

Jay F. Rosenberg

Philosophy's Self-Image

Abstract: Rorty rejects the idea of a "permanent and neutral matrix of heuristic concepts". The claim of privilege, however, is separable from the aim of universality, and this idea can be transposed into a regulative ideal, while still preserving the unique intellectual mission of a discipline of philosophy. Rorty's own positive picture of "edifying philosophy" in contrast is arguably irresponsible and grounded in misreadings both of the epistemology of science and of episodes in the history of philosophy, especially the contributions of Kant.

Like many of my colleagues, I find much of what Professor Rorty has to say about the state of philosophy in America today insightful and persuasive. Certainly it is difficult to argue with his observation that analytic philosophy in the English-speaking world today lacks the sort of comfortable unifying metaphilosophical self-image which thirty years ago it drew from canonical listings of "the leading problems of scientific philosophy" and from the "secure matrix of heuristic concepts" taken for granted in the early days of logical positivism's first flowering. Like many of my colleagues, however, I am also disturbed by the full picture which Rorty paints of the current state of our discipline.

I would want to insist upon the word 'discipline' here. The truth of much of what Rorty says crucially turns upon his focusing his attention upon the notion of philosophy as a profession, a "Fach" - and it is indeed undeniable that many of the current members of the American Philosophical Association tend to think of themselves in those terms, as philosophers by profession. The self-conception which lay behind a newsletter entitled "Jobs in Philosophy" has unfortunately outlasted its salutary renaming as "Jobs for Philosophers", and so in America we still solicit our candidates for teaching positions by AOS (Area of Specialization) and AOC (Areas of Competence) - as if Plato and Aristotle, Augustine and Aquinas, Locke and Leibniz, Kant and Hegel, Mill and Peirce and Dewey, Wittgenstein, Strawson, and Sellars, or for that matter, Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, Gadamer, Habermas, Merleau-Ponty, Derrida, and Foucault could or should be sorted by AOS and AOC.

Unlike Rorty I do not find Sellars' "definition" of philosophy - as "seeing how things, in the largest sense of the term, hang

together, in the largest sense of the term" - to be the least bit "bland". To remark, as Sellars does, that

"What is characteristic of philosophy is not a special subject matter, but the aim of knowing one's way around with respect to the subject-matters of all the special disciplines." (Sellars 1963, 2)

is to point up the fact that, although philosophy may not be a profession, it may nevertheless still be a coherent discipline, one having its own unique and distinctive intellectual mission.

To insist in this way that the philosophical enterprise is essentially synoptic, of course, is not to demand that its practitioners devote their full energies solely to sketching out synoptic visions. As Sellars also remarks, "... one can't hope to know one's way around in 'things in general', without knowing one's way around in the major groupings of things. ... And, indeed, one can 'have one's eye on the whole' without staring at it all the time. The latter would be a fruitless enterprise." (3) But it is to suggest that there is something characteristic of the discipline in terms of which it is arguably (more or less) appropriate and to the point to characterize Marx, Kierkegaard, and Frege as great nineteenth-century "philosophers" - and Kuhn, Kripke, and Rawls as three contemporary "philosophers" - rather than blandly and generically merely as important "thinkers" or "intellectuals".

Of course, if one's model for the characterization of a discipline is the description of a profession, the intellectually compartmentalized specification of a "Fach", the sorts of remarks which I have just been making are not likely to be seen as particularly helpful - and, indeed, in a certain sense they are not. For to say of someone that he or she is a philosopher is still to say something highly generic, something at a level of generality akin to categorizing someone as, for example, a "natural scientist". Unlike a classification of someone as a plumber or a linguist or a teacher or a film critic or a neurosurgeon or, for that matter, a lawyer, it is not the sort of description which implies very much about what that person is apt concretely to be doing or thinking about at those times when he or she is, so to speak, "on the job". For all that, however, to describe someone's intellectual pursuits at this level of generality is not in the end to say nothing at all about that person. For such generic descriptions do imply a good bit about the "problem space" in which he or she is likely to be moving - that is, about the kinds of problems, questions, inquiries and investigations which are likely to be of interest to that person - and about the "lines of attack" which he or she is likely to adopt in coming to grips with them - that is, about the ways in which that person is apt to approach and engage those problems and questions and the sorts of strategies which he or she is likely to pursue when conducting those inquiries and investigations.

Unlike Rorty, I am not convinced that the historical problem space of philosophy exhibits any significant discontinuities, either during the 17th and 18th centuries or at the beginning of the 20th. Rorty himself speaks of a traditional image of the

philosopher-sage as one who has "traveled far in the realms of thought, and pondered the great problems which have always troubled the human spirit". I am not sure what Rorty himself would count among those "great problems", but, while claiming neither exhaustiveness nor precision, one might venture to list: the nature of physical and of social reality, of good and evil, of right and wrong and justice; the intelligibility of the encountered world; the place of persons in the world; their capacities as knowers and as doers; their rights and their responsibilities; death and time; consciousness and self-consciousness; experience and thought. But it is then significant, I submit, that such a list describes the concerns of Wittgenstein, Kuhn, Quine, Chisholm, Sellars, and Rawls or of Heidegger, Gadamer, Habermas, Derrida, and Foucault no less than it characterizes those of Plato, Aristotle, Augustine, Aquinas, Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Hume, Kant, Hegel, Nietzsche, Mill, Peirce, Whitehead, and Dewey.

To this it may be objected that a list of themes and problems so general and so abstract could hardly fail to describe the concerns of any significant thinker. Of course not. But that is not the point. What is important here is not that such a broad and synoptic list of intellectual concerns is sufficient to capture the contributions of such figures in its descriptive net. What is important is that it is necessary. Plato wrote the Euthyphro and the Theatetus, the Republic and the Parmenides. Aristotle gave us both the Nicomachean Ethics and the Physics. Locke's "certain physiology of the human understanding" was equally the vehicle of a metaphysics of Newtonian dynamics and a foundational formulation of political liberalism. Kant was the author of three Critiques, not one; Hegel of the Logic as well as the Phenomenology and the Philosophy of Right. The Mill who wrote On Liberty is the Mill of "Mill's Methods". Nothing less than a list of problems as sweepingly conceived as "the nature and intelligibility of reality" and "the epistemological and ethical place of persons in the world" has the descriptive reach to span the full range of such historical paradigms of the enterprise "philosophy". But what more structured and specific descriptions would Rorty recommend to characterize the work of Wittgenstein or Heidegger, Chisholm or Habermas, Sellars or Foucault?

What I am proposing, in short, is that philosophy is an essentially synoptic, generalist, and integrative discipline. While the positivistic notion of "the logical space in which all possible human activities could proceed" and the idea of "that sort of largest possible context of thought which the Platonic sage was supposed to possess" which Rorty castigates cannot, in view of analytic philosophy's metaphilosophical self-criticisms, be carried over unmodified into future self-descriptions of the philosophical enterprise, neither, I am convinced, should such pictures of the aims of our discipline simply be discarded as the outworn garments of an immature culture. The "ambition to classify, comprehend, and criticize every significant inquiry in terms of a permanent neutral matrix" may well be chimerical, but the drive toward synopsis and synthesis which that ambition embodies surely is not.

My point is that the claim of privilege is separable from the aim of universality. We can, in other words, relinquish the claims to the "permanence" and "neutrality" of any "matrix of heuristic concepts" under which this or that individual philosopher, school, or philosophical movement has historically attempted to subsume, to understand, and to appraise diverse specific areas of human inquiry and concern without however at the same time abandoning the conviction that it is precisely the effort to construct and to apply such synoptic "matrices of heuristic concepts" which always has been, and still is, the proper business of the discipline of philosophy as such.

On this view, the historically-important idea of a universal categorial framework which is privileged, permanent, and socio-culturally neutral becomes transposed into a "regulative ideal". The enterprise which such an ideal de facto regulates, however, can remain untouched by this transposition. That is, it remains open to us to undertake the distinctively philosophical project of formulating a universal synoptic framework of integrative concepts and categories in terms of which our polymorphic languages, inquiries, and practices can be synthetically grasped and reflectively appraised, while simultaneously acknowledging that any actual categorial framework which we succeed in outlining will inevitably be time-bound and historically contingent.

The crucial point upon which I wish to insist is that it no more follows from the ultimate contingency of such synoptic heuristic frameworks that their construction is pointless or valueless than it follows from the necessary defeasibility of explanatory theories projected within the natural sciences that they fail actually to explain the phenomena which fall within their scope. Just as we regard our currently-best explanatory theories as embodying our currently-best answers to questions regarding the objective content and lawful structure of physical reality, so, too, we can regard the systematic frameworks of concepts and categories outlined and applied by philosophers of synoptic intent precisely as embodying our currently-best solutions to "the great problems which have always troubled the human spirit". What I have elsewhere (Rosenberg 1980b, 191) called "the grand project of bringing our rational practices under rational survey" remains the legitimate coherent enterprise of an autonomous discipline of philosophy even after we have granted that the categories and concepts of such an intellectual self-knowledge and self-appraisal - of our collective cultural apperception, so to speak - may well themselves evolve and change as we ourselves evolve and change.

Although I am thus convinced that both the problem space and the distinctive intellectual mission of the discipline of philosophy as such have not in fact undergone any radical or discontinuous changes since their articulation by Socrates-cum-Plato, however, it is certainly undeniable that the specific points of focus within this synoptic space of human concerns which have served as the points of departure for historically significant philosophical research programs have

varied dramatically across time. The "theological turn" inaugurated by the mediaeval Christian rediscovery of Aristotle, the "epistemological turn" initiated by Descartes, and the "linguistic turn" (or, perhaps better, the "logico-linguistic turn") executed at the outset of this century by Frege, Wittgenstein, Russell, and Moore are rightly recognized as major nexes of change - not, I would argue, in the way in which the aim of philosophical inquiry itself was globally and generically conceived, but in the tactical orientation from which this invariant synoptic enterprise came to be approached, the methodological and problematic perspective from which the overarching goal of a universal and integrative cultural self-understanding and self-criticism came to be pursued.

The "analytic" philosophy which Rorty charges with metaphysical directionlessness is a child of the latest of these tactical "turns". I use the word 'tactical' advisedly, for I intend, indeed, to recall the classical military distinction between tactics and strategy. The strategy of philosophical inquiry, I think, has not changed. It was at the beginning and it remains today what Plato called "dialectical" - in contrast, for instance, to being "observational", "experimental", or "poetic". By whatever name, philosophical practice has always been "a movement of the Logos", that is, a question of discursive reasoning. The business of philosophical inquiry has always been "argumentation" - not in the sense of "quarrelsomeness" but in the sense that the philosophical aim is not, so to speak, merely to express a synoptic vision of man-in-the-world but to advance a rational vision, that is, one which has a legitimate claim on our reasoned assent and which can be coherently sustained in the face of rational criticisms.

Stylistically, of course, philosophical discourse has spanned the range of literary possibilities. We have had the dramatic dialogues of Plato (and the less dramatic ones of Hume and Berkeley), the solipsistic meditations of Descartes and Husserl, the cramped exposition "more geometrico" of Spinoza's *Ethics*, dry Kantian architectonic, convoluted Hegelian dialectic, and the aphoristic mannerisms of Wittgenstein and, before him, Nietzsche. Currently, as Rorty points out, our collective "analytic" style inclines toward the "lawyerly". We tend, that is, to give our discursive reasonings the expository form of a legal brief.

I think that Rorty is right about this. Our customary expository idiom has, indeed, become more "legalistic" and "argumentative" than "literary" and "historical" (although not without significant exceptions). But we need only recall the "Disputatio" of the Scholastics to remind ourselves that this is hardly the first time that this has happened. What I think Rorty is wrong about, however, is his suggestion that this stylistic unity is now the only unity of analytic philosophy - that analytic philosophy today lacks any, even implicit, shared substantive metaphilosophical convictions.

As Rorty knows full well, such stylistic unity does not evolve in a vacuum, as it were, per accidens. If philosophers in England and America suddenly began at the turn of the century

to sound ever less like men of letters and ever more like officers of the court, it is surely appropriate to ask why that should be so. What is the reason for this relatively abrupt shift in the style of expository philosophical prose? I want to suggest that the explanation lies precisely in the area of metaphilosophy. It is to be found, in fact, precisely in the collective (albeit often only implicit) acknowledgement by members of the Anglo-American philosophical community of certain metaphilosophical and methodological theses which are themselves, in turn, characteristic and even constitutive of the so-called "linguistic turn".

What is definitive of the "linguistic turn", I propose, is its decisive abandonment of the picture of language as a transparent medium for the transmission of thoughts. As Rorty himself notes:

"If there is one thing we have learned about concepts in recent decades it is that to have a concept is to be able to use a word, that to have a mastery of concepts is to be able to use a language, and that languages are created rather than discovered." (Rorty 1981, 14)

This remark, of course, is exactly on target - as far as it goes. But it need to be supplemented with the second crucial thesis of the "linguistic turn": Not only are things often not what they seem, words too are often not what they seem. That is, there is appearance and reality with respect to language itself.

This distinction between appearance and reality with respect to language appears in many guises. It first surfaced as a distinction between "grammatical form" and "logical form"; later, as a contrast between "surface grammar" and "depth grammar". In the Philosophical Investigations, it dramatically emerges in the tension between "the picture which holds us captive" (the picture which "lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably") and "the language game which is actually played". Although variously baptized, however, the thesis that our languages themselves - not only the languages about which we philosophize, but, crucially, the very language in which we philosophize as well - can confuse, mislead, and not merely transmit but essentially embody error and illusion has been a pivotal commitment of Anglo-American metaphilosophy, explicitly or implicitly, since Frege paraphrased "all" in terms of "if" and Russell applied the therapy of "On Denoting" to Meinong's golden mountain.

It is, I suggest, in consequence of their commitment to this metaphilosophical thesis, what we might call the thesis of "Two Forms", that analytic philosophers, naturally enough, have come to be very fussy about the language in which their own discursive reasonings are expressed - much in the way that lawyers are inclined to be very fussy about the language in which their legal reasonings are expressed. In the aftermath of the reflective critiques of philosophical discourse mounted by Moore, Wittgenstein, and Austin during the first half of this century, in other words, the first order of business for analytic philosophy has become: "Making sense".

It is this metaphilosophically-rooted determination of priorities, I think, and not some hidden political agenda or a mere difference in expository style, which primarily accounts for the "analytic"- "Continental" split that Rorty attempts to diagnose. Because the important philosophers working in the "Continental" tradition do not make a point of addressing themselves first to the conditions of "making sense" - do not, so to speak, pause to inquire into the "logical form" of the sentences with which they express their synoptic theses - some "analytic" philosophers (although hardly all of them) indeed do too facilely conclude - quite wrongly, of course - that the works of their "Continental" colleagues do not "make sense" at all, that is, that those works contain no positive insights at all which could, in principle, be recast in that logico-semantic expository idiom which they themselves have embraced as a methodological aid to avoiding the snares and pitfalls of linguistic appearance.

What is the case is that the project of thus "making (analytic) sense" of philosophical works written in the "Continental style" is an extraordinarily demanding one. What, more than anything else, is in fact operative in many "analytic" dismissals of what Rorty calls the Hegel-Marx-Nietzsche-Heidegger-Foucault-Derrida sequence, I suspect, is mere laziness. It is simply easier to dismiss the work of these men as irrelevant to our own legitimate philosophical concerns than to undertake the difficult exegetical and interpretive task of determining their considerable significance for those concerns and appropriating their, frequently substantial, contributions in a more congenial expository idiom.

That some of these lazy academicians tend narrow-mindedly to express such metaphilosophically-motivated discontents by denying that their Continental colleagues are "really" philosophers or, worse, by suggesting that they are "incompetent", or, worse still, by proposing that the material taught by "the other side" shouldn't be taught at all, is indisputably deplorable. As a blanket indictment of the analytic tradition, however, the charge of this sort of intellectual bigotry is surely without foundation. This kind of censorious obstructionist rhetoric, although it is still unfortunately to be heard (and even, or perhaps especially, at meetings of the American Philosophical Association, where the currents of academic politics run particularly high) is no more characteristic of "Philosophy in America Today" than a mirror-image indictment of "sterile and dehumanizing logic-chopping", although indeed also sometimes to be heard, is characteristic of the metaphilosophical rhetoric of our Continental counterparts.

If these unfortunate rhetorical tendencies are to be debited in general to any account, I suppose, it is probably, alas, the account of the discipline of philosophy itself. Perhaps we need to remind ourselves that it was Plato who condemned the sophists as destructive of the well-being of the polis and banned the poets from his Republic - and that Socrates was executed, at least nominally, for "corrupting the youth of Athens". Such continued reminders of the dangers of intellectual bigotry as those which Rorty offers us, then, are indeed

unfortunately all too often necessary and to the point. His liberal vision of free and unconstrained inquiry and learning is not to be faulted. What disturbs me is only his tacit suggestion that contemporary American "analytic" philosophy is especially culpable on charges of obstructionism and closed-mindedness within the Academy. That claim, indeed, I would vigorously dispute.

In Part Three of his recent and influential book (Rorty 1979), Rorty sketches out his own positive account of the future of philosophy. Philosophy in our century, he suggests, has been centered on epistemology, modeled on inquiry, systematic in intent, and conceived as aiming at "objective truth". In the first two parts of the book, Rorty's goal, in essence, was precisely to demonstrate that this philosophical self-image has now become untenable. The collapse of the framework of positivistic heuristic concepts brought about by analytic philosophy's own holistic and pragmatist self-criticisms - in particular, the abandonment of the "Myth of the Given" and the eclipse of the analytic/synthetic distinction - has rendered epistemology, thought of as an autonomous inquiry into the "foundations of knowledge", impossible.

In place of this timeworn, now demonstrably outworn, self-image, then, Rorty proposes a more impressionistic picture of philosophical activity as "edification". Once we have decisively abandoned the idea of culture as "a structure erected upon foundations" in favor of "the notion of culture as conversation" (Rorty 1979, 319), our image of ourselves as philosophers will also undergo a sea-change, from that of "the cultural overseer who knows everyone's common ground ... because he knows about the ultimate context ..." to that of "the informed dilettante, the polypragmatic, Socratic intermediary between various discourses". (317-8) The first self-image is appropriate to the classical epistemological enterprise; the second, to what Rorty calls "hermeneutics":

"Hermeneutics sees the relations between various discourses as those of strands in a possible conversation, a conversation which presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers, but where the hope of agreement is never lost so long as the conversation lasts. This hope is not a hope for the discovery of antecedently existing common ground, but simply hope for agreement, or, at least, exciting and fruitful disagreement." (Rorty 1979, 318)

A philosophical self-image which is informed by hermeneutic rather than epistemological ideals will no longer see its practices as modeled on inquiry and systematic in intent. ("For epistemology, conversation is implicit inquiry. For hermeneutics, inquiry is routine conversation." (318)) Rather than seeing himself as an arbiter, possessing a privileged, "normative" framework within which all discourses become commensurable, the philosopher whose self-conception is shaped by the idea of hermeneutics will see himself as a facilitator, imaginatively helping the creators of abnormal, revolutionary, and incommensurable discourses to remain, for all that, in communication with one another.

It is such activity, so conceived, that Rorty calls "edification". The aim of "edifying philosophy", in contrast to

"systematic philosophy", is not "to find objective truth". It is, simply, "to keep the conversation going". (377) An edifying philosopher is not a "Wissenschaftler", pursuing an inquiry into special subjects by special means, but rather a "conversational partner", whose business, so to speak, is not to hold and advocate views on subjects of cultural concern but instead to "attempt to prevent conversation from degenerating into inquiry, into an exchange of views." (372)

Now there is much that is appealing about this picture of philosophical activity, not the least of which, I suspect, is the fact that it apparently removes from us the burdens of a certain intellectual responsibility. If the edifying philosopher neither holds and advocates views nor advances and defends theses, he is a fortiori relieved of the responsibility for producing cogent reasons in support of what he says. Given that the aim of edifying philosophy is simply "to keep the conversation going", the edifying philosopher will have achieved his goal once he has succeeded in saying something to which other participants in the conversation find themselves moved to react. It is not simply that the classical and positivistic ends of demonstration and proof come to be surrendered in favor of the less stringent rhetorical goals of convincing and persuading, for, if I read Rorty rightly, there is nothing of which an edifying philosopher per se wishes to convince or persuade his conversational partners. In his role as "informed dilettante", he has no view which he wishes them to espouse nor any thesis which he hopes they will adopt. There is, to be sure, something which an edifying philosopher wants his conversational partners to do - but it is only to "keep talking".

The conclusion seems warranted, in fact, that the most important talent which a philosopher of Rorty's "edifying" persuasion could possess would not be the "lawyerly" skill of cogent argumentation or the "literary" capacity to tell a moving story, but rather the ability more or less at will to say something provocative. And if he can say something which his conversational partners find absolutely outrageous, so much the better. The conversation will not only "keep going"; it is likely to become positively heated. (These virtues, of course, Rorty himself possesses in abundance. Witness his celebrated sympathetic account of Cardinal Bellarmine's stance in the disputes with Galileo over Copernican theory.)

What strikes me most about Rorty's picture of "edifying philosophy" is its apparent pointlessness. To put it another way, what I am inclined to say is that Rorty has failed to distinguish between our culture's being thought of as a series of ongoing conversations and its being thought of as a series of ongoing chats. The virtue of a chat is, indeed, to "keep going". It is those awkward silences which one wishes above all to avoid. A conversation, in contrast, is about something. It has a point, a theme or a topic. It is not just "going" but - or so we hope - going somewhere. In a chat, "changing the subject" is often a mark of social grace. In a conversation, however, it is not just impolite: it is precisely obstructive. A conversation has a point - and one of the positive obligations of its participants is to stick to the point.

That a conversation contrasts with a chat in having a point is important in particular for understanding that complex, multi-stranded conversation which we call "natural science". Rorty makes much of the discoveries of Kuhn and Feyerabend - that theory-change has a "revolutionary" character and that a superceded theory and its successors are logically "incommensurable" - and, indeed, there is much to be learned from these valuable insights, properly understood. But a proper understanding of "scientific revolutions" and "theoretical incommensurability" precisely requires a prior appreciation of the point of the conversation called "natural science", of the goals or aims of scientific inquiry, and on that count, I think, Rorty's own reflections are largely deficient.

I have discussed these matters at considerable length elsewhere (in Rosenberg 1980b, especially Chapter VIII, and in Rosenberg 1980a), and it is not my intention here to attempt to recapitulate everything which I have said on those other occasions. The central observation, however, is that scientific inquiry aims at "knowledge" in the Aristotelian sense: not merely the ability to say correctly what is, but to say correctly of what is why it is what it is. The point of the conversation called "natural science", in other words, is to equip its human participants with the ability to give correct explanatory accounts of aspects of their world.

The phrase "human participants" is intentional, for it is important to recognize that the conversation called "natural science" has a "third partner", an extra participant, whose contributions the other participants ignore precisely on pain of abandoning the very point of their conversation. This "third partner", of course, is "the world" (or "nature") itself, and its contributions are precisely the phenomena which the explanatory conversations of natural science are about, the "appearances" to be "saved", or, to put it less metaphorically, that which is to be explained.

The remarks of this "third partner" have a certain stubborn intransigence. We find ourselves with experiences - and, in an important sense, we are stuck with them. When Galileo peered through his crude telescope and noted the phases of Venus, something was interjected into the explanatory scientific conversation from which it could henceforth never pry itself loose, the obligation to explain what Galileo observed ... or thought he observed.

The reservation which I have appended to my last remark strikes at the heart of the matter. "Appearance" and "illusion" are themselves explanatory categories. Rorty lays great stress on the "situatedness" of all our affirmations (as Polanyi or Merleau-Ponty might call it), that is, on the fact that there is no "neutral" or "privileged" place to stand from which we can, so to speak, "non-committally" describe or characterize what it is that we then undertake to explain. Any description of an ostensible phenomenon must be framed in terms of the resources of some determinate "theory-laden" language - a language, that is, which already embodies an implicit system of explanations which, by adopting it for our descriptions, we eo ipso already implicitly endorse. That, indeed, is the

crux of the Kuhnian and Feyerabendian insights concerning "revolutions" and "incommensurability", and a consequent insistence on our "situatedness" is, I think, both quite in order and quite correct. I certainly do not wish to be interpreted as setting myself in opposition to it.

I would also insist, however, that the fact that we cannot say what it is that we undertake to explain without tacitly endorsing some determinate explanation of it does not imply that there is nothing "objective" to be explained. From the fact that we cannot say what is "given" without first somehow "taking" it, in other words, it does not follow that nothing is "given" at all.

Galileo peered through his crude telescope and saw - or thought he saw - the planet Venus wax and wane. At that moment, certain roads became closed to us. Thenceforth, to the extent that we remained participants in the conversation called "natural science" at all, we were obligated to explain a waxing and waning, to explain the phases of Venus. In the end, of course, we could explain them as real, or as merely apparent, or even as only Galileo's idiosyncratic, private illusions of a waxing and waning. These options all lay within the scope of our choices. Deciding among them, indeed, is what "scientific inquiry" is crucially about. But there was also something here which lay outside the scope of those choices, something which admitted of being "taken" as real or as mere appearance or even as illusion, but which, for all that interpretive latitude, was absolutely intransigent in its demands on us. It was imposed on us. It was, so to speak, a "remark" in the face of which our conversation had henceforth to proceed.

The point of that conversation is precisely to "come to terms" with such "remarks", that is, non-arbitrarily to arrive at a categorial, explanatory description of what is, in this way, as it were, "a-categorially given" - to explain, and thereby to accommodate, the conversational contributions of our inescapable "third partner". What follows from this in the end, although the story is a long one, is that "scientific revolutions" are not the consequences of "arbitrary" socio-cultural forces and that "incommensurable theories" are not, for all their "incommensurability", immune to rational comparison and evaluation. A "scientific revolution", despite its radical and holistic character, is still accountable to something - and no such "revolution" which is not responsive to our "explanatory grievances" vis-à-vis the theory which it displaces can ultimately succeed, any more than a political revolution which neglects the grievances of its citizenry vis-à-vis the government which it proposes to overthrow can, in the end, be lastingly consummated.

Like the "mirroring" idiom against which Rorty sets himself, his own "conversational" idiom, which I have adopted (somewhat fancifully, to be sure) in these last remarks about explanation and theories, is at ground metaphorical. Any such idiom needs, in a certain sense, to be "demythologized" - and I have indeed attempted to supply less-fanciful versions of my own main substantive points elsewhere (in the works which I have already cited above).

Rorty may well be right in his insistence that it is high time for us once and for all to "demythologize" the metaphor of mirroring as well, to "purge philosophy of its mirror-imagery". Any such metaphor indeed carries its own risks of confusion. Whether or not the matter is as urgent as Rorty makes it out to be depends, I think, on one's reading of the history of philosophy and of the current scene - on one's judgment as to how pernicious the mirror metaphor in fact has been and one's sense of the extent to which such "ocular" thinking remains a dominant and persistent influence upon our current practices.

These, of course, are questions over which reasonable people can and will differ. While the issue is one which demands a far more detailed discussion than I can hope to give it here, it is, I think, in place for me to say that I am not inclined to share Rorty's sense of urgency. In particular, I am convinced that Rorty - and not just Rorty - underestimates the extent to which Kant already successfully pointed the way past the chief snares and pitfalls both of Cartesianism and of the tacit Concept Empiricist presuppositions shared by Locke, Berkeley, and Hume.

Rorty's own reading of Kant appears to be fairly traditional. It is in any event, I would argue, mistaken in just the ways that many traditional readings of Kant tend to be mistaken. Rorty's explicit discussion of Kant (Rorty 1979, 148-55) is unfortunately very compressed. His chief critical accusation, however, is clear enough. It is that Kant "confused" predication with synthesis. Rorty arrives at this conclusion by focusing on Kant's distinction between "intuitions" (*Anschauungen*) and "concepts" (*Begriffe*), and by interpreting the Kantian notion of an intuition as continuous with Hume's "impressions", themselves regarded as "singular presentations to sense" - a phrase which Rorty evidently reads (since he identifies it with the first pole of C.I. Lewis' distinction between "immediate data" and "form, construction, or interpretation") as roughly equivalent to the twentieth century's "sense data".

While it must be admitted that Kant was not always as clear about "intuitions" as he should have been (especially in A), Rorty's interpretation of "*Anschauungen*" nevertheless arguably overlooks precisely Kant's major advance on the Cartesian-Lockean tradition - his sharp distinction between "sensations" (*Empfindungen*) and "cognitions" (*Erkenntnisse*).

On Kant's considered view, intuitions are a species of cognitions; sensations are not. (A320=B376-7) What Rorty parses as Kant's "confusion" of synthesis and predication turns out, in fact, to be an essential Kantian thesis, one which Kant brings critically to bear on the failure of his predecessors to distinguish between non-cognitive "sensations" and singular "intuitions" which, to put Kant's point in a contemporary idiom, already exhibit "logical form" (that is, the "forms of judgment"). Kant's point, adopting Rorty's terminology, is precisely that there can be no synthesis - and therefore no consciousness - without "predication". "The same function which gives unity to the various representations in a judgment also gives unity to the mere synthesis of various representations

in an intuition ..." (A79=B104-5) The "sense-datist" notion of a pre-conceptual or non-cognitive "given" which is at the same time "experience" - i.e., something of which one is or can be conscious - is not, as Rorty appears to suppose, an idea which Kant embraces but, on the contrary, one which Kant is centrally concerned to oppose.

Not, of course, that Kant's own positive picture is free from significant problems. Chief among them, as Hegel already pointed out, is the complete absence of any developed theory of social reality, and Kant's consequent inability to distinguishing between a concept's not being "acquired from experience" (in the Humean, inductive sense) and its being somehow innate. The picture of "innate faculties" does, indeed, need to be abandoned - in favor of an account which recognizes precisely that "to have a mastery of concepts is to be able to use a language", and that such languages are themselves "acquired", although not by applying the operations of a "mental chemistry" to the raw materials of "impressions".

Be that as it may, however, it ought to be clear enough that Kant was not simply another uncritical expositor of the metaphor of mirroring. His concern, indeed, was precisely to deny that we come to know the world through being passively "impressed" by it, and instead to stress our own activity in "constructing" or "constituting" the objects of our categorial experience. While "constitution" may, to be sure, be no less a metaphor than "mirroring", it is at least a different metaphor - and one which is continuous with such contemporary views as "that 'knowledge of' presupposes 'knowledge that'" and "all seeing is seeing as" (as well as with central claims of contemporary physiological and cognitive psychology, e.g., that sensory systems act as "filters" and "pre-processors" rather than as neutral "transmitters" of external stimuli) in a way in which the "ocular" metaphor of mirroring obviously is not.

There would also be some justice, however, in the claim that the most a philosopher can ever hope to do is to proceed in this way from one metaphor to another. We must, after all, in the end grant Rorty his insistence that there is not "privileged" or "neutral" place for us to stand, outside of all historical contingencies, in order to attain the synoptic and reflective survey and appraisal of our own rational practices which, I would continue to maintain, remains the proper goal and mission of the discipline of philosophy. Any such global self-understanding and self-appraisal can only be conducted, so to speak, "from within", by adapting the descriptive and explanatory resources of our current time-bound culture to such wider aims.

From this perspective, the distance separating Plato's account of the individual soul as the Greek polis writ large from Rorty's Habermasian image of culture as conversation writ large is not particularly great. The working out of such metaphors (or perhaps, less romantically put, analogies) may well be all that philosophy as a discipline in the end has to offer. Even acknowledging such limitations, however, we need not conclude that philosophical practice, thus conceived, is

necessarily unhelpful. Of course everything is what it is, and not some other thing. But, although language, for example, is not literally a medium (for the transmission of thoughts) or a picture or a game, and although practical deliberation, for instance, is literally neither a political negotiation among disputing parties nor an economic mediation of conflicting interests, there may still be something useful, and even important, to be learned about our languages and about our practical reasonings - that is, about ourselves - by seeing how far one can go in describing and understanding these things as if they in fact were what, of course, they literally are not.

Man, of course, does not in any literal sense have a "glassy essence". We are what we are, not some other thing, and what we are is complex, versatile, and talented living organisms, not mirrors. Such correctives as Rorty offers us in his recent work, then, are not inappropriate. The metaphor of mirroring, like all metaphors, carries with it its own potential confusions, and Rorty is surely right in observing that philosophers, living and dead, have not failed to succumb to them. I would insist, however, that Rorty is surely wrong about his larger claim - that "philosophy" names nothing but a persistent historical disposition to succumb to such confusions and its lingering contemporary residue in the interdepartmental political revalries of the Academy. I would, in contrast, vigorously argue that "philosophy" instead names a distinctive intellectual mission within any reflective culture worthy of the name, a necessary project of synoptic self-understanding and self-appraisal, the legitimacy of which survives our acknowledgment of the contingencies, limitations, and inadequacies of any of its concrete, time-bound instantiations.

When I began the project of composing this response to Rorty's challenges, I was torn between an inclination to say a great deal and a strong temptation to say nothing at all. As it is, I have in fact written rather more than I originally expected to - but far less than I now see that I could. Rorty aligns himself with those whom he counts among the great "edifying" philosophers - Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, the later Wittgenstein and the later Heidegger. Such philosophers, he says, are "reactive".

"They know their work loses its point when the period they were reacting against is over. They are intentionally peripheral." (Rorty 1979, 369)

What explains my temptation to say nothing at all is my feeling that perhaps the period against which Rorty himself is reacting is over. His sketch of "Philosophy in America Today" is, to be sure, a likeness - but in the way in which a caricature is a likeness, not a photograph. Presented with a caricature of oneself, one may react in two ways. One can protest heatedly against the distortions; or one can chuckle and nod - and then get back to business. In this essay, I have registered what I hope is a mild protest against Rorty's distortions. But a chuckle and a nod are surely equally among his due. The role of gadfly is, of course, also a time-honored one within philosophy, and Rorty has played it well. But now, I think, it is high time for us to stop chatting about our

failings and our excesses. It is, I think, instead time for us once again - failings, excesses, and all - to get back to business.

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