The Self and the Sublime:

A Comparative Study in the Philosophy of Education

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Abstract

In this thesis I discuss personal identity (the self) as it relates to authoritative contexts (the sublime). I show how these contexts confer meaning on personal and cultural narratives, which in turn confer meaning on facts and knowledge claims. I outline three conceptions of the self and sublime (Richard Rorty's, Charles Taylor's and Robert Kegan's), and address the implications of these for education. In conclusion I isolate a common product of all three perspectives - unconditional love - and recommend a 'will to positive description' as a necessary and desirable pedagogical goal.

Resumé

Dans le cadre de ce mémoire, j'examine l'identité personnel (le soi) se rapportant aux contextes autoritaires (le sublime). Je démontre de quelle façon ces contextes donnent un sens aux récits personnels et culturels, lesquels en retour, donnent un sens aux faits et aux revendications de connaissance. J'esquisse trois conceptions différentes du soi et du sublime (celles de Richard Rorty, de Charles Taylor et de Robert Kegan), et j'aborde les implications de celles-ci par rapport à l'éducation. En conclusion, j'isole un produit commun de ces trois perspectives — l'amour inconditionnel — et je recommande une «volonté d'une description positive» comme un but pédagogique nécessaire et désirable.

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E.D. Hirsch's *Cultural literacy: What every American needs to know* and Allan Bloom's *The closing of the American mind: How higher education has failed democracy and impoverished the souls of today's students* both point to the unhappy consequences of multiculturalism in contemporary education, yet they differ in important ways.

1.1 Cultural Literacy

Hirsch claims modern democracies, merely to function, require citizens to share a variety of common reference points, which constitute the cornerstone of "literate culture". He and his colleagues compiled a 65-page list of 'What literate Americans know'. And while he acknowledges the list needs "greater representation of women and minorities and of non-Western cultures" if America is to fulfill its commitment to the diversity of its population, "eighty percent of the listed items have been in use for more than a hundred years" (Hirsch, 1988, p. xii).

Hirsch claims he is not advocating a list of "great books that every child in the land should be forced to read" (p. xiv). He is merely chronicling what literate Americans know, such that future Americans can share in that literate culture. It is, he claims, only by sharing in this literate culture that citizens can meaningfully participate in the political, social, economic and cultural life of the nation. The multicultural ethic of tolerance

should not be the primary focus of national education. It should not

be allowed to supplant or interfere with our schools' responsibility to

ensure our children's mastery of American literate culture. The

acculturative responsibility of the schools is primary and

fundamental. To teach the ways of one's own community has

always been and still remains the essence of the education of our

children, who enter neither a narrow tribal culture nor a

transcendent world culture but a national literate culture. (p. 18)

Allowing children to follow their own interests in school rather than a core

curriculum results in cultural fragmentation and discriminates against those with

less opportunity to become literate outside a school environment. Literate culture

may not be everyone's first culture but it should be everyone's second culture. It

represents "a universally shared national vocabulary ... analogous to a universal

currency like the dollar" (p. 26). A just and prosperous society, Hirsch claims, will

only be possible when "everyone commands enough shared background

knowledge to be able to communicate effectively with everyone else" (p. 32).

1.2 Relativism and Prejudice

The result of this widespread cultural illiteracy is students arriving at

University "unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality"

(Bloom, 1987, p. 25). This focus on relative truth and openness is not a

theoretical insight but a moral postulate. It has replaced the notion of inalienable natural rights as the condition of a free society and is "the virtue, the only virtue, which all primary education for more than fifty years has dedicated itself to inculcating" (p. 26). Bloom believes this facile commitment to openness results in a closedness to "the real motive of education, the search for a good life" (p. 34).

A genuine study and interaction with other cultures, Bloom claims, would teach the exact opposite of cultural relativism. For "one should conclude from the study of non-Western cultures that not only to prefer one's own way but to believe it best, superior to all others, is primary and even natural" (p. 36). Every culture except Western culture, Bloom claims, believes itself to be superior. We should learn from them that just as "a father must prefer his own child to other children, a citizen [must prefer] his country to others" (p. 37).

Bloom positively teaches prejudice, claiming "the mind that has no prejudices at the outset is empty" (p. 43). Students nowadays, he laments, have "learned to doubt beliefs even before they believed in anything ... one has to have the experience of really believing before one can have the thrill of liberation" (pp. 42-43). Bloom decries the "barbaric appeal" (p. 73) of rock music, and the passionless interactions of the modern-day sexual "relationship" (p. 124). And yet he claims "education is not sermonizing to children against their instincts and

3

pleasures, but providing a natural continuity between what they feel and what they can and should be" (p. 80).

Historicism and cultural relativism, in Bloom's account, are the enemies of education. They promote an indifference that lets us be "whatever we want to be, just as long as we don't want to be knowers" (p. 41). True openness is driven by a quest for knowledge and certainty - by the question "what is good for me, what will make me happy" (p. 41). This necessarily implies a "closedness to all the charms that make us comfortable with the present" (p. 42). Our educational challenge is to revive our ability to philosophize, and look critically at "whether men are really equal or whether that opinion is merely a democratic prejudice" (p. 40).

Table 1.1: Hirsch and Bloom compared

Author	Time Frame	Foundation	Skill	Outcome	Goal
Hirsch	High School	Pragmatic	Communication	Literacy	Democracy
Bloom	University	Moral	Reason	Truth	The Good Life

1.3 Facts and Narratives

Neil Postman (1989), writing on Hirsch and Bloom, claims Hirsch's list suggests more questions than answers - anyone reading it can only be struck by its arbitrariness. His list is an account of what literate Americans know - but it omits as much as it includes. Moreover, in emphasizing the importance of learning what others already know it fosters an imitative and conformist relationship to learning. Postman wants to know how students can develop their

own criteria for knowing - over and above a pragmatic consideration for

intercultural communication.   Postman asks

> How can we help our students to organize information? How can
>
> we help them to sort the relevant from the irrelevant? How can we
>
> help them to make better use of information? (p. 122).

Bloom, he suggests, provides an answer - for Bloom shows how history

and tradition can provide stories and narratives that bind together the discrete

facts on Hirsch's list in ways that give them meaning and value. Although he

charges Bloom with arrogance for supposing the narratives that gave him

(Bloom) a moral and intellectual purpose will serve for everyone else, he agrees

a sense of purpose is essential for the process of education. Such a purpose

can only come through "constructing a meaningful tale" in which the various

elements of cultural literacy play a role.

Figure 1.1: Hirsch and Bloom compared

a) Hirsch   b) Bloom
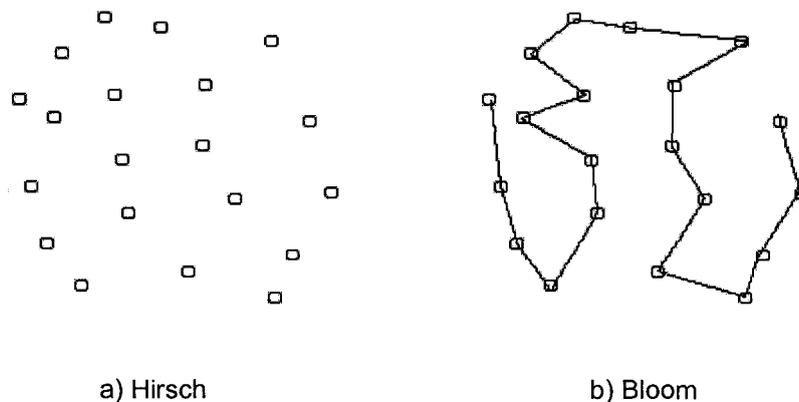
The difference between Hirsch and Bloom, then, on Postman's account, is illustrated above. Figure 1.1a shows a number of discrete points, each representing an item of cultural literacy on Hirsch's list. Figure 1.1b shows these elements joined in a narrative that gives meaning, coherence and purpose to the student's learning. Without a narrative, information has no value. Narrative is what enables us to know how and what we need to know. Without it, there are only facts without meaning. "Without a story, our selves die" (p. 122). Our sense of self depends on the narratives we construct for others and ourselves. It is not merely what you know, but how you know that matters.

1.4 Socialization and Individuation

Richard Rorty (1989), also writing on Bloom and Hirsch, suggests much of the controversy in education results from an over-generalized use of the term. Education, he claims, is not a unitary phenomenon. It "covers two entirely distinct, and equally necessary, processes - socialization and individuation" (pp. 199-200). It is inappropriate to suppose a single philosophy or 'end' of education will suit both these processes. While socialization is appropriate for high school students, higher education should allow students to "reshape themselves ... rework the self-image foisted on them by their past, the self-image that makes them competent citizens, into a new self-image, one that they themselves have helped to create" (p. 200).

The role of a university professor, as opposed to a high school teacher, is to provoke students to self-creation. This is justified not on pragmatic or moral grounds - it is a "fuzzy" commitment to growth for growth's sake. "Fuzzy" because to define growth in a concrete way is to limit the possibility of genuine growth, which is always creative and unpredictable. It is a commitment to the unknown, the new and the possible - to the Sublime that "still lifts up the hearts of some fraction of each generation of college students" (p. 204).

1.5 Hegemony and Democracy

While Postman believes cultural narratives help 'connect the dots' of knowledge, Rorty believes cultural narratives, at least at the University level, inhibit the development of personal narratives. The idiosyncratic narrative depicted below can only develop when the narrative in figure 1.1b is not oppressively authoritative.

Figure 1.2: An idiosyncratic narrative
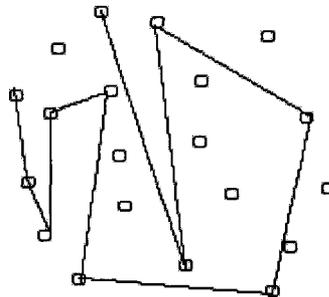
In Rorty's account cultural narratives are inherently hegemonic, imposing a set of

uniform values on an infinitely diverse population. The traditional cultural

narrative of heterosexual love and marriage, for instance, oppresses

homosexuals; the Western artistic and intellectual canons oppress women; and

the narrative of North American democracy oppresses First Nations. But if all

cultural narratives are inherently oppressive, are we better off without them? Is it

morally reprehensible to present a limited number of narratives, when the cultural

data allow for a vast number? And if narratives determine our moral outlook,

how can we get behind them to determine *their* moral value?

If we take a concrete example from sexuality education we can see how

this plays itself out.

Figure 1.3: Three approaches to sexuality education

Plain facts   Safe Sex   Abstinence
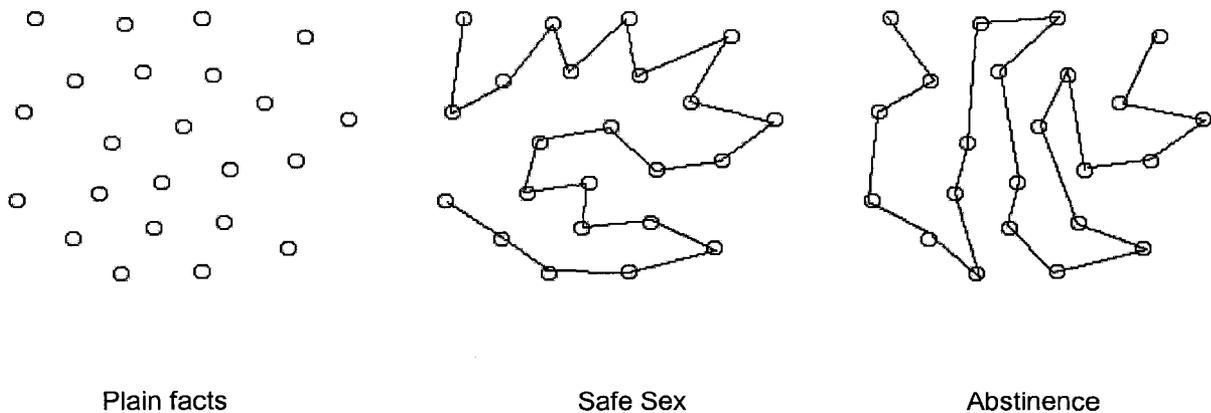
In the figures above three approaches to sexuality education are depicted. The

'plain facts' approach teaches the basic facts of sexual reproduction with no

values orientation. The 'safe sex' approach teaches the facts of sexual

reproduction with a narrative emphasizing health and personal responsibility

(Brick and Roffman, 1993). And the 'abstinence' approach unites the same facts

in a different narrative emphasizing patience and renunciation (Lickona, 1993). A

fourth approach, depicted below, acknowledges the validity of a number of

different narratives and accommodates these within a democratic framework.

This democratic approach allows us to "deliberate critically between competing

ideological perspectives on sexuality" (McKay, 1997, p. 285). Yet it is not clear

whether this framework is itself a narrative, necessarily favoring one or other

values orientation (Figure 1.4a), or whether it is genuinely encompassing and

neutral toward a range of diverse values orientations (Figure 1.4b).

Figure 1.4: Safe sex and abstinence approaches 'accommodated' within a democratic framework

a)   b)
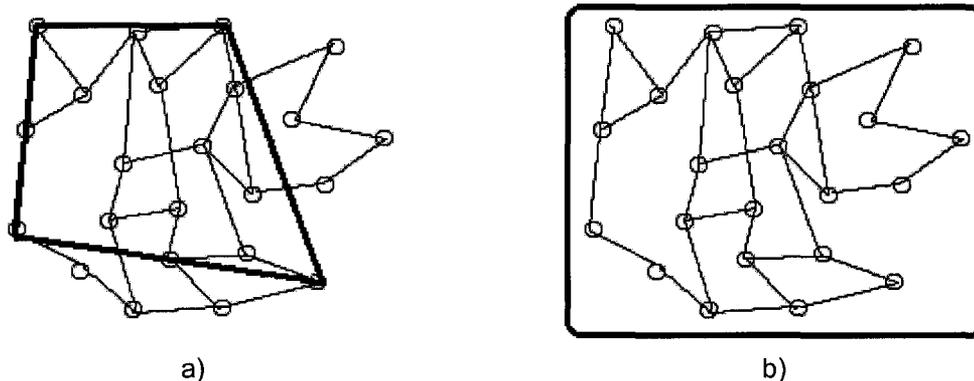
By acknowledging a range of different ideological perspectives the

democratic framework seeks to avoid the situation depicted below. In this

scenario a dominant narrative of abstinence inhibits the development of a safe

sex narrative (this analysis is not limited to sexuality education - it applies equally

to almost every other aspect of education). The consequences of this remain unclear - is an authentic self denied fruition as a result of this inhibition? Is our sexual development permanently stunted? Or can we successfully adapt to the dominant narrative without any harmful consequences? (cf. Halstead, 1997).

Figure 1.5: A safe sex narrative inhibited by a dominant narrative of abstinence

Barrier to
meaning
making
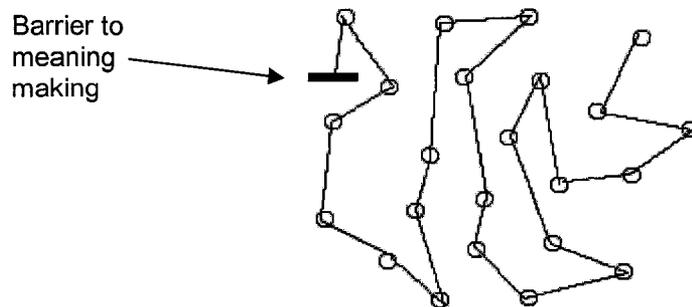
Taking this approach to other areas of education, we must ask 'When does the prejudice Bloom advocates become unacceptable and legitimately inhibited?'

1.6 The Self and the Sublime

I have titled this thesis 'The self and the sublime' to acknowledge the extent to which personal identity (The Self) is bound up with narratives, and the extent to which these narratives derive their meaning from a range of authoritative contexts (The Sublime). These 'sublime' contexts include culture, society, religion, nature, spirit and psyche (cf. Kant, 1914, p. 110; Lyotard, 1994; Gergen, 1996, pp. 137-139; Pillow, 2000, pp. 285-318). They confer validity on narratives and it is the contexts, rather than the narratives, I emphasize in this study. Thus I speak of Rorty's pragmatic sublime, Taylor's transcendent sublime

and Kegan's relational sublime as contexts that give meaning and purpose to the self-creating, dialogical and postmodern selves respectively.

In Chapter 2 I discuss Richard Rorty's ideal of the self-creating self. In this view there is nothing to be authentic to - everything we are is a product of contingency. The most we can do is acknowledge our contingency, and redescribe others and ourselves in our own terms. This, he claims, is only possible when we jettison the notion of truth as independent of our descriptions. Just as we have become free from the tyranny of God and religion, so we must break from the tyranny of truth and traditional philosophy. I discuss the educational implications of Rorty's philosophy and offer some critical perspectives.

In Chapter 3 I explore the debate between Richard Rorty and Charles Taylor. Taylor advocates a return to religious faith and adopts a historical perspective to show how we are necessarily oriented toward a spiritual purpose. Using a methodology focused on qualitative distinctions, he shows how secular culture is fundamentally similar to religious culture - it merely emphasizes different values. Only by recognizing the extent to which modern culture is grounded in, and dependent on, a rejection of religious faith can we hope to find a more balanced middle-ground that allows both the faithful and the non-faithful to prosper. Again, I look at the educational implications of this and offer some critical perspectives.

In Chapter 4 I address personal identity and cultural responsibility from a psychological, rather than philosophical perspective. Robert Kegan's stage theory of human development focuses on distinctions of self and other over the course of a lifetime. The final stage in Kegan's model suggests concrete distinctions between subject and object are erroneous - the self is constituted by, rather than constitutive of, relationships. Again, I outline the educational implications of this and offer some critical perspectives.

In the final chapter I explore the tensions in these perspectives. Rorty's post-relativistic position relies on a neo-Nietzschean reading of history and I critique this. But I claim that, despite their differences and intentionally or not, all three perspectives result in a greater capacity for unconditional love. From this I derive a 'will to positive description' as a focus for moral education.

Chapter II: Richard Rorty's Self-Creating Self and the Pragmatic Sublime

Richard Rorty advocates a world where we "no longer worship *anything*, where we treat *nothing* as a quasi divinity, where we treat *everything* - our language, our conscience, our community - as a product of time and chance" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 22). De-divinizing our worldviews enables us to find meaning not in God or truth, but in "finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings" (p. 45). This increases our chances of developing rich idiosyncratic personal narratives that further our individual and collective growth.

2.1 Truth vs. Descriptions

Rorty is not a relativist - he does not claim there is no such thing as truth. Rather he claims truth is redundant - it is no longer useful or interesting - it is "just the name of a property which all true statements share" (Rorty, 1982, p. xiii). Truth is dependent on language, a man-made tool, and as such cannot exist "out there". Reality is always mediated by our descriptions of reality. So while "the world is out there ... descriptions of the world are not" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 5). As Elliot Eisner puts it

> To know that we have a correspondence between our views
> [descriptions] of reality and reality itself, we would need to know two

things. We would need to know reality, as well as our views of it. But if we knew reality as it really is, we would not need to have a view of it. Conversely, since we cannot have knowledge of reality as it is, we cannot know if our view corresponds to it. (Eisner, 1991, p. 44)

We do, nonetheless, describe the world, and some descriptions seem to us more accurate than others do. A schizophrenic describing the world in terms of alien voices out to destroy him we take to be less accurate in his descriptions than a psychoanalyst, who describes the same phenomena in terms of conscious and unconscious drives. But when faced with a multitude of socially legitimate descriptions - scientific versus religious descriptions, for instance - how can we decide which better represents reality?

Rorty claims we can't, because "the world does not speak. Only we do" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 6). While our descriptions appear to accurately describe the world, intellectual history shows new descriptions are inevitably stopgaps in a larger process of description and re-description. Moreover, new descriptions are not rationally chosen - their validity depends on their ability to offer interesting, novel or useful ways of understanding our selves and the world around us. The history of ideas, then, is "a history of increasingly useful metaphors rather than of increasing understanding of how things really are" (p. 9).

When we conceive of our intellectual history in this way, as a set of increasingly useful metaphors, rather than a gradual discovery of the way the world is, truth becomes simply that which members of a liberal society believe, following a free and open dialogue. This pragmatic view of truth suggests the more we break down barriers to free and open dialogue the more "truly" we will live. But this would mean living in a culture in which "neither the priests nor the physicists nor the poets nor the Party were thought of as more "rational", or more "scientific" or "deeper" than one another" (Rorty, 1982, p. xxxviii). There would be no authoritative narratives inhibiting new, idiosyncratic ones. We would be without an epistemology, and would, as Allan Bloom laments, be robbed of our ability to philosophize, at least with respect to epistemological foundations.

2.2 Secular vs. Pragmatic Culture

What Rorty is proposing, then, is a cultural shift as significant in scope as the Enlightenment shift from a religious to a secular culture. Just as the priest arbitrated between God and His people in a religious culture, so the philosopher arbitrates between Truth and truth claims in a secular culture. Jettisoning the idea of reality as distinct from our descriptions of it, the philosopher in a pragmatic culture loses his authority in the same way the role of the priest was diminished in the shift from a religious to a secular culture.

Figure 2.1: Religious, secular and pragmatic cultures compared

GOD
↕
TRUTH   TRUTH

Religious Culture   Secular Culture   Pragmatic Culture
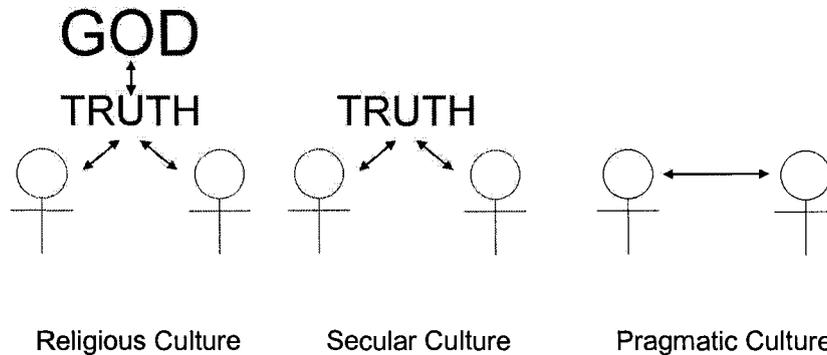
The question then becomes how we might choose between a pragmatic or secular culture. A secular culture assumes there is something to be true to - our inner nature, or the way the world is. A pragmatic culture claims we are nothing other than what we describe ourselves to be. By questioning the notion of truth-as-correspondence the pragmatist has changed the nature of the debate. There are no shared criteria by which we can choose one form of life over another. We are, instead, left with a spiritual choice, a choice between "alternative self-images" (p. xliv) - to believe in Truth independent of our descriptions of it, or to be "alone, merely finite, with no links to something Beyond" (pp. Xlii-xliii).

To refuse to believe in something Beyond - no God, no Truth, no Human Nature - seems an inherently unspiritual position to take. Spirituality, as we currently conceive it, depends on a belief in a consciousness transcending our own. But in religious times we couldn't imagine a non-religious spirituality - the idea of spirituality existing apart from religion seemed incomprehensible. Might it not be possible for a spirituality to exist independent of something larger than life

- to locate our spirituality in a commitment to our own self-creation, and to derive our meaning solely from our interactions with other self-creating human beings? (cf. Palmer, 1998)

Part of our reluctance to do this rests on a fear that without Truth, God, or Nature as viable concepts we will destroy the planet and ourselves. Much of the moral weight given to liberal and ecological argument rests on a belief in *inherent* human rights or the *inherent* value of diversity. Rorty robs us of a belief in the inherent value of anything - life has value only insofar as we give it value, for there is nothing beyond us to do so.

What does this mean for our commitment to others? Surely without a belief in the inherent wrongness of murder, we will quickly descend into anarchy? Rorty claims not. For the decline of religious faith prompted a similar fear - that without the moral motivation of the afterlife the social fabric of society would disintegrate. Yet the promise of reward in the afterlife was transferred to a promise of reward in this life. In a pragmatic culture, intrinsic reward for living in accord with human nature will be replaced with extrinsic reward for living in accord with others.

Secular culture emphasizes commonality, an overlapping consensus, a shared understanding of basic human rights. The pragmatist, in contrast, looks to imaginatively identify with others in their difference. Human solidarity in a

pragmatic culture depends not on "sharing a common truth or a common goal but of sharing a common selfish hope" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 92) - the hope that the idiosyncratic world each of us has built will not be destroyed. So while the traditional liberal looks for a common language to prove *why* it is wrong to humiliate, the pragmatic liberal looks for *what* humiliates in a variety of different circumstances. The focus shifts away from shared philosophical foundations, toward a literary emphasis on sensitivity, responsiveness and empathic identification with others (cf. Johnson, 1993, pp.185-243).

Martha Nussbaum, in her essays on philosophy and literature, draws a similar distinction, claiming ethics is not about finding scientifically or philosophically justified beliefs, but about practical insight focused on the "idiosyncratic and the new" (Nussbaum, 1990, p. 75). This ethical flexibility and responsiveness, she claims, is best nurtured through an appreciation of literature, rather than philosophy, for literature develops "sensitivity and emotional depth" (p. 82). She agrees with Rorty that poets, or philosophers who think like poets, are "models of teaching and judgement" (p. 104) and philosophy, while it has a role to play as the ally of a literary text, needs to adopt "a posture of sufficient humility" (p. 161).

2.3 Describing the Self

As new descriptions arise they create their own purpose - a new description "makes possible, for the first time, a formulation of its own purpose"

(Rorty, 1989b, p. 13). By changing the way we talk, we change the way we think, which in turn changes who we think we are and what we want to do. The 'will to re-description' is a will to creativity for creativity's sake, and is in accord with Rorty's educational philosophy of growth for growth's sake. By redescribing others and ourselves we are able to defy the contingency of our own existence. The person who describes himself in his own terms, with a unique and distinct vocabulary, "is best able to appreciate his own contingency" (p. 28). Drawing on Nietzsche, Rorty claims to "accept somebody else's description of oneself" (p. 28) is to fail as a human being. To realize the full possibility of my humanity I must tell the story of how I came to be, in a language of my own making. Defining myself in the language of others is to be a copy of those whose language I am using. To find distinctive words to describe myself - words or forms not previously used - is to demonstrate my uniqueness, to be "as strong as any human being could possibly be" (p. 24; cf. Tappen & Brown, 1996, pp.103-107).

This, Rorty claims, is a process of active creation, rather than discovery. I am what I make myself to be. By escaping from the descriptions foisted upon me, I give birth to myself and alleviate the anxiety of dying in a world not of my own making. My self-respect, in this model, is based not on my ability to live up to universal standards, but on my ability to break free of the defining features of my contingent and idiosyncratic past. The ability to re-describe what defines us

is "the only sort of power over the world which we can hope to have" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 40).

Yet this project of self-creation is doomed from the outset. For any re-description of the self, however novel or original, will necessarily rely on prior descriptions. "A language which was "all metaphor" would be a language which had no use, hence not a language but just babble" (p. 41). Moreover, the language we use to describe ourselves must intersect with the language of others. We exist within a web of relations, and just as a poem is dependent on a reader to give it meaning, so a created self relies on others to give it meaning. Success, in Rorty's terms, is to re-describe the past in such a way that what was once marginal, metaphoric and descriptive appears to future generations as literal, obvious and true.

Philosophy, freed from its role as arbiter of moral truth and underwriter of social organization in secular culture, can serve in a pragmatic culture as a means to "private perfection" (p. 96). Philosophy becomes a "way of coping", helping us transcend our contingency by relegating the past to the role of servant rather than master. Through philosophy we develop our own unique "final vocabulary" so we can say, at life's end, "Thus I willed it". Proust and Nietzsche, for Rorty, are examples of private perfection. They both "cared only about how they looked to themselves, not how they looked to the universe" (p. 98).

Rorty's description of Proust's quest is instructive:

His method of freeing himself from those people [friends and family]
- of becoming autonomous - was to redescribe the people who had
described him ... Proust became autonomous by explaining to
himself why the others were no authorities, but simply fellow
contingencies. He redescribed them as being as much a product of
others' attitudes toward them as Proust himself was a product of
their attitudes toward him ... This feat enabled him to relinquish the
very idea of authority, and with it the idea that there is a privileged
perspective from which he, or anyone else, is to be described. (pp.
102-103)

Proust created a self *for* himself, and in so doing became the person he wanted
to be. He transcended barriers to personal meaning-making and defied narrative
inhibitions. This empowerment was gained not at the expense of others, nor did
it make him an authority on others. He simply "turned other people from his
judges into his fellow sufferers, and thus succeeded in creating the taste by
which he judged himself" (p. 103).

Nietzsche, on the other hand, created not only the taste by which he
would be judged, but attempted to prevent others from judging him by any other.
While Proust accepted his descriptions as descriptions, which would in turn be

redescribed by others, Nietzsche posited a generalized theory of the Will to Power. He assumed what was relevant and meaningful to him was relevant, meaningful and true for others. He elevated his personal narrative to the status of a meta-narrative and in the process became what he decried in others - a metaphysician (p. 106).

2.4 Metaphysics and Generalization

The non-metaphysical philosopher can never have a theory about Life, Liberty, Culture or anything - only an account of his own personal struggle for autonomy. While he is committed to extending the "conversation of the West" (Rorty, 1979, p. 394), he does so in a way that "presupposes no disciplinary matrix which unites the speakers ... [no] special set of terms in which all contributions to the conversation should be put" (p. 318). This commitment to refrain from epistemology is what distinguishes a pragmatic from a secular culture. Learning and understanding become less about receiving instruction and "more like getting acquainted with a person" (p. 319).

The overall scheme, then, that Rorty advocates is the proliferation of new vocabularies that enhance our capacity for self-creation. By calling into question dominant vocabularies and offering different and potentially interesting alternatives, we expand the realm of human possibility. In contrast to metaphysical philosophers who support their claims with argument, 'edifying' philosophers i.e. those using philosophy solely as a means to private perfection,

"are reactive and offer satires, parodies, aphorisms" (p. 369). They react against the constraints of convention, subverting barriers to personal meaning-making, recognizing that "this century's "superstition" was the last century's triumph of reason" (p. 367). Their primary commitment is to "decry the very notion of having a view, while avoiding having a view about having views" (p. 371) - to keep the conversation going, wherever it may lead. This prevents "man from deluding himself with the notion that he knows himself, or anything else, except under optional descriptions" (p. 379).

I have spoken at some length about Rorty's pragmatic culture, the role of truth in such a culture, and the implications of this for personal development. In the remainder of this chapter I will look at how these relate to education, before presenting some critiques of Rorty's approach.

2.5 Moral Conversation

Robert Nash has incorporated Rorty's approach into university-level moral education classes. He claims Rorty's "postmodern take on truth" (Nash, 1997, p.171) is neither relativistic nor nihilistic - rejecting philosophical, political and religious narratives does not leave us spiritually void. "The ultimate ideal for Rorty is solidarity, and the way to get there is through conversation, narration, and respect for alterity and individual self-expression" (p. 174). Only by engaging in moral conversation, he claims, can we articulate our convictions and live peaceably in pluralist societies.

Nash's moral conversation centers on "pivotal postmodern virtues" (p. 176). These include

> a sensitivity to the postmodern realities of incommensurability, indeterminacy, and nonfoundationalism; dialectical awareness; empathy; hermeneutical sensitivity; openness to alterity; respect for plurality; a sense of irony and humor; a commitment to civility; a capacity for fairness and charity; compassion in the presence of suffering, with an antipathy toward violence; and humility in the face of shifting and elusive conceptions of reality, goodness and truth. (p. 11)

Moral conversation:

- Does not privilege any one moral vocabulary over any other. No moral vocabulary can be final or "highest". This does not imply relativism. There is often substantial overlap between different moral vocabularies (cf. Strike, 1994, pp. 1-26) and by comparing and contrasting incommensurable moral vocabularies, a consensual framework for negotiating competing claims may emerge.

- Is free of manipulation and domination. There can be no presumption in advance as to what is true or good. Conversation must be free flowing, with everything up for negotiation and discussion. The purpose of moral conversation is not to assert a moral viewpoint or exact agreement - it is to develop "mutuality and self-criticism in order for personal transformation to occur" (Nash, 1997, p. 178) - while accepting transformation may not occur and all truth claims may not be reconcilable.

- Is hermeneutically aware, allowing us to get beyond others' and our own interpretations. We must be aware that "people always interpret and translate texts into their own idioms" (p. 178). The contributions of others are interpreted according to our own schemas - we never experience pure intentions, only a blend of intentions and interpretations, mediated through language. Hermeneutical sensitivity "recognizes and respects the principle that reality is endlessly interpretable" (p. 179). But, again, this does not imply relativism or subjectivism - in fact, recognition of the partiality of our interpretations allows for the development of intersubjective truth (cf. Marietta, 1997, p. 14). Only by sharing "partial perspectives" (Nash, 1997, p. 179) can we articulate a common reality and develop common goals.

- Is conducted in a spirit of trust and optimism, rather than suspicion (p. 180).

By engaging in moral conversation of this kind, we are more likely to understand each other and develop original and novel ways of describing ourselves and the world. Moral conversation allows us to extend our imaginations and poeticize life in original ways. These private idiosyncratic fantasies, when they "just happen to catch on with other people" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 37), become the mainstream philosophies and poetic realities of tomorrow.

2.6 Recognizing Contingency

As I mentioned in the introduction, Rorty's own writings on education distinguish between education as socialization and education as individuation. High school, he claims, *should* be about socialization, because "socialization has to come before individuation, and education for freedom cannot begin before some constraints have been imposed" (pp. 199-200). Higher education can then critique socialization, challenge the status quo, and encourage students' self-creation.

In Rorty's ideal society high school socialization would focus more on recognizing contingency than acknowledging truth. High school graduates would be "commonsensical nonmetaphysicians, in the way in which more and more people in the rich democracies have been commonsensical nontheists" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 87). Rather than learning the principles and ideals behind liberal democracy, they would learn the history of democracy and alternative political structures. The primary value would not be truth but hope - hope that "the future

will be unspecifiably different from, and unspecifiably freer than, the past" (Rorty, 1989, p. 201). This hope guarantees growth.

Which brings us back to our starting point - a "fuzzy" commitment to growth for growth's sake. But before we grant Rorty his utopian vision, I would like to explore his ideas more critically, drawing on Charles Taylor's 'Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition'.

2.7 Realism vs. Non-Realism

Both Taylor and Rorty take pride in having moved beyond epistemological foundations - they have embraced hermeneutics as an exciting and powerful tool for expanding our understanding of what knowledge is and can be. But while Rorty has moved from epistemology to non-realism (the idea that there is no truth of the matter) Taylor believes breaking free of epistemology is "to come to an uncompromising realism" (Taylor, 1990, p. 258).

This poses a special kind of problem because while Taylor believes there is a truth of the matter as to whether there is a truth of the matter, Rorty, having rejected realism, doesn't believe his and Taylor's differences can be resolved - at least not rationally. But Taylor questions the extent to which Rorty exemplifies the non-realism he espouses - for often in his writing there is a sub-textual realism. For instance, in outlining the consequences of pragmatism, he suggests we might find something morally humiliating in not having a human essence, to

which we must be true. Yet Rorty suggests this does not warrant our rejecting pragmatism - which suggests there must be something pulling us toward the pragmatic view despite its being morally humiliating.

Rorty's argument rests on a belief that, historically, disputes between competing paradigms have been solved through natural selection rather than rational deliberation. New descriptions kill off old ones, not because they are rationally justified or more in accord with nature, but simply because they provide new and powerful ways of helping us cope. Taylor refutes this on two counts. Firstly it is not an accurate reading of history - new paradigms often address specific weaknesses in old paradigms, update old paradigms, or respond to old paradigms in ways that honor their implicit rationality; and secondly, this view is itself a product of the epistemological paradigm Rorty rejects. If Rorty were not operating with a preconceived theory of knowledge he wouldn't find himself in the paradoxical position of *believing* there is no truth of the matter (Taylor, 1990, p. 262-263).

Taylor is suggesting disputes between competing paradigms or 'language games' may or may not be resolvable by appeal to shared standards of rationality, but to decide this in advance, for all cases - to claim these disputes are never arbitrable - is to make an unjustified pre-judgement. And the consequences of this are devastating - for to claim all competing truth claims are

unarbitrable, is to imply this claim is itself unarbitrable - and all conversation stops.

But Rorty claims only a certain kind of conversation stops - pragmatic, edifying conversation begins at the point where rational, constructive conversation ends. But Taylor is reluctant to make this shift, claiming we are inherently rational and constructive. When we, as individuals, move from one view to another we do so because our new view seems to be "truer, more insightful, less self-deluding than the other" (p. 272). Rorty, in contrast, believes we adopt new descriptions (views) simply insofar as they suit our purposes better, are more exciting, novel, interesting or aesthetically-pleasing - anything but truer! Taylor responds

> The way we live our transitions, and struggle with potential
> redescriptions, unfailingly makes use of these notions of
> overcoming distortion, seeing through error, coming to reality, and
> their opposites. We can't function as agents without some such
> language, however much we may want to deny it in the name of
> some general *ex ante* view. (p. 272)

Truth, in Taylor's terms, has value only insofar as it allows us to make better sense of our lives. Any perspective that refuses to address key philosophical questions such as what is knowledge, what is truth, and what is understanding,

fails to acknowledge how central these concerns are to how we live our lives. By failing to offer constructive alternatives, Rorty condemns us to re-live the old in different guises. To pursue growth for growth's sake, without acknowledging our need to transcend the momentary, the individual and the idiosyncratic, is to limit genuine growth, which has meaning only insofar as it stands in relation to a justification beyond itself.

2.8 Spirit and Nature

But what would a justification beyond ourselves look like? Taylor suggests we have an inherent need to believe in a spiritual beyond. But Rorty revisions this as a need for new descriptions.

Figure 2.2: Taylor and Rorty's world/spirit divide

Spirit   Nature   Descriptions
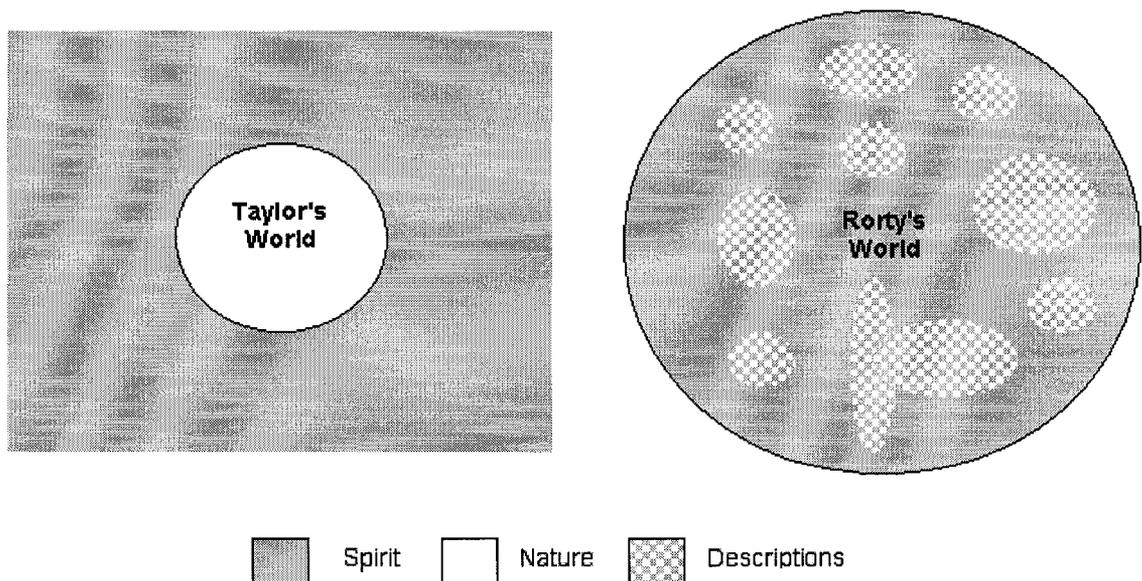
Spirit, as Taylor conceives it, is beyond human consciousness. While nature is knowable through rational inquiry, spirit forever eludes us. Spirit in this model is a fundamentally different order of stuff, existing outside the constraints of time and space.

In Rorty's world, it is nature that is forever unknowable - the world is inherently spiritual and all we have are contingent descriptions of it. These descriptions appear to describe nature, and consequently I have shaded them half grey (spirit) and half white (nature). But Rorty rejects Galileo's claim that "nature was written in the language of mathematics" (Rorty, 1983, p. 156). Galileo didn't 'discover' anything - he merely "lucked out" (p. 157), coming up with a new terminology that worked better for a given purpose. This descriptive vocabulary didn't correspond to reality but was the conclusion of "an inquiry which was, in the only sense I can give the term, hermeneutical ... the sort of by-guess-and-by-God hunt for new terminology which characterizes the initial stages of any new line of inquiry" (p. 166).

Hermeneutics, then, "describes our inquiry into spirit, whereas epistemology is a description of our inquiry into nature" (Rorty, 1979, p. 353). 'Spirit' is not man's inner essence, nor that which distinguishes men from beasts, nor self-transcending creativity - it is "whatever is so unfamiliar and unmanageable that we begin to wonder whether our "language" is "adequate" to it" (p. 253). Spirit is everything that makes us doubt whether our current

paradigms capture important distinctions we feel we should be making but aren't. Hermeneutics, in so far as it presents an opportunity for us to retrieve these dislocated elements of ourselves and our world, is as much a "way of coping" (p. 356) as a way of knowing. And by acknowledging the created, rather than found, nature of epistemological frameworks, we can work the hermeneutic dimension to produce new and original epistemological frameworks in the future.

Our quest for a spiritual beyond, then, in Rorty's model, is a quest for new and different vocabularies that enhance our capacity for self-creation. By calling into question dominant vocabularies and offering new and interesting alternatives, potential narratives emerge that expand the realm of human possibility and purpose. By resisting the impulse to treat narratives as authoritative, we increase our chances of coming up with new and interesting alternatives. Education, if it is to allow for continued intellectual and cultural development, should avoid inhibiting the development of personal narratives that conflict with dominant ideologies. In the next chapter I explore the interaction between personal and cultural narratives in more detail.

Chapter III: Charles Taylor's Dialogical Self and the Transcendent Sublime

If Rorty advocates de-divinization, Taylor advocates re-divinization - a renewed appreciation for "the moral meaning of biblical religiosity and what we have lost in abandoning it" (Shklar, 1991, p. 105). The modern identity, he claims, is cramped, for while it professes certain goods (i.e. universal justice, benevolence and non-oppression) it suppresses all discussion about these goods. The modern identity is "self-deluded" (p. 106), alienated from its moral roots, arrogant in relation to the pre-modern, and ignorant of its own limitations.

3.1 Identity and Authenticity

In his chapter 'The politics of recognition' (1995) Taylor outlines the contradictions and biases in the modern identity. Identity, he claims, is "something like an understanding of who we are, of our fundamental defining characteristics as human beings" (p. 225). Since the Enlightenment we have increasingly understood this as unique and individual - identity is that which is "peculiar to me and that I discover in myself" (p. 227). Each of us has a unique identity. The more accurately I understand myself the better I can live my own inner nature.

There is a certain way of being human that is my way. I am called

upon to live my life in this way, and not in imitation of anyone else's

life. (p. 228)

Every life has its own criteria for evaluation - there are no universal standards by

which a life can be measured.

Discovering who I am as a unique individual - my authentic self - and living

the life I am uniquely placed to live is what my life is about. But this is not

something I can do alone - I can only discover who *I* am by discovering myself in

relation to others. "We become full human agents, capable of understanding

ourselves, and hence of defining our identity, through our acquisition of rich

human languages of expression" (p. 230). These are necessarily obtained and

sustained through interaction with others - my identity is situated within a rich

web of social relatedness - it is essentially dialogical.

This conception of identity as dialogically constructed drives procedural

liberalism's commitment to a neutral stand on the purpose of human life. Only by

remaining neutral does a culture provide equal support to the range of different

conceptions of the purpose of human life. Yet this commitment is already based

on a notion of what life is about - namely, self-discovery. 'Neutral' liberalism "is

the political expression of one range of cultures, and quite incompatible with

other ranges" (p. 249). The separation of church and state, for instance, is

incomprehensible to mainstream Islam. Procedural liberalism presupposes a range of values that is far from neutral (cf. Halstead, 1995)

In his major work, *Sources of the self*, Taylor explores the bias of liberalism and the origins of modern identity in more detail. He sees this as a work of retrieval, claiming we have become so enmeshed in the modern identity we can barely see the assumptions underlying it. By retracing the emergence of the modern self over the past two millennia he shows how, far from being beyond ideology, we are deeply, and blindly, immersed in ideology.

But in articulating the assumptions underlying the modern identity, Taylor himself relies on an interpretive framework based on a number of contentious assumptions. Judith Shklar, for instance, "does not share a single one of Taylor's assumptions, reactions, or conclusions" (Shklar, 1991, p. 105), but is fascinated nonetheless by the glimpse into the Catholic mind Taylor provides. He shows how Catholic belief, and indeed any strongly held religious belief, can be justified philosophically.

3.2 Qualitative Distinctions

Taylor claims modern Western philosophy has focused on what it is right to do rather than on what it is good to be. It articulates our minimal obligations to others, rather than "what makes life worth living" (Taylor, 1989, p. 4). Life is meaningful, he claims, only when we operate with an interpretive framework that

distinguishes certain actions, modes of life, or feelings as "incomparably higher" (p. 19). To not have a framework "is to fall into a life which is spiritually senseless" (p. 18) - to be pathological. We *need* to distinguish between the spiritually higher and lower, just as we *need* to distinguish between up and down, left and right. They are psychological demands the world necessarily places upon us.

These qualitative distinctions of higher and lower form my identity. "To know who I am is a species of knowing where I stand" (p. 27). Personal identity and moral orientation are inextricably bound. "We are selves only in that certain issues matter for us. What I am as a self, my identity, is essentially defined by the way things have significance for me" (p. 34). To understand humans without reference to their own personal meaning-making processes - as in the science of behaviorism - is to deny what it is to be human. Humans inevitably understand themselves in relation to key goods, around which they construct personal narratives. We have no choice but to "understand our lives in narrative form, as a 'quest'" (p. 52). These are structural requirements of human agency.

This emphasis on qualitative distinctions drives Taylor's methodological stance, which he calls the Best Account, or BA, principle. On this account, we believe that which enables us to make the best sense of our lives.

36

What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms in which critical reflection and after correction of the errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives? (p. 57)

Rather than appealing to external reality or theoretical orientation, the everyday language with which we make sense of the world acts as the basis for determining justified belief. No matter how convincing a theoretical orientation or language game becomes, if it "can't be supported by moral experience, then there are no good grounds to believe it at all" (p. 60).

3.3 Hypergoods

All moral experience depends on distinguishing 'higher' from 'lower' goods, where one good takes on supreme importance i.e. family life, self-expression, the love of God, universal justice. This Taylor terms the hypergood, which, were I to be "turned away from it" would render my life "devastating and insufferable" (p. 63). When turned toward it, it "gives me a sense of wholeness, of fullness of being as a person or self, that nothing else can." (pp. 63-64).

Our acceptance of any hypergood is connected in a complex way with our being *moved* by it ... the most reliable view is not one that would be grounded quite outside our intuitions but one that is grounded on our strongest intuitions, where these have

successfully met the challenge of proposed transitions away from them. (pp. 73-75)

If I strongly intuit the existence of God, for example, and after communicating with atheists and scientists my life still makes better sense interpreted within a theological framework, this represents justified belief with authority for me.

Taylor claims hypergoods are inescapable aspects of any interpretive framework, even when explicitly denied. Postmodern perspectives, which claim to have no ideological commitments, are driven by a thick moral commitment to freedom and power (Rorty's self-creating self, with its focus on radical autonomy, is an example.) Postmodernists are "constitutionally incapable of coming clean about the deeper sources of their own thinking. Their thought is inescapably cramped" (p. 88). Locating their moral orientation in rationality and theory rather than intuition they suppress the obvious and "mystify the priority of the moral", failing to "cope with all that aspect of our moral thinking which concerns aspirations to perfection, heroism, supererogation, and the like" (pp. 89-90).

But maybe Rorty and the postmodernists are right - maybe contentious, strongly held beliefs should be redescribed until they whither away. Wouldn't we be better off without the social, cultural and interpersonal tension they create? Taylor believes not - for our status as full human beings requires us to articulate "what moves us, what our lives are built around" (p. 92). Only by articulating

these beliefs do they retain their capacity to motivate us, to "inspire our love, respect or allegiance" (p. 96)

3.4 Constitutive Goods

Taylor goes further. Not only are we necessarily committed to goods and hypergoods, but to a larger and more substantial good. Only the love of something to which these goods are subservient can motivate us to *live* these goods. This is the constitutive good - the "love of it is what empowers us to be good" (p. 93). It confers value on goods and hypergoods, with an implicit authority (it is similar in this respect to what I am calling the sublime). For Taylor a Catholic God is the constitutive good, but is there a non-theistic equivalent?

The constitutive good for non-theists is rational agency. As secular citizens we worship at the altar of self-hood, others, and our own, conceived as a developing narrative of increased freedom, autonomy and authenticity, a product of our inherent capacity for rational thought. Our *love* for God becomes *respect* for human dignity, but the motivating power remains the same - a larger than life ideal conferring value on and animating the life goods to which we subscribe.

3.5 Locating the Divine

The task Taylor sets himself is to retrieve and articulate (Rorty might say redescribe) the goods, hypergoods and constitutive goods underlying the modern

identity. The story Taylor tells is one of increasing inwardness - where we once looked outside ourselves, to Plato's Ideas or a Christian God for faith and sustenance, we increasingly look inside ourselves for moral strength. The move to inwardness was not originally a move away from God, but a re-location of God - God became accessible through our own inner nature. Human emotion and rationality were a "way of access into the design of things, which is the real constitutive good, determining good and bad" (p. 285). Human nature, when properly understood, is "the source of right impulse or sentiment" (p. 284) - to know ourselves is to know how to live in accord with our Maker.

In the past two hundred years difference, rather than similarity, has been the focus of attention and the idea of a common human nature has been replaced with an ideal of authenticity. Based on the constitutive goods of human rationality and imagination, and the "depths of nature, within and without" (p. 408), the authentic self looks to culture, rather than religion, to sustain itself. Epiphanic art, poetry in particular, brings us into contact with a spiritual beyond - "most of the Romantic poets saw themselves as articulating something greater than themselves: the world, nature, being, the word of God" (p. 427). Epiphanic art resists the dehumanizing influence of science and rationality - and yet "the very nature of epiphanic art can make it difficult to say just what is being celebrated: the deep recesses beyond or below the subject, or the subject's uncanny powers" (p. 429).

Epiphanic art might not so much evoke a spiritual awareness, as manipulate an illusory, sculpted *sensation* of the spiritual, one that lacks any depth. "Drunk with what? With wine, with poetry, with virtue, as you please. But get drunk" (Baudelaire in Taylor, 1989, p. 437). The pleasure previously associated with spiritual revelation becomes an end in itself. A non-transcendent spirituality of human self-fulfillment replaces the traditional emphasis on significance - God, Plato's Ideas and the associated metaphysical claims of rationality and emotion lose their power.

This rejection of prior spiritual traditions in favor of personal fulfillment lies at the heart of contemporary therapeutic culture. But in rejecting demands from beyond the self, subjectivism tends "toward emptiness: nothing would count as a fulfillment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfillment" (Taylor, 1989, p. 507). This is the same argument Taylor levels at Rorty - without a commitment to something outside ourselves our lives are futile and meaningless. Subjective self-fulfillment must be accompanied by a spiritual orientation - and the demands of personal self-fulfillment may be trumped by the demands of spirituality. "The highest spiritual ideals and aspirations also threaten to lay the most crushing burdens on humankind" (p. 519). Spiritual ideals *may* lead to human suffering and destruction but, Taylor argues, this does not make them invalid. Ridding ourselves of spiritual ideals may avoid one kind of suffering and destruction, but the suffering that results from mutilating that part of ourselves that reaches for "the deepest and most powerful spiritual

aspirations" (p. 520) is equally real. We must balance the "spiritual lobotomy" (p. 520) of modernity with the potentially destructive power of traditional spiritual orientations. This, Taylor, concludes, is "our greatest spiritual challenge" (p. 521; cf. Palmer, 1998, pp. 9-34, pp. 163-183).

In presenting his account of the origins of the modern identity Taylor shows how "our self-understanding as moral agents, cannot be properly comprehended without reference to its religious history" (Morgan, 1994, p. 49). Our modern self relies on a range of moral sources that exist outside ourselves - Rorty's self-creating self, for instance, can have neither meaning nor motivation without a reason to be (cf. Postman, 1995, p. 4). And while Rorty and other postmodernists deny moral foundationalism in the interests of radical freedom, freedom itself would have no meaning without a moral foundation. By casting doubt on the legitimacy, independence and neutrality of secular society and the modernist self, he re-opens the door to religious faith as a moral source. By emphasizing epiphanic art's capacity to re-connect the self "with what lies beyond it" (Morgan, 1994, p. 57) he shows "the world in which we live is not as bereft of the divine, or religious potentiality, as some have thought" (p. 61).

3.6 Celebrating the Divine

This highlights the central contention between Taylor and Rorty. Rorty wants us to move away from religious potentiality - to be ashamed of our dependence on metaphysical and religious comforts. Taylor, in contrast, wants

us to reconnect with the divine - to celebrate the empowering and motivating force of the metaphysical beyond. Yet it is not clear what the metaphysical beyond motivates us to do. Rorty, for instance, lives, works, writes and teaches, despite his rejection of both God and Truth. It is not clear why moral sources *should* be re-empowered through articulation - what end does re-articulation serve, other than to keep religious conceptions alive? What has Rorty lost in rejecting the transcendent?

The answer can only be found in Taylor's own personal best account - in understanding what God means to him. In *A Catholic Modernity* Taylor speaks about his faith and philosophical orientation. Secular society, he claims, "in breaking with the structures and beliefs of Christendom, also carried certain facets of Christian life further than they ever were taken or could have been taken within Christendom" (Taylor, 1999, p. 16). But this does not make secular humanism superior to Christianity. Modernism may have instituted a more humane, fair and civilized society, but this does not make transcendent outlooks dangerous and oppressive. Exclusive humanism, Taylor claims, "also carries great dangers" (p. 19) which can only be mitigated by an understanding of the limitations of non-transcendent perspectives.

Acknowledging the transcendent means looking beyond human life for a reason to be. "What matters beyond life doesn't matter just because it sustains life; otherwise it wouldn't be 'beyond life'" (p. 20). It requires a "radical

decentering of the self" (p. 21) - God's will trumps my own will, or the collective

human will. Foregoing a commitment to human flourishing in favor of God does

not mean a denial of human flourishing - for "God's will is that humans flourish"

(p. 22). We are brought back to human flourishing by our commitment to

something beyond human flourishing. But we are no longer at the center of the

universe - God is.

This is important because humans have an inherent need to reach beyond

the constraints of modern rationality.

Exclusive humanism closes the transcendent window, as though

there were nothing beyond - more, as though it weren't a crying

need of the human heart to open that window, gaze, and then go

beyond; as though feeling this need were the result of a mistake, an

erroneous worldview, bad conditioning, or worse, some pathology.

(p. 27)

In denying the transcendent we deny a fundamental human need and this makes

us less, rather than more, likely to fulfill the modernist ideals of benevolence and

compassion. Elevating human life to a metaphysical, rather than practical

priority, is "wrong and stifling" (p. 29) - it "puts in danger the practical primacy" (p.

29). By putting ourselves at the center of the universe, we are thwarting an

inherent need for transcendent meaning, and limiting our capacity for unconditional love.

3.7 Unconditional Love

Unconditional love is the hidden claim at the heart of Taylor's philosophy. While he applauds the secular humanist commitment to solidarity and benevolence, he questions the underlying motive. A recognition of the inherent dignity of all human beings, he claims, is part of our self-image - "we feel a sense of satisfaction and superiority when we contemplate others - our ancestors or contemporary illiberal societies" (p. 31). But a commitment to others based on a sense of moral superiority is a fickle and fragile thing, vulnerable to "the shifting fashion of media attention and the various modes of feel-good hype" (p. 31). Equal dignity and respect must be motivated by a genuine desire to help others, whoever and however they are, not by a desire to improve our own self-image. Self-image should be a consequence of our actions, not the driving force behind them.

Without a genuine commitment and love for others the modernist ideal of freedom and equality, not just for one's self and one's community but for all humans everywhere, risks grave consequences. For "before the reality of human shortcomings, philanthropy - the love of the human - can gradually come to be invested with contempt, hatred, aggression" (p. 32). The higher our expectations, the greater our disappointment when others fail to meet these. The

history of Christian missionaries shows how disappointed expectations can turn benevolence and compassion into frustration and contempt. Our philanthropic ideals must be "tempered, controlled, and ultimately engulfed in an unconditional love of the beneficiaries" (p. 33). We must not let a commitment to justice and equality drive a hatred for all those who stand in the way. To do so is to have "safely located all evil outside us" (p. 33).

Our safest bet is to care for others without expecting much in return - for only in so doing can we avoid the malevolent consequences of frustrated hopes. This ability to give unconditionally is only possible when we locate our sense of identity and worth outside ourselves. Our love must not be "conditional on the worth realized in you just as an individual or even in what is realizable in you alone" (p. 35). We must open ourselves to God and stand "among others in the stream of love ... overstepping the limits set in theory by exclusive humanisms" (p. 35). By denying transcendent reality, secular humanism closes itself off to the possibility of unconditional love.

This is a fundamentally important point. In Rorty's pragmatic world self-interest and instrumental rationality determine right action. The earth, its creatures and human life are justified only insofar as they contribute to the greater good as we define and experience it - they are never justified in and of themselves (cf. Taylor, 1991, pp. 68-69). Yet Rorty might ask, hasn't this always been the case? Is it not an illusion to think otherwise? And, arguing from within

Taylor's own methodology, he might say it *must* have been an illusion for we have transitioned to secular humanism precisely because it makes better sense of our lives. Secular society was a transition opportunity that we took. The shift to a pragmatic culture represents a similar transition opportunity, which we will take if *it* makes better sense of our lives. We must ask, "Did unconditional love ever exist?" and, if so, why was it unable to resist the transition opportunities that took us away from it.

In the discussion above I addressed Taylor's conception of self as dialogical, centered on goods and hypergoods intimately related to a constitutive good. I also discussed the role, function and purpose of a transcendent Beyond in Taylor's own personal best account, and the critical consequences of this for modernity. In the remainder of this chapter I will look at the educational implications of Taylor's philosophy - in particular the best account principle as it relates to justified belief in educational settings.

3.8 Presuming Value

Taylor wants to open up debate - to "get to the point where mainstream people have to *defend* the narrow focus" (Taylor, 1999, p. 123) of modernity. But to what extent is meaningful dialogue possible when the best account principle determines justified belief? To what extent are we duty-bound to make positive efforts to shift our best account - to experiment with new ideas, navigate through uncertainty, and risk the loss of a comfortable and familiar identity?

In 'The politics of recognition' Taylor claims educational institutions have been struggling with this very issue. There has been mounting pressure to expand the boundaries of what counts as legitimate knowledge and culture. This responds to a growing awareness that previous criteria for determining the value of knowledge and culture have been defined by a small elite of mostly dead white males. Students who are not white or male (and not dead!) internalize a demeaning image of themselves as a result of this bias, devaluing their own understanding and that of their ancestors. In consequence "dominant groups tend to entrench their hegemony by inculcating an image of inferiority in the subjugated" (Taylor, 1995, pp. 251-252).

To redress this imbalance Taylor proposes a leap of faith, a presumption of value, such that we assume "all human cultures that have animated whole societies over some considerable stretch of time have something important to say to all human beings" (p. 252). But this is not a conclusion - it is a starting point, a means by which we can begin a process of evaluative study. It is a necessary starting point because to approach another culture with the criteria developed in our own is to limit in advance what the other culture can mean to us. "To approach, say, a raga with the presumptions of value implicit in the well-tempered clavier would be to forever miss the point" (p. 252). A genuine appreciation for another culture necessitates immersing ourselves in that culture, so our criteria for evaluation shift.

This does not mean jettisoning completely our initial standards of judgement. We cannot deem another culture of value purely on ethical grounds. If our judgements are to mean anything, to be judgements rather than statements of solidarity, they must be rooted in something more than a 'will to appeasement'.

> The giving of a judgement on demand is an act of breathtaking condescension. No one can really mean it as a genuine act of respect. It is more in the nature of a pretended act of respect given at the insistence of its supposed beneficiary. (p. 255)

For judgements to be real yet sensitive to the dynamics of cultural difference we must begin with a presumption of value and seek a fusion of horizons. We must be transformed by our experience of the other, struggling to make sense of their difference. Favorable judgements based on an ethical obligation rather than concrete evaluation shortcuts this process, assuming we already have criteria for assessing all cultures. Inversely, non-favorable judgements based on an unwillingness to engage in a presumption of value assume an ethnocentric standard of value, which is equally homogenizing. "There must be something midway between the inauthentic and homogenizing demand for recognition of equal worth, on the one hand, and the self-immurement within ethnocentric standards on the other" (p. 256). The middle ground, for Taylor, is a presumption of equal worth, where that presumption is subject to further investigation.

3.9 Receptivity and Evaluation

Linda Nicholson, in her chapter 'To be or not to be: Charles Taylor and the politics of recognition', agrees with Taylor but questions what "we", the dominant majority who presume value, must do to be genuinely transformed by our study of the other. She asks,

> Is knowledge of another's practices and values sufficient to
> generate questions about one's own? Might there not be factors
> about "ourselves", including our emotions or interests, that
> contribute to or hinder the making of that particular cognitive move?
> (Nicholson, 1999, pp. 138-139)

Taylor believes it would be arrogant to assume other cultures have nothing worthwhile to contribute. But humility is only required up to a point - after an unspecified period of time we can "evaluate" according to newly fused standards. But it is not clear at what point our standards *are* sufficiently fused - when does humility legitimately give way to a more critical stance?

This leads Nicholson to question the very terms in which Taylor frames his argument. His bipolar view of a benevolent majority extending recognition to a disenfranchised minority fails to do justice to her own situation. As a white European female, she straddles both sides of the fence - she is both the "we"

who can bestow recognition and the "other" who demands it. This complexity of

relation suggests multiculturalism cannot focus on judgements of worth for whole

groups - it must focus instead on "the process by which judgements of worth

have and can be made" (p. 142). Only by assessing prior and embedded cultural

judgements and their historical relation to power and self-interest can we engage

in a genuinely non-oppressive dialogue in which neither "us" nor "them" are

disadvantaged.

Figure 3.1: Taylor's Personal Best Account Principle

Rationality   Intuition

Argument   Art

Transition
Opportunities

Boundary line
between self
and other

Personal
Best
Account
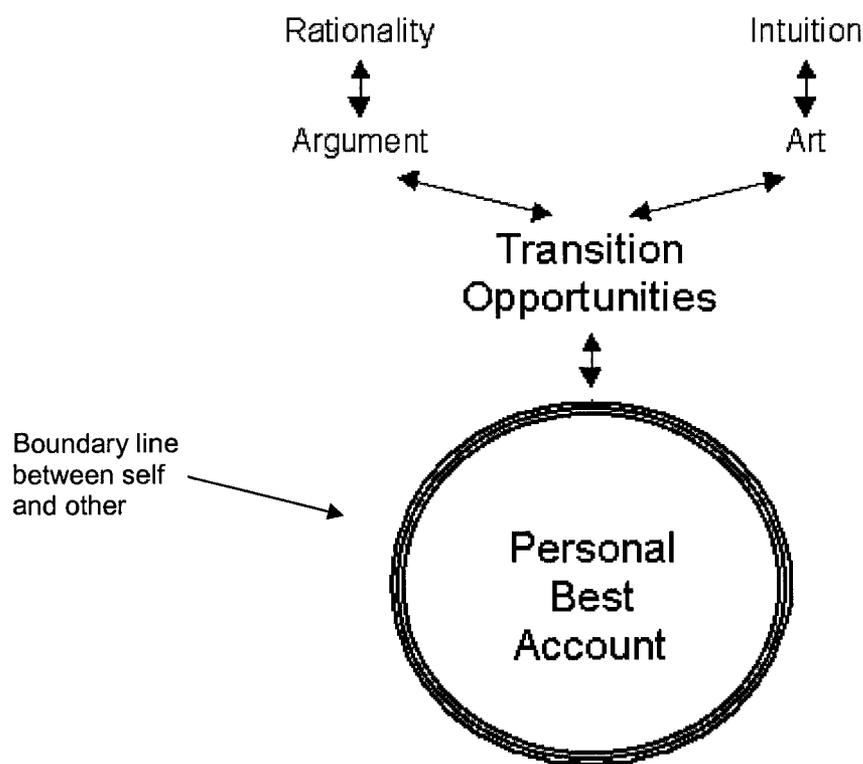
If we apply this same argument to Taylor's best account principle we must

ask what ethical obligation I as an individual have to remain open and receptive

to transition opportunities. If strong intuitions are accessible only through

subjectively resonating epiphanies, what determines my receptivity to these? Can education make us more or less receptive? What is an appropriate level of receptivity? When can I legitimately say 'I have understood your perspective but reject it in making sense of my own life'?

In figure 3.1, personal best accounts are susceptible to transformation from transition opportunities, and capable of producing transition opportunities for others. Yet the determinants of our receptivity to any kind of transition opportunity remain unclear. How should we understand the nature and thickness of the circle that binds the personal best account, that distinguishes me from not-me, the legitimate from the illegitimate, the subjectively resonant from the meaningless? In the next chapter I address receptivity and the relation between self and other in more detail.

Chapter IV: Robert Kegan's Postmodern Self and the Relational Sublime

Taylor's *Sources of the self* traces our collective sense of identity from Plato to today. His approach is historical and philosophical. Robert Kegan's *In over our heads* traces individual identity over the course of a lifetime. His approach is empirical and psychological. In this chapter I outline Kegan's stage theory of mental development and discuss the implications for education.

4.1 Philosophy, Epistemology and Hermeneutics

Taylor believes philosophy's role should be to sensitize us to the good and the true - to break down barriers to transformation, to thin out resistance to transition opportunities, particularly those originating in the arts and intuition. But Habermas, in his *Justification and application: Remarks on discourse ethics* (1993), claims philosophy is in no position to do this - "we learn what moral, and in particular immoral, action involves prior to all philosophizing" (Habermas, 1993, p. 75). Our empathic response to others, based on our emotional experience, drives our moral will. "Moral theory is competent to clarify the moral point of view and justify its universality, but it can contribute nothing to answering the question "Why be moral?" whether this be understood in a trivial, an existential, or a pedagogical sense" (p. 76). Our inherent biological structure, he

claims, in conjunction with real-life and intimate experience, determines our essential moral nature, our receptivity to the claims of rationality and intuition.

This inherent biological structure has been the focus of Piaget, Kohlberg and Kegan's empirical developmental psychology. But how justified is an empirical approach to mental and moral development? In 'Interpretive Social Science vs. Hermeneuticism' Habermas distinguishes two ways of communicating - "either *you say what is or is not the case* or you *say something to somebody else so that the hearer understands what is said*" (Habermas, 1983, p. 253). Epistemology addresses the former - what is or is not the case. Hermeneutics encompasses epistemology but additionally asks what the speaker's intention and relationship to the intended audience is, and how what is being said relates to everything that has previously been said. Hermeneutics expands the context within which knowledge exists, subverting claims based on assumptions not explicitly addressed or accounted for.

Does this make all knowledge claims futile? Not if both speaker and hearer understand the hermeneutic orientation of the other and grasp the background assumptions involved. Where this is the case, theories are a useful way of understanding the world and ourselves. Kohlberg's theory of moral development, for instance, despite taking morality as an object when "the objectivity of the theory itself seems to be affected by the in-built preference for one moral theory as against others" (p. 261) is not necessarily redundant or

intellectually indefensible. It retains as much value as its hermeneutic dimension allows. And Kohlberg is clear about his assumptions. He explicitly states

> which parts of it [his theory] are currently claimed to be empirically
> validated ... which parts are claimed to be in principle empirically
> verifiable but await further research ... and which parts are
> philosophical assumptions justified on logical rather than empirical
> grounds. (Kohlberg et al., 1983, p. 5)

By acknowledging the limits of his theory's applicability, Kohlberg allows for a "*mutual* orientation toward validity claims" (Habermas, 1983, p. 255).

Robert Kegan's "neo-Piagetian" (Kegan, 1982, p. 4) stage theory of consciousness follows in this tradition of hermeneutically aware empirical research. It explores hermeneutics by adopting a hermeneutic perspective. It is both a form of meaning-making and a theory of meaning-making itself. It addresses its own assumptions and explicitly responds to hermeneutic challenges.

4.2 Ways of Knowing

In *The evolving self: Problems and process in human development* (1982) and *In over our heads: The mental demands of modern life* (1994) Kegan makes a fundamental distinction between *what* people know, and *how* they know. How

people know refers to the ways people construct meaning. The "zone of mediation where meaning is made is variously called by personality psychologists the 'ego', the 'self', the 'person'" (Kegan, 1982, p. 3). A person is an activity as much as a thing - "an ever progressive motion engaged in giving itself a new form" (p. 8). Using a qualitative interview analysis to analyze statements of self- and other-awareness, Kegan identifies five primary forms of meaning-making where each successive stage builds on and envelops that which preceded it. "Each successive principle subsumes or encompasses the prior principle. That which was subject becomes object to the next principles" (Kegan, 1994, p. 33). Each stage is to the prior stage as a point is to a line, or a line is to a plane. What was once totality (i.e. subject) is now part of a larger more inclusive totality (i.e. is now object to a newly emerging subject). In the case of a child's first sense of self, for instance, "rather than being my reflexes, I now have them, and 'I' am something other. 'I' am that which coordinates or mediates the reflexes" (Kegan, 1982, p. 79). This transformation is a slow, and often painful, process, representing both the loss of an old self, and the emergence of a new one.

> Liberating ourselves from that in which we were embedded, making what was subject into object so that we can "have it" rather than "be had" by it - this is the most powerful way I know to conceptualize the growth of the mind. (Kegan, 1994, p. 34)

Just as a young child for the first time experiences something behind perception - something ordering perception and experiencing experience - so teenagers and adults develop increasingly complex 'orders of consciousness'. These result from the "interaction between self and other, subject and object, organism and environment" (Morris, 1994, p. 55). Meaning-making is about "both knowing and being ... about self-preservation and self-transformation, decentering and recentering, surrendering and defending" (p. 56). It is necessarily dialogical, embedded within a cultural context that both challenges and supports us. Each identifiable stage represents a point of equilibrium, where demands emanating from beyond the self are met by an internal capacity to meet these demands. Kegan's focus, then, is success, where this is defined as the ability to adequately meet the demands placed upon us. When our meaning-making capacity falls short of cultural expectations, we are literally 'In over our heads'.

The first way of knowing, or 'order of consciousness', is found in children between the ages of 0 and 7. They are fundamentally egocentric, attached to the momentary, the immediate and the impulsive. They recognize the existence of others, separate from themselves, but are unable to recognize agency in others - they cannot comprehend another point of view, distinct from their own.

Between the ages of 7 and 12 children develop a second order of consciousness, allowing them to construct cause and effect relations and

distance themselves from the immediate and momentary. The momentary and fleeting impulses of the first stage are now object to a subjectivity that constructs narratives, delays gratification and identifies enduring qualities of self.

4.3 Traditional Consciousness

Third order, or Traditional, consciousness represents the point at which we are truly "a part of society ... when society has become truly a part of us" (p. 76). It is the point at which we are socialized to meet the demands of living in community with others. We have internalized the values of society, subsumed our personal second order narrative within a larger cultural narrative, and identified with an authority outside ourselves.

> An infallible guide outside ourselves, in which we comfortably invest authority and to which authority we pledge loyalty, fidelity, and faith - this is the essence of psychological *de*pendence. It is the essence of the premodern Traditional state of mind, and it is the essence of third order consciousness. (p. 112)

The shift from second to third order consciousness represents a "spectacular transformation" requiring "twenty years of living" (p. 75) but does it equip us to meet the demands of modern life? Traditional third order consciousness is adequate to the demands of a traditional culture or subculture, where the range of value and belief is a limited. But heterogeneous societies

bombard us with competing conceptions of the good. We no longer know to whom to be loyal. We are forced to look inside ourselves to find the support traditionally provided by the larger culture - to develop a capacity of mind that "has" cultural specificity, rather than is "had" by it. This represents

> nothing less than the extraordinary cultural demand that each person, in adulthood, create internally an order of consciousness comparable to that which ordinarily would only be found at the level of a community's collective intelligence. This amounts to the expectation that faithful adherents themselves become priests and priestesses; or that the acculturated become cultures unto themselves. (p. 134)

4.4 Modern Consciousness

Fourth order, Modern, consciousness develops a new set of ideas about ideas, about where they come from, who authorizes them and what makes them true. It rests on a critical capacity that acknowledges "ideas, values and beliefs are by their very nature assumptive" (p. 110). It requires us to be consciously rather than *un*consciously socialized. Our identification with the larger culture is tempered by a distinct sense of self that transcends that culture. The socialized subject becomes object to a newly individuated subject.

This has important implications for cross-cultural communication. So long as we are uncritically identified with cultural norms, we are locked into an ethnocentric perspective. We assess the norms of others according to our own interpretations. Fourth order consciousness, in contrast, allows us to engage in a presumption of value, to give others a reasonable chance of being understood on their own terms, as discrete individuals with their own independent meaning-making.

Insofar as fourth order consciousness is Modernist, it shares the anti-religious bias of modernism. Or does it? Kegan acknowledges the shift from third to fourth order consciousness "is akin to leaving the family's faith ... the kind of orthodox, traditional faith that is as public as private, a constant minute-to-minute foundation and guide to the purpose of life and the means of realizing that purpose" (p. 266). This need not be a recognized religious faith - we all, he claims, are raised in households where core values and beliefs are reinforced through rituals and customs that inculcate desired attitudes and orientations. But a modernist mindset does not require jettisoning faith - it requires a re-negotiation with faith. We must "construct a new relationship to the family or the religion" (p. 270) such that we "have it" rather than are "had by it".

4.5 Postmodern consciousness

The final, fifth order, Postmodern consciousness once again entails the development of a subjectivity that "has" what previously constituted its totality.

Just as the fourth order was a reaction against the third order, so the fifth order is a reaction against the "whole, complete, and prior self" of the fourth order (p. 351). The fifth order sees the Modernist self as compromised by the network of relationships and context within which it has been constructed. The relationship between discrete selves is understood from a fifth order perspective as prior to the existence of the discrete selves themselves.

While fourth order consciousness allows us to differentiate between our socialization and our selves and adopt a position that reflects "who we really are", fifth order consciousness casts doubt on the very notion of a finite, authentic self. The modernist, fourth order self, priding itself on having transcended its socialization, is nonetheless constructed against a backdrop of limited ideological choices circulating in the larger culture. The fifth order self recognizes a potentially infinite range of possible ideologies - ideologies that may be mutually exclusive, may not have been constructed, or may not yet even exist.

The choices on which fourth order consciousness is constructed are limited by the context within which those choices were made. Fifth order consciousness conceptualizes contexts within which different, and perhaps, better choices could be made. These potential and imaginative contexts are infinite and encourage an identification with "the transformative process of our being rather than the formative products of our becoming" (p. 351).

4.6 The Vanishing Self

Kenneth Gergen (1991), also writing from a psychological perspective, echoes Kegan's observations. The vocabularies we use to describe ourselves determine who we are - and these are constituted by our cultural context. The twentieth century inherited two vocabularies of the self - a romantic vocabulary emphasizing personal depth and creativity, and a modernist vocabulary emphasizing reason and intention. Both, he claims, are falling into disuse as emerging technologies "saturate us with the voices of humankind - both harmonious and alien" (p. 6). This social saturation is part and parcel of the postmodern condition which, rather than offering a new vocabulary of the self, "is more apocalyptic than that: the very concept of personal essences is thrown into doubt" (p. 7). Social saturation

> furnishes us with a multiplicity of incoherent and unrelated
> languages of the self. For everything we "know to be true" about
> ourselves, other voices within respond with doubt and even derision
> ... The saturated self becomes no self at all. (p. 7)

If we are selves only insofar as we know where we stand, as Taylor suggests (Taylor, 1989, p. 27), how can a distinct self exist in a world where a vast range of diverse beliefs and opinions prevails. Any belief we as individuals hold "is relativized by our simultaneous consciousness of compelling alternatives"

(Gergen, K, 1991, p16). A bounded identity with palpable attributes no longer seems plausible.

The consequence, Gergen claims, is a vanishing of self into a "stage of relatedness" where "one ceases to believe in a self independent of the relations in which [one] is embedded" (p. 17). This postmodern non-self is, "at least as compelling as our traditional beliefs in a psychological self" (Gergen, 1996, p. 137). Rather than presuming a self at the center of the social world, relationships become the "enduring reality of which the self is an integral part" (Gergen, 1996, p. 135) - interdependence rather than independence becomes the norm.

This emphasis on relationality and the loss of subject-object boundaries is not new - poets, artists and mystics have long emphasized the essential oneness of mind and world. Bai (1997), for instance, notes the "fundamental unity of art and morality achieved through a kind of "transcendental" viewpoint which has to do with overcoming the egoic, dualistic frame of consciousness" (p. 38). She draws parallels between Zen aesthetics and postmodern consciousness, which both emphasize the unity of self and Other and the importance of radical empathy for the development of "compassionate, harmony-seeking human beings" (p. 42). A Buddhist, she claims, "is more likely to understand the 'self' as a relational term, i.e. a term that signifies a relation rather than an entity" (p. 44; cf. Hall, 1996; Scheurich, 1997, pp. 80-93). This echoes the relational emphasis of Kegan and Gergen's postmodern consciousness.

To summarize, each one of Kegan's stages represents the development of a new subjectivity that "has" the old subjectivity. These develop in response to pragmatic demands the larger culture places upon us. Later stages map to particular cultural conceptions i.e. Traditional, Modern and Postmodern. These are tabulated below:

Table 4.1: Kegan's traditional, modern and postmodern consciousness

Stage of Consciousness	Cultural Conception	Developmental Process	Mental Demand	Age Range
3	Traditional	Socialization	Responsibility	13-20
4	Modern	Individuation	Respect for Difference	20-30
5	Postmodern	Relationalization	Compassion	30-

If, as Kegan claims, modern society makes demands on us, both at home and at work, for at least the individuation and respect for difference of fourth order consciousness, the question becomes when, and how, this should be taught - if indeed it can be taught.

4.7 Challenge and Support

Kegan claims "people grow best where they continuously experience an ingenious blend of support and challenge" (Kegan, 1994, p. 42). Modern pluralist cultures, he claims, are strong on challenge and weak on support. Families, schools and the workplace make behavioral demands, without acknowledging

the implicit mental demands underlying them. Society requires different qualities of mind depending on where we are in the life span. A baby whose total experience of life is the present, whose mind has no sense of basic concepts and is completely dependent on others, is normal. But when a forty-year-old exhibits these same qualities he would most likely be found in an institution. So while hedonism is acceptable for a child within the culture of parenting, the same ethic exhibited by an adult within a culture of work and social responsibility is unacceptable. While this may seem obvious, these mental demands, which constitute the hidden cultural curricula, are not explicitly addressed in our society. They are assumed to develop on their own, and when they don't, it is the individual, rather than the culture, which shoulders the blame.

> While we have been able to extend a disciplined sympathy to
> children, evoked by our analytic exploration of their capacity to
> meet the challenges of the various curricula we create for them, it
> remains for us to extend the same disciplined sympathy to adult
> experience. (p. 5)

Recognizing the hidden cultural demand for higher order consciousness allows us to approach mental development with a greater clarity of purpose and tolerance for those struggling with the cultural "curriculum".

4.8 Teaching Consciousness

Kegan addresses the educational implications of his theory at both high school and university levels. In high schools an emphasis on capacities of mind cuts across traditional distinctions between 'back to basics' and 'humanistic' approaches. Both ideological positions are equally able to succeed (or fail) in providing a balance of challenge and support for adolescents' growing consciousness.

Kegan takes the example of two 'back to basics' teachers teaching 'irony'. Both require students to provide a definition of the term. This represents a demand for third order thinking as "the difference between an example and a definition is precisely the difference between a concrete fact, a second order way of knowing, and abstract generalization, a third order way of knowing" (p. 53). Teacher A asks students to provide examples, which they do. She asks for a definition and students, unable to differentiate between an example and a definition, provide more examples. When she realizes students are unable to provide a definition, she provides a definition herself, which the students duly note. Teacher B adopts a similar approach, but emphasizes the additional level of abstraction required for a definition. As students provide examples of irony, she writes them on the board. Once she has a sizeable collection, she draws a circle around all the examples, and asks students to find a commonality between these examples. The students struggle to find a principle or idea that would

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'have' the concrete examples as objects and in so doing create an encompassing 'subject' that is the definition of irony.

The same distinction can be found in humanist approaches. Two humanist teachers, C and D, are teaching listening, cooperation and conversational skills. Teacher C establishes rules for proper conduct in classroom conversation, encouraging students to take turns in an orderly fashion. She may also run a mini therapy session, encouraging students to talk about how they feel when interrupted.

Teacher D institutes a different kind of rule. Before any speaker makes a point she asks that they "restate the preceding speaker's point with sufficient accuracy that the preceding speaker agrees it has been adequately restated" (p. 54). In so doing, students have to step outside their own perspective, making their own view "object rather than subject" (p. 55).

In Kegan's model it is Teacher B and D who, despite their differences in educational ideology, share a common teleology. They are both focused on developing a capacity for abstract, cross-categorical (third order) consciousness. Teacher A and C, despite their best intentions, are engaged in what Paulo Freire and Bell Hooks term the 'banking' model of education, limiting critical consciousness, fragmenting understanding, and stifling student creativity (Freire, 1989, p. 58; Hooks, 1994).

University education presents different challenges. Unlike high school, in which the population is homogeneous with respect to age and development, University students are from 18 to 60 years old with a variety of motivations and interests. What unites them, Kegan claims, is a desire for increased personal authority. It is not enough for university students to adopt a reverent attitude toward the professor and deliver exactly what he wants. Professors like papers in which students are "writing to parts of themselves, conducting an inner conversation" (Kegan, 1994, p. 284). This represents a call for a particular kind of self, one that can stand apart from its own subjectivity, reflect on and evaluate its own responses. Adult education should not aim to re-socialize students into a new discourse community (third order), nor should it aim to undermine the development of complete and whole selves by casting doubt on the very notion of whole and complete selves (fifth order). It should focus on the development of an order of consciousness suited to the liberal democratic, multicultural, self-reflexive demands of modern society i.e. the fourth order.

4.9 Deconstructive vs. Reconstructive Postmodernism

If fourth order consciousness is a desirable pedagogical goal because it enables a self- and cultural awareness necessary for active participation in modern, pluralist societies, what is the purpose and function of postmodern, fifth order consciousness? Postmodernists

are not just taking charge of the internal logic of their respective

disciplines; they are standing outside these systems, taking them

as object and seeing them for what they are ... They see that each

system - each "way of knowing" - is inevitably "decisive" in the

literal sense of cutting some things off and including others, that

each way of knowing is a way of not knowing. (p. 290)

Kegan distinguishes two types of postmodern consciousness. Deconstructive

postmodernism looks for the hidden assumptions and ideological agendas of

disciplinary perspectives in order to discover "the separate bases for

deconstructing the widest range of intellectual disciplines" (p. 330). This is

Rorty's approach. He believes all disciplinary orientations are compromised by

ideology, and none are worthy of our commitment. Reconstructive

postmodernists, on the other hand, look for the hidden ideological agenda in

disciplinary perspectives, so the disciplines can be reconstructed in a way that

makes them "truer to life" (p. 330). Taylor is a reconstructionist.

How to decide between them? Kegan argues for reconstructive

postmodernism, on the grounds it provides more protection from dominating,

ideological absolutes. He echoes Taylor's critique of Rorty, that to assume all

universals and generalizations are absolutistic in advance of any contact with

them is to *be* absolutistic. His own theory, he claims, is not absolutistic. Despite

it deprioritizing "those procedures, theories, and stands that are not self-

conscious about their own tendency toward absolutism" (p. 330), and even though it generalizes, judges, universalizes, and prioritizes, it is an ally of postmodernism, explaining and providing a method by which postmodern sensibilities can be nurtured and sustained.

Reconstructive postmodernism has pedagogical value insofar as it furthers the development of new and innovative approaches to knowledge and knowledge creation but, Kegan argues, lessening our identification with ideology, personal authority and self-control can be risky. Introducing students to a 'beyond ideology' position at a time when they are still searching for ideology can result in 'beyond ideology' being interpreted as an ideology of anti-ideology, or nihilism. As Kegan notes, "before people can question the assumptions of wholeness, completeness, and the priority of the self, they must first construct a whole, complete and prior self" (p. 351). A post-ideological (fifth order) self must follow from and grow out of an ideological (fourth order) one, if psychic integrity is to be maintained.

Unfortunately "there is no order of consciousness that holds less charm for us than the one we have only recently moved beyond" (p. 292). Postmodern professors are in an awkward position. Either they teach what no longer interests them (i.e. fourth order consciousness), or they teach only those "whole and complete selves" ready to explore their own incompleteness. As the demands of Western society are still primarily modern, rather than postmodern,

the motivation for students to develop fifth order consciousness is minimal and postmodern professors have little opportunity to teach what they know.

In conclusion, the more complex, and hence the more pedagogically desirable, form of consciousness is that which is "able to understand the other's position on the other's own terms" (p. 334). The capacity to empathize and provide support for the transition from one form of consciousness to another is what characterizes the destination as more complex. This is similar, but not identical, to Taylor's best account principle. In Kegan's model, whenever we transition to a more complex, and hence more pedagogically desirable, way of knowing, we retain a sympathy and empathy for prior stages, and an ability to help others transition to our new form of consciousness.

4.10 Hierarchy and Metaphor

Kegan follows in the tradition of Piaget and Kohlberg, and as such is vulnerable to the charges leveled at these other stage theorists (Kohlberg, et al., 1983). The most celebrated critique is Carol Gilligan's *In A Different Voice* (1993) which questioned the value of separation and male bias in Kohlberg's formulation. On the surface a similar bias toward autonomy and separation exists in Kegan's work - we are encouraged to distance ourselves from our natural responses, to "have" what previously "had" us. But, Kegan claims, "the self-authorizing capacity to 'decide for myself' does not implicate the stylistic preference to 'decide by myself'" (p. 219). 'Autonomy' does not imply

'separateness' or 'independence'; 'embeddedness' does not imply 'connected' or 'relational'. The stylistic differences of Gilligan's formulation are not the same as Kegan's structural differences. Moreover, implicit in Gilligan's demand that we see others as equal but different - to respect stylistic difference - is a demand for a certain type of consciousness - the very subject of Kegan's model. Respect for difference is not a discrete skill. It requires

> a mind that can stand enough apart from its own opinions, values,
> rules and definitions to avoid being completely identified with them.
> It is able to keep from feeling that the whole self has been violated
> when its opinions, values, rules or definitions are challenged. (p.
> 231)

Only by "having" our natural responses rather than "being had" by them can our reactions become "mediate" rather than "immediate" (p. 231). It is fourth order consciousness that allows us to accept and accommodate difference. Hence the normative, universalizing, and judgmental bias of subject-object psychology is justified as it enables us to be non-normative, non-universalizing and non-judgmental in other areas of our lives (p. 230).

This is no doubt true - but there is more to Kegan than this. For in outlining his model, and justifying it scientifically, he is implicitly classifying people by their stage of development. Not only is this politically suspect, despite his

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stated "impulse to throw a sympathetic arm of disciplined friendliness across the burdened shoulders of contemporary culture" (p. 3) but it is overly reductive. The autonomy of 4th order consciousness, for example, where we choose our faith rather than have our faith choose us, runs counter to religious or spiritual conceptions in which to choose God, rather than have Him choose you, is already to have distanced yourself from God. While from a societal point of view 4th order consciousness is pragmatically justified, for those whose faith remains more important than their culture Kegan's developmental options are limiting. Kegan's model provides one developmental possibility, and presents this as authoritative. He over-simplifies the inherent possibilities of the human mind with a strict account of what development is.

Blasi (1998) makes a similar observation. Kegan's model, he claims, unites the cognitive, social, motivational and emotional strands of development in a single theory. But in so doing it denies the central complexity of human personality, which "does not function according to the harmonious totality such a theory would have to postulate" (p. 20). Kegan's model, he suggests, would avoid oversimplification if it claimed metaphoric, rather than literal, validity. Re-interpreting subject-object theory as metaphor also avoids the potential for abuse implicit in a hierarchy of mental development, without diminishing its effectiveness as a tool for interpreting self and society.

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Chapter V: Conclusion

In the previous chapters I outlined three conceptions of the self and sublime, originating in post-analytic philosophy, historical phenomenology and developmental-constructive psychology respectively. The key features are summarized below:

Table 5.1: Rorty, Taylor and Kegan compared

	Rorty	**Taylor**	**Kegan**
Self is ...	Self-created	Co-created	Co-created
Truth is ...	Non-Real	Real	Real
Relation to others is ...	Pragmatic	Transcendental	Co-evolutionary
Philosophical orientation is ...	Postmodern	Post-epistemological	Empirically postmodern
Disciplines should be ...	Deconstructed	Reconstructed	Reconstructed
Primary value is ...	Freedom/Growth/Power	Unconditional love	Freedom/Growth/Success

These approaches share common themes and overlap in interesting and complex ways. While Kegan and Taylor are united in their emphasis on realism and reconstructionism, Kegan and Rorty share a focus on autonomy and pragmatism. Some of these differences may be superficial. Kegan's primary value of freedom, growth and success, for instance, may be in the service of Taylor's primary value, a greater capacity for love. What is clear, though, is the depth of argument over whether there is or is not a truth of the matter, whether we are better off with a realist or non-realist account of truth. The answer to this

will determine whether we take a reconstructivist or deconstructivist approach to education. In conclusion I will explore realism and non-realism in more detail, drawing on Peter Levine's *Nietzsche and the modern crisis of the humanities*, before making some suggestions for the practice of moral education based on this approach.

5.1 Revisiting Nietzsche

Levine's stated aim is to defend the humanities against conservatives such as Allan Bloom, and deconstructionists such as Jacques Derrida. To do so he re-engages with Nietzsche, because "Allan Bloom, wrong about so much else, is right to claim that practically all contemporary thinkers who argue about the fundamental value and meaning of the humanities derive their problems and paradigms from Nietzsche" (p. xiii). Levine claims Nietzsche based his relativism on an oversimplified notion of culture. By reexamining Nietzsche's conception of culture he casts doubt on the inevitability of relativism and its consequences.

Levine isolates five stages in Nietzsche's thought. The first is an acknowledgement of historicity; that values and beliefs exist within a given time and place. The second applies this to whole cultures; ideas and values underlie cultures and determine the course of human life within those cultures. Levine calls this *Weltanschauung*-historicism. The third stage, relativism, recognizes ideas are only true or good within a given culture or *Weltanschauung*. The fourth

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turns relativism on itself, recognizing even relativism is relative. And the fifth stage moves beyond nihilism to find meaning in creativity and philosophy.

Rorty has clearly borrowed much from Nietzsche. Both see relativism and nihilism as a necessary stopgap on the road to creative freedom. And both take relativism as the inevitable by-product of a historical account of culture and scientific progress. But Levine questions this view of culture as a closed system or *Weltanschauung*. He claims cultures are not "isolated, delimited entities with clear boundaries" (p. xix). They

> merely represent useful categories within which to place people
> who share some element of background that happens to be of
> interest; but these categories can be defined in numerous ways. In
> fact, almost any two people could be described as belonging to
> different cultures if the cultures were defined appropriately. (pp. xix-
> xx)

The inverse is also true - any two people can belong to the same culture if that culture is appropriately defined. So while I may be white, male, and Canadian I am also British, a musician, a dog owner, a student, a brother, a son and a host of other things, all of which carry their own cultural baggage. In other words, "no single cultural category has a definitive role in determining human lives and thought; we result rather from the interplay of many cultural categories" (p. xx).

Given this complexity of identity construction, cross-cultural communication is required even when we communicate with those who are closest to us.

5.2 Modernism vs. Postmodernism

The idea that our identity is constructed along core, large-scale cultural axes such as nation, class or language group constitutes the essence of the modernist paradigm.

**Figure 5.1: Levine's representation of the modernist paradigm (p. 188)**
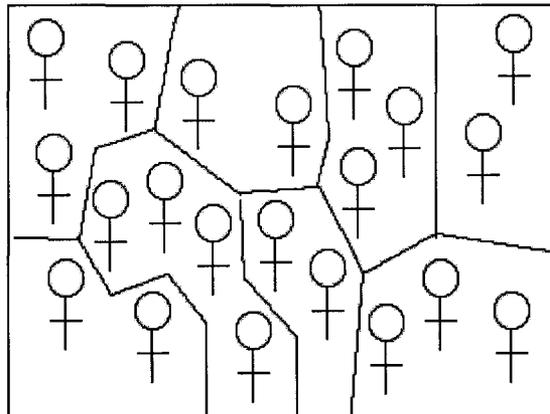
In the diagram above each person exists within a delimited culture, separated by a barrier to communication. While people within a given culture communicate easily and respectfully, people from different cultures i.e. those who differ with respect to language, social class, gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality, engage in a fundamentally different order of communication.

A deconstructive postmodernist such as Rorty revolts against any cultural categorization. He attempts to move right off the map. He "enters an extracultural, Dionysian state of intoxication and creativity where he can at last be active and authentic" (p. 188). But this is "merely a moment of renunciation, a declaration of revolt, a recognition of modernity's contradictions, beyond which nothing comprehensible lies" (p. 188). It doesn't represent a truly postmodern position. By re-examining the assumptions on which modernism rests, resolving the contradictions rather than escaping them, we enter a genuinely postmodern paradigm that emphasizes not only diversity across cultures but diversity within cultures.

The diagram below represents such a reconstructed, postmodern position:

Figure 5.2: Levine's representation of a postmodern paradigm (p. 189)
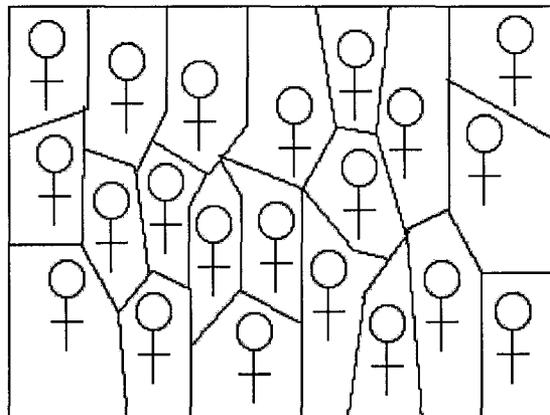
In this model we are distinct individuals, cultures unto ourselves. In contrast to the modernist paradigm, which assumes a limited number of core axes, the postmodern paradigm accepts each of us is "shaped by everything we know,

hear, read and see, to the point at which no two people have identical influences" (p. 189). Linda Nicholson, for instance, is both a privileged, White European and a woman oppressed by patriarchal culture. Only by highlighting one or another of these aspects does she fit neatly into the modernist paradigm. The postmodern paradigm, in contrast, allows her to be all that she is, and to communicate with others as all that they are. Even in cases where there are no shared, cultural reference points between two people, there are likely to be third parties who can bridge the gap. "What is alien in any person's background (my next door neighbor's or an ancient Greek's) can gradually be understood by building on commonalities" (p. 191). No presumption of value is required - merely a sensitivity to commonality, and an ability to expand on commonality.

5.3 The Will to Positive Description

From this we can derive a focus for moral education. A postmodern moral education should develop 1) a sufficiently broad knowledge base such that an initial commonality can be found with almost anyone and 2) the ability to expand on commonality. Yet this leaves a core question unanswered - are we morally obligated to build on commonality, and if so, under what circumstances?

This is where the three perspectives outlined in the preceding chapters interact in interesting ways.

Table 5.2: Rorty, Taylor and Kegan's responses to the question, 'Why build on commonality?'

a) Rorty	b) Taylor	c) Kegan
To further human growth and freedom	To bring us closer to the divine	To better understand ourselves

While the above responses differ in content, they nurture a common product - a greater capacity for unconditional love, resulting from a) the ability to redescribe self and other, b) a belief in a transcendent God and c) an awareness of our essential oneness.

Let's take scenario a) in which unconditional love is a result of our capacity to redescribe others and ourselves. On this view, my feelings of love or hate are based on my descriptions. If, for instance, I describe myself as someone who hates fascists, and I describe Hitler as a fascist, it follows that I hate Hitler. If one of these two descriptions changes - if I redescribe myself as someone who loves fascists, or I redescribe Hitler as someone with a strong and inspiring political vision, my feelings change. Given Rorty's non-realism, no description is any truer than any other and I can, to a considerable extent, choose my emotional response, either by redescribing myself or redescribing the situation.

This capacity to retain a relationship of love toward others through redescription only breaks down when we grant descriptions or emotional responses ontological validity - when we move from non-realism to realism. When, for instance, I claim Hitler is definitively a fascist and I definitively hate

fascists, and this is not dependent on my description or interpretation but represents an ontological truth, unconditional love is no longer possible.

In scenario b), Taylor's analysis, realism is a fact of life and redescription without respect for truth is a way of obscuring reality to better suit our needs. When we lose our capacity for unconditional love, we must turn to God, who alone can reassure us of His cosmic plan. Rediscovering our faith in a basic human purpose, God redeems us of our shortsightedness and restores our love for others. But He does so by offering a redescription of the world. God allows us to redescribe evil as ignorance, for instance, when he asks us to "forgive them, for they know not what they do". There is, then, no fundamental difference between religious redescriptions and any other form of redescription. To argue against religious redescriptions, as Rorty does, is to limit the descriptive possibilities available to us - but to suggest these are the only descriptions that allow us to love unconditionally, as Taylor does, is to underestimate the power of non-religious descriptions.

In scenario c), our capacity for unconditional love depends on our seeing others as parts of ourselves. When I hate Hitler, I hate that part of myself Hitler represents. Assuming I am motivated to love myself, I am also motivated to love Hitler. This may include understanding him differently (redescribing him), changing him, or changing my relationship to him. 'Changing him' is a necessary consequence of Kegan's commitment to realism. No matter how sophisticated

my redescription skills become, if no descriptions of Hitler are both accurate and positive, and I can not change my relationship to him, I must change him, if I am to love myself. This in turn raises the question, When have all legitimate redescriptions run dry? If for instance, we make every possible attempt to interpret Hitler in a positive light, yet still find him hateful and dangerous, does this justify changing him? And if so, what limits apply?

This re-introduces traditional moral questions such as 'When is violence justified?' and 'What are basic human rights?' But it is important to recognize these follow from our having reached the limits of our descriptive abilities. Only when we have exhausted all legitimate descriptions should we turn to traditional morality as a guide to right action.

Moral education should thus first and foremost develop a 'will to positive description'. By equipping students with a range of descriptive tools, they will enter the self-reinforcing cycle presented below. The ability to describe in positive terms and be described in positive terms represent two sides of the same coin. The more capable I am of creating positive descriptions, the more I am able to describe others and myself in positive terms. A cycle develops, in which I at once learn to love and be loveable.

Figure 5.3: The self-reinforcing cycle of positive description

Will to positive
description

motivates

enables

Positive
descriptions of
self and others
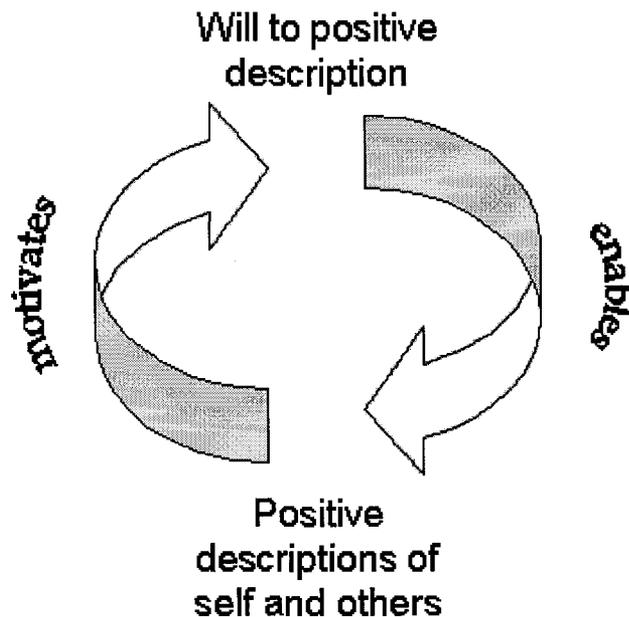
5.4 The Affirmative Self and the Unconditional Sublime

I began this thesis with a discussion of Hirsch's cultural literacy and

Bloom's cultural narratives. I introduced the term 'sublime' to refer to the multiple

contexts that confer power and authority on narratives. In the subsequent

chapters I discussed three conceptions of the self and sublime and concluded by

identifying a common product of these conceptions - a greater capacity for

unconditional love. From this I derived a focus for moral education based on a

'will to positive description'.

If we present this visually, we can see how Rorty, Taylor and Kegan

respond to disrupted meaning-making.

Figure 5.4: Narrative disruptions
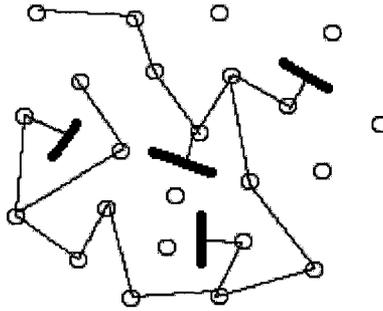
In the diagram above, meaning-making has been disrupted on four occasions. In Rorty's account these disruptions are the result of an outdated commitment to truth - we should be free to make whatever meaning we choose to make. In Taylor's account certain disruptions are necessary to respect reality, while others are an unfortunate consequence of a cultural over-emphasis on rationality at the expense of intuition. Kegan's account sees disruptions, when not in the service of truth, as an unnecessary byproduct of a limited understanding of the complexities of human mental development. A commitment to positive description recognizes meaning-making as integral to personal and cultural development, and avoids unnecessary disruptions by affirming multiple conceptions of self and multiple authoritative contexts (cf. Bruner, 1996, pp. 66-70; Ghosh, 1996, p. 33).

If we go back to the sexuality education example in Chapter 1, the ability to positively describe both abstinence and safe sex approaches is now seen as more pedagogically desirable than clarifying allegiance to one or other perspective (cf. Halstead, 1996, pp. 6-11). We only understand a position when

we see how it appears rational, when we understand why someone "felt entitled to put forward (as true) certain assertions, to recognize (as right) certain values and norms, and to express (as sincere) certain experiences" (Habermas, 1983, p. 259). Once we comprehend the sublime context that confers meaning and value on a position, we cannot help but describe it in positive terms, even if we disagree with it.

Future studies would address how a 'will to positive description' might be nurtured in educational settings (cf. Simons, 1994). What narratives, if any, support this emotional disposition (cf. Callan, 1988)? What role do the arts play in fostering creative, positive descriptions (cf. Bailin, 1993)? What distinguishes a 'deep' positive description from a 'shallow' or sentimental one (cf. Swanger, 1990)? And what limits apply when positively describing our selves and others (cf. the complete history of Western moral philosophy)? The original contribution of this thesis lies not in answering these questions, but in articulating, through description, re-description and diagrammatic representation, some of the many and diverse challenges facing educators, and particularly values educators, in postmodern times.

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