychology, as the discipline which exhibits the "foundations of knowledge."** This emphasis on language, I shall be arguing in chapters four and six, does not essentially change the Cartesian-Kantian problematic, and thus does not really give philosophy a new self-image. For analytic philosophy is still committed to the construction of a permanent, neutral framework for inquiry, and thus for all of culture. [8]

The very idea of "philosophy" as something distinct from "science" would make little sense without the Cartesian claim that by turning inward we could find ineluctable truth, and the Kantian claim that this truth imposes limits on the possible results of empirical inquiry. **The notion that there could be such a thing as "foundations of knowledge" (all knowledge-in every field, past, present, and future) or a "theory of representation" (all representation, in familiar vocabularies and those not yet dreamed of)** depends on the assumption that there is some such a priori constraint. [9]

The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of the mind as a great mirror, containing various representations-some accurate, some not-and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods. Without the notion of the mind as mirror, the notion of knowledge as accuracy of representation would not have suggested itself.

Without this latter notion, the strategy common to Descartes and Kant—getting more accurate representations by inspecting, repairing, and polishing the mirror, so to speak—would not have made sense. [12]

One way to see how analytic philosophy fits within the traditional Cartesian-Kantian pattern is to see traditional philosophy as **an attempt to escape from history**—an attempt to find nonhistorical conditions of any possible historical development. From this perspective, the common message of Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger is a **historicist** one.[9]

...the attempt (which has defined traditional philosophy) to explicate "rationality" and "objectivity" in terms of conditions of accurate representation is a self-deceptive effort to eternalize the normal discourse of the day, and that, since the Greeks, philosophy's self-image has been dominated by this attempt. [11]

Yet neither Heidegger nor Wittgenstein lets us see the historical phenomenon of mirror imagery, the story of the domination of the mind of the West by ocular metaphors, within a **social perspective**. [12-13]

In [Dewey's] ideal society, **culture is no longer dominated by the ideal of objective cognition** but by that of **aesthetic enhancement**. In that culture, as he said, the arts and the sciences would be "the unforced flowers of life." [13]

From Chapter Four:

The earnest reductionism of Bain and Mill and the equally earnest romanticism of Royce drove aesthetical ironists like James and Bradley, as well as social reformers like the young Dewey, to proclaim the unreality of traditional epistemological problems and solutions. **They were provoked to radical criticisms of "truth as correspondence" and "knowledge as accuracy of representations," thus threatening the entire Kantian notion of philosophy as metacriticism of the special disciplines**. [165-66]

Driven by the need to find something to be apodictic about, Russell discovered "logical form" and Husserl discovered "essences," the "purely formal" aspects of the world which remained when the non formal had been "bracketed." The discovery of these privileged representations began once again a quest for seriousness, purity, and rigor, a quest which lasted for some forty years. But, in the end, heretical followers of Husserl (Sartre and Heidegger) and heretical followers of Russell (Sellars and Quine) raised the same sorts of questions about the possibility of apodictic truth which Hegel had raised about Kant. Phenomenology gradually became transformed into what Husserl despairingly called "mere anthropology," and "analytic" epistemology (i.e., "philosophy of science") became increasingly historicist and decreasingly "logical" (as in Hanson, Kuhn, Harre, and Hesse). So, seventy years after Husserl's "Philosophy as Rigorous Science" and Russell's "Logic as the Essence of Philosophy," we are back with the same putative dangers which faced the authors of these manifestoes: **if philosophy becomes too naturalistic, hard-nosed positive disciplines will nudge it aside; if it becomes too historicist, then intellectual history, literary criticism, and similar soft spots in "the humanities" will swallow it up**. [166-168]

...if we do not have the distinction between what is "given" and what is "added by the mind," or that between the "contingent" (because influenced by what is given) and the "necessary" (because entirely "within" the mind and under its control), then we will not know what would count as a "rational reconstruction" of our knowledge. We will not know what epistemology's goal or method could be. These two distinctions... [169]

In what follows, I shall confine myself to discussing two radical ways of criticizing the Kantian foundations of analytic philosophy—Sellars's behavioristic critique of "the whole framework of givenness" and Quine's behavioristic approach to the necessary-contingent distinction. [170]

As long as knowledge is conceived of as accurate representing--as the Mirror of Nature--Quine's and Sellars's **holistic** doctrines sound pointlessly paradoxical, because such accuracy requires a theory of privileged representations, ones which are automatically and intrinsically accurate. So the response to Sellars on givenness and Quine on analyticity is often that they have "gone too far"—that they have allowed **holism** to sweep them off their feet and away from common sense. [170]

In order to defend Sellars and Quine, I shall be arguing that their holism is a product of their commitment to the thesis that justification is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (or words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice. Conversational justification, so to speak, is naturally holistic, whereas the notion of justification embedded in the epistemological tradition is reductive and atomistic. I shall try to show that Sellars and Quine invoke the same argument, one which bears equally against the given-versus-nongiven and the necessary-versus-contingent distinctions. The crucial premise of this argument is that we understand knowledge when we understand the social justification of belief, and thus have no need to view it as accuracy of representation. [170]

Then the notion of philosophy as the discipline which looks for privileged representations among those constituting the Mirror becomes unintelligible. A thoroughgoing holism has no place for the notion of philosophy as "conceptual," (as "apodictic," as picking out the "foundations" of the rest of knowledge, as explaining which representations are "purely given" or "purely conceptual," [170]

Analytic philosophy cannot, I suspect, be written without one or the other of these distinctions. If there are no intuitions into which to resolve concepts (in the manner of the *Aufbau*) nor any internal relations among concepts to make possible "grammatical discoveries" (in the manner of "Oxford philosophy"), then indeed it is hard to imagine what an "analysis" might be. [172]

The simplest way to describe the common features of Quine's and Sellars's attacks on logical empiricism is to say that both raise behaviorist questions about the epistemic privilege which logical empiricism claims for certain assertions, qua reports of privileged representations. [173]

Explaining rationality and epistemic authority by reference to what society lets us say, rather than the latter by the former, is the essence of what I shall call "epistemological behaviorism," an attitude common to Dewey and Wittgenstein. [174]

Epistemological behaviorism (which might be called simply "pragmatism," were this term not a bit overladen) [176]

Can we treat the study of "the nature of human knowledge" just as the study of certain ways in which human beings interact, or does it require an ontological foundation (involving some specifically philosophical way of describing human beings)? [175]

We can take the Sellars-Quine attitude toward knowledge while cheerfully "countenancing" raw feels, a priori concepts, innate ideas, sense-data, propositions, and anything else which a causal explanation of human behavior might find it helpful to postulate. What we cannot do is to take knowledge of these "inner" or "abstract" entities as premises from which our knowledge of other entities is normally inferred, and without which the latter knowledge would be "ungrounded."

The difference is between saying that to know a language is to be acquainted with the meanings of its terms, or that to see a table is to have a rectangular sense-impression, and explaining the authority of tokens of "All men are animals" or "That looks like a table" by virtue of the prior (internal, private, nonsocial) authority of a knowledge of meanings or of sense-impressions. Behaviorism in epistemology is a matter not of metaphysical parsimony, but of whether authority can attach to assertions by virtue of relations of "acquaintance" between persons and, for example, thoughts, impressions, universals, and propositions. [177]

The issue is not adequacy of explanation of fact, but rather whether a practice of justification can be given a "grounding" in fact. The question is not whether human knowledge in fact has "foundations," but whether it makes sense to suggest that it does—whether the idea of epistemic or moral authority having a "ground" in nature is a coherent one. [178]

One reason why professional philosophers recoil from the claim that knowledge may not have foundations, or rights and duties an ontological ground, is that the kind of behaviorism which dispenses with foundations is in a fair way toward dispensing with philosophy. ...

It threatens the neoKantian image of philosophy's relation to science and to culture. The urge to say that assertions and actions must not only cohere with other assertions and actions but "correspond" to something apart from what people are saying and doing has some claim to be called the philosophical urge. [179]

It is the urge which drove Plato to say that Socrates' words and deeds, failing as they did to cohere with current theory and practice, nonetheless corresponded to something which the Athenians could barely glimpse. **The residual Platonism which Quine and Sellars are opposing** is not the hypostatization of nonphysical entities, but the notion of "correspondence" with such entities as the touchstone by which to measure the worth of present practice. [179]

When Sellars's and Quine's doctrines are purified, they appear as complementary expressions of a single claim: that **no "account of the nature of knowledge" can rely on a theory of representations which stand in privileged relations to reality.** The work of these two philosophers enables us to unravel, at long last, Locke's confusion between explanation and justification, and to make clear why an "account of the nature of knowledge" can be, at most, a description of human behavior. [182]

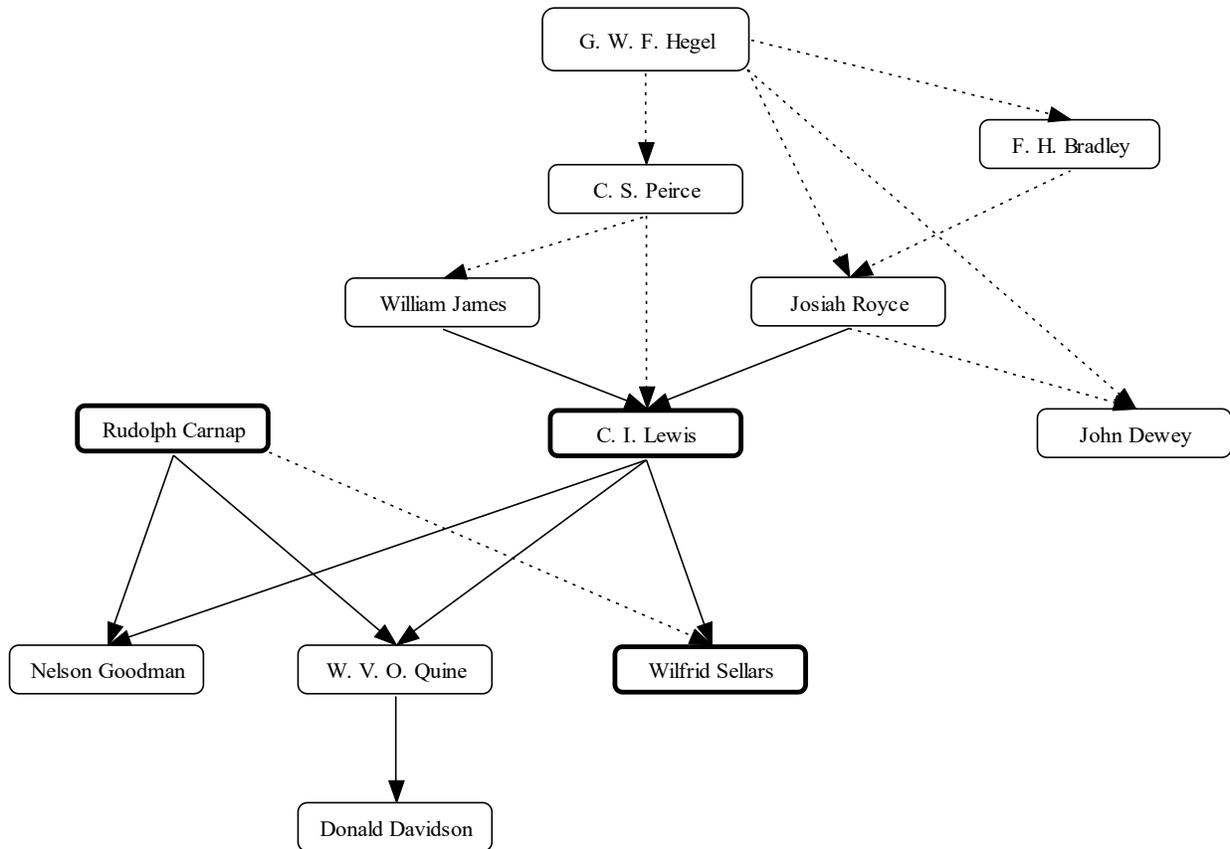
Shall we take conceptualization as a matter of classification or of justification? Sellars can say that he will give up the term concept to those who wish to endow record-changers or their protoplasmic counterparts with concepts, as long as he can have some other term to indicate what we have when we can place classifications in relation to other classifications in the way language-users do when they argue about what class a given item should fall in. Once again, Sellars falls back on saying that **justification is a matter of social practice, and that everything which is not a matter of social practice is no help in understanding the justification of human knowledge, no matter how helpful it may be in understanding its acquisition.** [186]

This attitude toward the concept of "concept" makes it possible to dismiss Kant's distinction between necessary truths (which can be determined by looking at concepts alone [analytic truth] or pure concepts and pure forms of intuition alone [synthetic a priori truth]) and contingent truths (which require reference to empirical intuitions). [193]

Quine is led into these difficulties, I think, by an attempt to preserve the view which he, like Sellars, inherits from Carnap and ultimately from Wittgenstein's Tractatus: **the view that the world can be "completely described" in an extensional language.** It is intensionality rather than intentionality which is the real bugbear, for only the non-truthfunctional character of intentional discourse makes its presumed subject more disreputable than, say, irreducibly biochemical talk of mitochondria. [204]

In the previous chapter I said that the epistemological tradition confused the **causal** process of acquiring knowledge with questions concerning its **justification.** In this chapter I have presented Sellars's criticism of the Myth of the Given and Quine's criticism of the notion of truth by virtue of meaning as two detailed developments of this more general criticism. If we accept these criticisms, and therefore drop the notion of epistemology as the quest, initiated by Descartes, for those privileged items in the field of consciousness which are the touchstones of truth, we are in a position to ask whether there still remains something for epistemology to be. I want to urge that there does not. [209-210]

Some Pragmatists and Neopragmatists



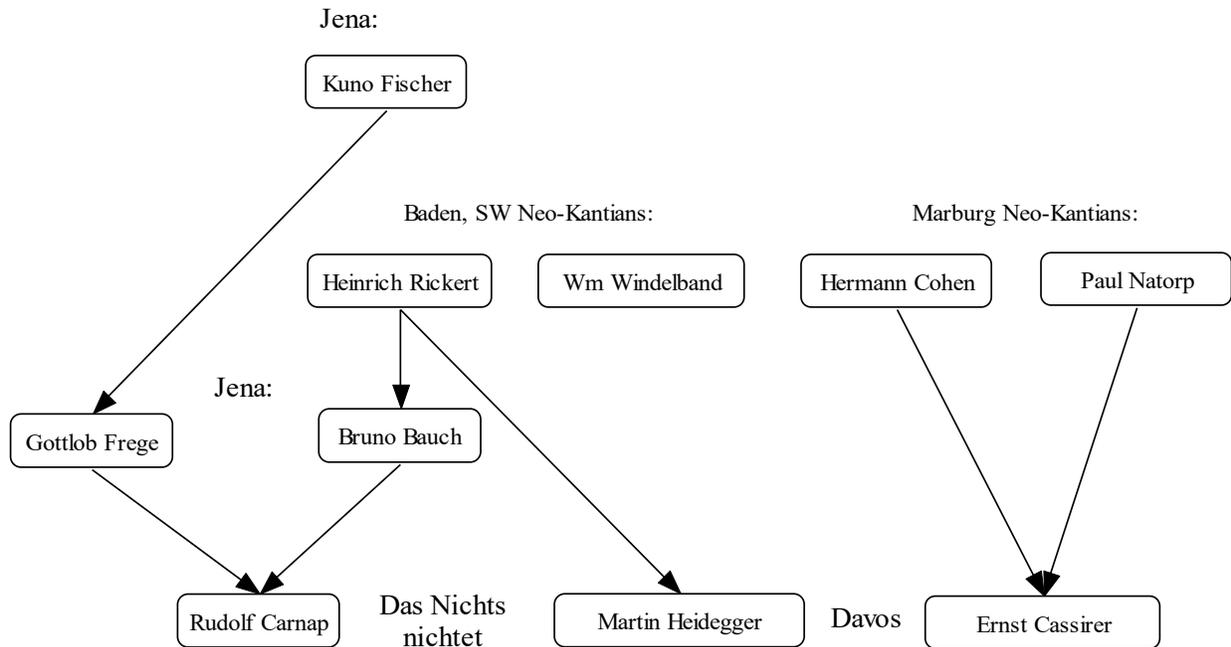
Dotted lines indicate influence.

Solid lines are teachers, including actual or *de facto* Doktorvaters.

Thick borders indicate neopragmatists.

For Carnap's neopragmatist heritage, see the next page.

German Neo-Kantians after 1860



Notes:

The trigger for this “zurück nach Kant” movement was the publication, in 1860, of Kuno Fischer’s *Kants Leben und die Grundlagen seiner Lehre*, after his conversion from empiricism. Arrows indicate Doktorvaters (except Frege, who merely taught Carnap, and learned Kant from his older colleague Fischer).

Bauch seems to have been Frege’s best philosopher friend in Jena.

Fischer, Cohen, Natorp, Bauch and Cassirer read Kant as principally a philosopher of science. Heidegger’s remarks on nothingness in “What is Metaphysics” are criticized by Carnap in “The Elimination of Metaphysics through the Logical Analysis of Language.”

On the 1929 Davos confrontation between Heidegger and Cassirer, see *Continental Divide: Heidegger, Cassirer, Davos*, by Peter Gordon [Harvard University Press, 2012].