ALTERNATIVE POSTMODERN PERSPECTIVES

OF HIGHER EDUCATION

by

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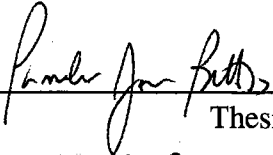Pittsburg, Kansas
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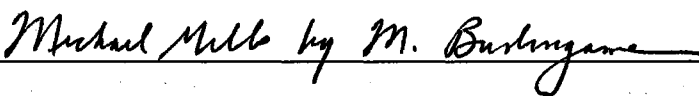
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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

A Personal Essay

My interest and initial exposure to postmodernism and subsequent interest in

Richard Rorty came about as a result of my wife's study of literary criticism in her

doctoral program in English at the University of Kansas. At that time, although my

interest was piqued by strange new ideas, like deconstruction and metanarratives, and

exotic names like Derrida and Foucault, all my energies and efforts were consumed by

my struggles not to become a victim of the political wars of Kansas City. My interests

lay dormant for a number of years until I left my position as the City's Grants

Administrator, assumed a position with an Oklahoma regional university, and enrolled

in a doctoral program in higher education at Oklahoma State University (OSU).

When I entered the program, I already held graduate degrees in history and

political science (public administration) with minor concentrations in philosophy and

economics. My academic background, combined with my current studies, reflected and

reinforced not only my longstanding interest in politics, social studies and the

humanities, but also a life-long commitment to, and belief in, the virtues of traditional

Western liberalism, secular humanism, and the emancipating power of education. My

academic training reinforced the values instilled in me by a family that included an

elector for FDR, people who walked picket lines with Walter Reuther, activists in both

the Knights of Labor and the UMW, and individuals who had a history of voting for

Eugene V. Debbs.

Although I remained centered in my history, my long-dormant interest in

postmodernism, a philosophy that basically debunked humanist ideology, rekindled as I

plunged into my graduate studies at OSU. Along with my regular class work, through

two directed reading courses and informal independent study and reading, I pursued my

ever-growing personal interests in postmodernism. As my knowledge expanded, I

attempted to relate what I was learning outside of the classroom to the material and

information presented by my professors and to my observations as a working mid-level

university administrator. I struggled to reconcile and position the new ideas that I

experienced--ideas that on the surface repudiated many of my oldest and most cherished

beliefs--in the context of my culture and personal history. The reward for my efforts

was ever-increasing dissonance. I found many of the ideas most closely associated with

postmodernism refreshing in their clarity and originality, but also very troubling. While

Jean-François Lyotard, and others, rejected the hierarchy and exclusionary practices

which I had questioned, he also suggested I adopt an incredulity toward metanarratives,

toward the very basis of my family's religious and political beliefs. They reflected

fears, concerns and suspicions that I had long felt, but that I had been unable to put into

words. Raised in the Catholic tradition, I knew the value and comfort of community,

and I longed to believe in something that embodied the ideal of ultimate truth. As a

college freshman, I fell under the sway of Camus and Sartre. They made me aware of

the profound loneliness of the isolated individual, of the angst that comes from staring

into the abyss and seeing nothing. For years I had lived with the dissonance that was

the necessary result of attempting to reconcile these two seemingly irreconcilable

claims--the ideal of community versus the reality of isolation.

In class I encountered a wide variety of views, ranging from traditional

positivism to critical and feminist theory. I enjoyed exposure to a variety of favored and

ideologically diverse methodologies, along with new ideas and interesting information.

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In the beginning, one of the most interesting aspects of my studies was their apparent diversity. But, although slow in coming, a central and unifying awareness began to emerge from the composite of my experiences--the near-total absence of any postmodern presence or overt influence. This discovery accompanied my growing perception of the magnitude of the privilege enjoyed by modernism within the Academy.

As I progressed through my program of study, and my interest in postmodernism and the modern/postmodern debate grew, I began to casually, and then more systematically, review the academic literature of higher education for postmodern texts or influences. My inquiry led me not to a body of postmodern literature produced by scholars about higher education, but to a growing awareness of its absence. The influence of postmodernism on the society as a whole and on major segments of the Academy, particularly the humanities and social studies, made this discovery all the more startling. My growing awareness of this absence of a major postmodern presence in the study of higher education combines with the dissonance between my historical beliefs and my contemporary awareness to offer the primary motivation for the topic(s), methodology and form that I propose for my dissertation.

Postmodern ideas deserve the attention they garner for two reasons. In addition to posing an alternative to the basic tenets of modernism and the beliefs of the Enlightenment on which they are built, postmodernism also provides a view of current and future life in the advanced capitalist nations of the West. One of the most modern of Western institutions, and one whose future in a postmodern world remains most precarious, is higher education. In his seminal work, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge (1984), Lyotard proclaims both the death of the professor and the end of liberal university education as it currently exists. He bases his judgement on a

belief in the widespread loss of popular faith in the modernist metanarratives combined with the transformative effects of advanced information and computer technology. The implications of Lyotard's words for the future of higher education are numerous and far-reaching.

In addition, postmodernism questions Enlightenment concepts like reason, progress, emancipation and agency, and thus the philosophical basis and even the possibility of traditional political actions, specifically those directed at leftist revolutionary change or liberal reform. As a result, many alternative theorists, particularly critical theorists and feminists, attack postmodernism and postmodernists as neoconservative. The hostility that developed between some postmodernists and other alternative theorists represents an ironic potential barrier that will prevent the modern university from making the changes necessary to successfully adapt to, and exist within, a postmodern future. Although members of both groups disparage many aspects of advanced capitalist culture and challenge the privileged position of positivism, rationality and science, both within the Academy and in the greater society, they waste much of their energy attacking and defending attacks from people who should be potential allies in their attempts to preserve and protect the liberal university.

Postmodern thought is most popularly conceived as being Continental, specifically French, but the United States produced its own permutation of postmodernism and one of the world's most influential and widely respected postmodern thinkers, Richard Rorty. Rorty draws heavily from John Dewey's ideas to fashion a uniquely American pragmatic postmodernism. His writings both directly and indirectly address education in a postmodern America. However, as opposed to Lyotard's postmodern university which abandons liberal arts and general studies as it evolves into a mechanically-dominated technical institute, Rorty bases his university on

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a revitalized and strengthened interdisciplinary liberal arts curriculum. Although not relying on master narratives grounded in an intimate knowledge of first principles, Rorty staunchly defends democracy and democratic institutions that strive to establish a philosophical basis for both collective and individual political actions.

Before moving on, I would like to say that I matured believing in such modernist ideas as humanity, emancipation, liberation, freedom, Truth, justice, and perhaps most importantly, the ability of education, particularly higher education, to transform all these lofty ideas into reality. My parents and grandparents believed and taught me to believe that education would protect their children from the abuse, humiliation and exploitation that filled their lives.

I make these comments to confirm early on the basis and nature of my interests in higher education and this project, and to establish that I do not consider myself a postmodernist, a modernist or a premodernist. I disagree with aspects of each, some for logical and rational reasons; others I find emotionally unacceptable. However, I also believe that each of the three perspectives has something worthwhile and useful to say, if we are willing to listen.

I feel no obligation or need to strive for internal consistence, i.e., ideological orthodoxy. In fact, my goal is inconsistency, i.e., to be eclectic. I strive to glean from each perspective useful and relevant information, and then, in the following narrative, to apply what I have gathered to American higher education.

Questions Considered

I propose to describe the current status of American higher education and to consider various suggestions that will facilitate its adaptation to, and survival in, an evolving postmodern future. This process involves a consideration of postmodernism as articulated by Richard Rorty, or what I refer to as pragmatic postmodernism

throughout this discussion. The discussion focuses particular attention on Rorty's assessment and description of higher education. In an attempt to gain a better understanding of Rorty's writings and their implication for American higher education, I also consider the views of the French postmodernist Jean-François Lyotard and, to a lesser extent, the French existentialist, Albert Camus. Specifically, the views of Lyotard I compare and contrast to those of Rorty, in an attempt to identify points of both convergence and divergence as they relate to postmodernism and higher education. I selected and consider these men because they offer different perspectives from that of modernist positivism, or "traditional theory," that has long held a privileged position within the Academy. An exploration of philosophical and political alternatives that will preserve the emancipatory power of liberal American education within a postmodern environment acts as the objective of this dissertation.

As with all human endeavors, this dissertation finds basis in a number of hopefully well-grounded assumptions presented and discussed at various points throughout. Primary among these assumptions is that, although the forces of "performativity" and vocationalism have made serious inroads, the American university remains an essentially modern institution, one that internalizes and reproduces the modernist metanarrative. An additional assumption builds on this idea: while the contemporary American university remains rooted in the Enlightenment, contemporary American culture continues an evolution from the era of liberal modernism through the late stages of consumer capitalism into the technologically-driven postmodern era. Popular nostalgia for the feeling of security that came with unquestioned accepted traditional modernist metanarratives is incompatible with academia's detached pursuit of romantic seventeenth-century ideals and objective scientifically-legitimated Truths. These assumptions support the conclusion that American higher education has lost faith

with, and no longer reflects, the interests and beliefs, or satisfies the desires and needs, of the society from which it derives both its essential sustenance and justification. In other words, while contemporary American culture evolves from the era of the modern into the era of the postmodern, the contemporary American university, through either its failure or inability to adapt to this rapidly evolving environment, continues to embrace and act on beliefs rooted in the traditional modernist metanarrative. Assumptions of this type have led postmodern thinkers like Lyotard to proclaim the death of the professor, in much the same way that Nietzsche proclaimed the death of God, and to cast doubt on the viability and relevance of the contemporary liberal university.

The Decline of the Modern American University

The deteriorating status and decreasing level of public support for American higher education, combined with the declining value the economy places on liberal education, reflects both the accuracy of Lyotard's vision and the resultant need for the Academy to reassess its role and function. One requires no great insight or special knowledge to recognize that the perception of the American university held by both the general public and their political leaders suffers rapid deterioration. The withdrawal of financial support offers the most obvious and tangible manifestation of the erosion of popular and political patronage. The U.S. Department of Education's National Center for Educational Statistics collects information and computes a "National Index of Public Effort to Fund Education," which describes the level of public support for education. Specifically, the index represents revenue raised for the education of students relative to the income of taxpayers adjusted for the number of students and number of people in the population. The index can be interpreted as the number of dollars of revenue raised for each student from each 100 dollars of income received by each member of the

TABLE A: National Index of Public Effort by Level Selected School Years 1930-93				
	National Index		Public Revenue Per Student	
School Year	Elementary/ Secondary	Higher Education	Elementary/ Secondary	Higher Education
1930	10.6	22.5	$639*	$1,352
1940	14.6	26.0	856	1,524
1950	13.9	32.0	1,196	2,762
1960	16.2	31.6	1,823	3,557
1966	**18.2**	**33.9**	2,433	4,545
1970	20.0	30.9	3,095	4,765
1972	22.3	30.1	3,516	4,744
1974	21.2	28.0	3,675	4,487
1976	22.9	27.7	3,827	4,615
1978	22.2	26.7	3,961	4,745
1980	21.5	24.8	3,970	4,583
1982	21.2	22.7	3,817	4,092
1984	22.5	22.9	4,087	4,174
1986	23.1	24.4	4,522	4,780
1988	23.4	23.7	4,775	4,856
1990	25.0	22.8	5,290	4,835
1992	25.5	21.8	5,329	4,556
1993	25.3	---	5,379	---

*Actual expenditures are all constant 1994 dollars, using the Consumer Price Index
Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Statistics, The Condition of Education 1995 (p. 148).

population[1] (National Center, 1995, p. 145). As the data in the preceding table indicates, public financial support for higher education rose steadily from 1930 through 1966. However, in the mid-1960s an ongoing erosion began which, by 1992, brought public financial support for higher education to its lowest level since the Great Depression.

Faculty salaries also indicate waning public support for higher education. In a capitalist society the ultimate determinant of a worker's perceived worth is her/his rate of pay. The Southern Regional Educational Board (SREB)[2] reports that over the past twenty years, "faculty salaries in public four-year colleges and universities have fallen almost 3 percent when adjusted for inflation, while inflation-adjusted median family income has increased almost 10 percent," reflecting a total discrepancy of 13 points (SREB, 1995, p. 105).

Information compiled by the American Association of University Professors (AAUP) supports the findings of the SREB about declining real faculty salaries (inflation adjusted) and further indicates that the trend continues. Based on information about 1,800 institutions compiled by the AAUP and reported by The Chronicle of Higher Education, the average adjusted salary for faculty of all ranks decreased by 0.3% in the 1996-97 school year (Chronicle, Internet).

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[1] The Index is derived by dividing revenues per student (a measure of average financial resources available for the education of each student) by the personal income per capita (a measure for the taxpayer's average ability to pay).

[2] The SREB region consists of the following states: Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and West Virginia.

As important as the level of faculty salaries is the relationship between salaries and "Selected Fields," i.e., how universities and colleges choose to allocate their dwindling resources among faculty in different areas of study--who gets what?

TABLE B: Average Faculty Salaries by Rank in Selected Fields at 4-Year Public Institutions 1993-94					
	All Ranks	Professor	Asso. Prof.	Asst. Prof.	Instructor
Engineering	(1) $57,396	(3) $53,805	$53,805	$46,007	$ 33,212
Accounting	(2) $54,293	(1) $57,396	$55,131	$49,557	$ 30,838
Marketing	(3) $53,842	(5) $53,430	$52,822	$48,727	$ 30,833
Business Mgmt.	(4) $53,430	(6) $53,185	$52,823	$48,326	$ 41,402
Business Admin.	(5) $53,185	(9) $51,370	$52,236	$48,309	$ 29,969
Economics	(6) $52,030	(4) $53,842	$49,145	$42,816	$ 31,010
Physics	(7) $51,959	(7) $ 52,030	$46,391	$37,717	$ 27,455
Computer	(8) $51,370	(2) $54,293	$51,588	$45,093	$ 30,563
Chemistry	(9) $48,699	(11) $45,602	$43,410	$35,661	$ 28,119
History	(10) $46,373	(13) $43,232	$43,232	$33,484	$ 27,485
Mathematics	(11) $45,602	(8) $51,959	$44,891	$36,084	$ 26,225
Sociology	(12) $44,632	(16) $42,732	$34,368	$28,542	$ 28,542
Education	(13) $42,870	(12) $44,632	$42,473	$35,136	$ 27,427
Special Ed.	(14) $42,850	(17) $42,000	$42,042	$34,925	$ 27,200
Foreign Lang.	(15) $42,332	(10) $48,699	$42,228	$33,312	$ 24,234
Music	(16) $42,000	(20) $38,334	$40,692	$32,558	$ 27,205
English	(17) $41,397	(14) $42,870	$42,228	$33,312	$ 24,234
Teacher Ed.	(18) $41,241	(15) $42,850	$41,642	$35,202	$ 27,288
Visual/Perf. Arts	(19) $41,152	(19) $41,241	$40,033	$33,108	$ 25,848
Nursing	(20) $38,334	(18) $41,397	$42,929	$35,548	$ 30,526

Source: The Almanac of Higher Education 1995 (pp. 56-57).

The information contained in Table B reflects the hierarchy, i.e., the location of power and privilege that exists within the American university. This study ranks fields in descending order based on the highest average salaries for all faculty within a field. Faculty in the various fields of business, the biological and physical sciences and related fields such as engineering and computer science receive the highest salaries, and, we may assume, the greatest degree of privilege. Conversely, faculty in the arts and humanities, education and the social sciences receive the lowest pay, and we may assume, the most marginalization. Nursing proves the one exception to this generalization.

This information indicates that due to shifting funding patterns, higher education is pulled into a growing partnership with business and dependency on public grants that support technological development and, by effect, marginalize the liberal arts. These changes force a confrontation between the university's modern ideals and the postmodernist reality evident in the culture the university serves.

The same hierarchy emerges in a comparison of the median salaries of academic Deans. The least valued Deans appear in the liberal arts. Comparatively, the most valued Deans appear in the most technical/scientific areas and professions. A traditional response made to such an observation might be, "salaries reflect market demand, not a pattern of structural discrimination." "Of course," would be an appropriate response to such a comment. In a society dominated by consumerism in which the price things bring determine their value, who would expect an academically trained musician to be as privileged as a physician for humans; an artist as a lawyer; or a teacher of humans as a physician for animals? Another question that merits consideration is, "why are educational administrators so much more highly valued than faculty?"

TABLE C: Median Salaries of Educational Administrators, 1993-94					
Dean	Doctoral Institutions	All Institutions	Dean	Doctoral Institutions	All Institutions
Medicine	$190,000	$186,500	Architecture	$100,194	$96,750
Dentistry	$144,652	$130,000	Humanities	$95,314	$81,756
Law	$139,775	$133,368	Education	$95,301	$74,614
Public Health	$137,000	$130,000	Home Econ.	$95,183	$68,600
Engineering	$122,381	$99,989	Fine Arts	$93,410	$69,714
Vet. Medicine	$120,950	$119,661	Libraries	$91,800	$73,168
Business	$117,210	$76,400	Music	$83,639	$59,314

Source: The Almanac of Higher Education 1995, The Chronicle of Higher Education, pp. 50-51.

Institutional revenue and faculty salaries are not the only areas of concern confronting the contemporary university. The Academy, experiencing ever-growing pressure to vocationalize, has become the hand maiden of business under the guise of economic development. While universities increasingly train to employer-dictated competencies, the value that society places on traditional higher education, particularly the liberal arts, continues its decline. Table D below illustrates the comparative market value of non-technical/non-professional degrees in the contemporary American work place. An article in a recent issue of The Chronicle of Higher Education (Gross, 1997) that describes 500 underemployed and unemployed Ph.D.'s attending community colleges in Virginia in pursuit of technical training, effectively illustrates the continuing marginalization of traditional liberal education and the comparative privileging of vocational/technical training.

Ideally, the American university serves the needs of the society. In return, the society sustains the university. However, as we have seen, both popular satisfaction with the services provided by American higher education and the level of popular

TABLE D: Department of Labor Market Outcomes of Full-Time Employed Bachelor Degree Recipient by Occupation				
Occupation	Average Annual Earnings	Average Age	% With Graduate Degrees	Percentage Female
Physicians	$121,120	44	100	16
Lawyers and Judges	$71,223	41	94	17
Private-Sector Executives & Managers	$56,044	41	33	26
Engineers	$48,408	41	32	8
Postsecondary Teachers	$47,867	45	90	29
Educational Administrators	$44,130	49	79	57
Sales Representatives	$39,872	42	10	23
Scientists	$39,320	36	43	21
All Bachelor's Degree Recipient	**$38,530**	**40**	**35**	**38**
Accountants and Auditors	$38,463	37	28	38
Registered Nurses	$33,981	38	16	88
Sales Supervisors & Proprietors	$32,720	41	21	20
Writers & Artists	$29,507	39	33	47
Social Workers	$26,739	40	38	60
Teacher	$25,983	42	48	71

Source: U.S. Department of Education, Office of Educational Research and Improvement, National Center for Statistics, The Condition of Education 1995 (p. 160).

support have declined over the past several years. This condition results from the university's unwillingness or inability to recognize and adapt to major changes that have and are taking place in both its internal and external environment. The university can continue to function as an authoritative (premodern), liberating (modern) and/or defining/redefining (postmodern) member of the greater American community, only if it recognizes that American society has undergone, and continues to undergo, fundamental

changes that alter its values, perceptions, expectations and needs. The university must further recognize that its students, to an overwhelming extent, are products of that society, and, thus, have radically changing needs and expectations. Then the university community must decide how it can adapt to the changes and satisfy the new needs and expectations coming from both within and without, and still maintain integrity.

Handmaidens of Business: The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education

While various elements in the external environment seriously question the viability and utility of traditional higher learning, many university leaders, both administrative and faculty, attempt to impose a corporate model on their institution that privileges vocationalism and commercialism. In an attempt to curry political favor, and to access both public and private funding, educational policy makers and administrators enthusiastically enter into partnerships with commercial and governmental interests that seek to convert the university into an instrument of economic development. This phenomena, frequently and authoritatively chronicled by Clark Kerr, manifests itself in actions of bodies like the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education (OSRHE).

In 1991 the OSRHE published a piece of marketing literature. This document merits comment only because it illustrates the Regents' vision, a vision shared by many politicians, educational policy makers and administrators, along with their desire to, and success at, imposing the corporate business model on the colleges and universities subject to their jurisdiction. Under the heading "Oklahoma Higher Education: One of the State's Best Returns on its Investment," the Regents present what they call "A Consolidated Economic Impact Statement for the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education." The following outlines the content of that Statement:

I.   "Stimulating Economic Growth"

II.   "Providing Life-Long Dividends"

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A. "Higher Quality of Living": The Regents define quality of life exclusively in terms of employment and earning power.

B. "Increased Lifetime Returns": As a result of increased earnings, individuals who hold college degrees will pay $1.3 billion more in state tax over their lifetimes than they would have if they did not hold degrees. According to the Regents, the additional tax revenue translates into an annual return on investment (ROI) of 8-10 per cent.

C. "Workforce Preparation": "Oklahoma higher education makes its most important contribution to the state's economic development by providing Oklahoma with a well-educated work force"

III. "Producing Jobs for Oklahoma"

A. "Revenue Sources: . . . Sources of Current Operating Revenue"

B. "Oklahoma Jobs": This section deals with the jobs directly produced by higher education, i.e., people directly employed by public institutions of higher education

C. "Income for Oklahoma: . . . Income Generated by Oklahoma Higher Education"

   1. "Operating Impact": Monies spent by the State's colleges and universities, and their employees and students

   2. "Visitor Impact"

   3. Capital Impact

IV. "Oklahoma Taxes: In FY 93, Oklahoma higher education and its associated employees, students and visitors generated an estimated $109.1 million dollars" in state income tax, sales tax, excise tax, including motor vehicle tax, gasoline excises and alcoholic beverage and tobacco taxes.

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Although the specific content of the Regents' publication is irrelevant and tedious, as a public expression of the belief of the State's chief policy-making body for higher education, the document offers extreme relevance. First, the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education have chosen to speak the specialized language of the corporate boardroom, i.e., the language of Wall Street. Second, Oklahoma Regents so value a high return on investment, that they publicly celebrate the money generated by their students' consumption of "alcoholic beverages and tobacco."

Lyotard's prediction and Hutchins'[3] fears are being realized. Our centers of higher learning are rapidly becoming high-dollar vocational technical schools, engines of economic development, capable of producing a highly-trained and technically-competent, but ignorant and marginalized, workforce. Although Hutchins' view of

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[3] In 1936 Robert Maynard Hutchins, then President of the University of Chicago, warned of the damaging effects that the pressure to vocationalize higher education would have on the American university. In Higher Learning In America, Hutchins wrote: "It is plain enough, I suppose, that it is bad for the universities to vocationalize them (p. 37) . . . the vocational atmosphere is ruinous to attempts to lead the student to understand the subject (p. 38) . . . If you set out to prepare a boy for a trade there are and can be no limits to the triviality to which you will descend except those imposed by the limitations on the time at your disposal. You can justify almost anything on the ground that it may be helpful to the young man in his profession. And if you take the view that a university may properly prepare boys for trades, there is no limit to the number of trades you can train them for except those imposed by the limitations on your resources. Since you can usually make a school pay if you make it vocational enough, there are really no limits at all" (pp. 39-40).

vocationalism differs from Dewey's romanticized vision, it remains consistent with that of many contemporary university and college administrators, public policy makers and business leaders. A commonly expressed goal of these people, and thus higher education, is to meet the research and training needs of business. To that end, education in many quarters has come to mean providing students, i.e., potential workers, with various sets of work place competencies established by various employers. This condition developed during the watch of the traditionalists, i.e., the modern positivists, who, along with their less conventional colleagues, seem to be unwilling or unable to adjust to their rapidly evolving environment. Or, more appropriately, the modernists have either knowingly or unwittingly betrayed the Enlightenment ideals of humanism, emancipation and truth that they embrace and claim to champion. However, the traditionalists should not solely shoulder responsibility for the current condition and uncertain future of American higher education. Those who look to the future and embrace change, those whose reality is not bounded by the scientific method and quantification, also significantly contribute to the deterioration and uncertainty faced by American higher education. With rare exception, those who view the university and its mission from alternative perspectives are not, in the words of William Tierney, "building communities of difference." Rather than seeking common ground and jointly articulating theoretical or practical alternative courses of action, they prefer throwing brickbats at potential allies. Such action represents a luxury that the Academy and its postmodern and liberal/leftist champions can no longer afford. The time has come to pursue a different course of action, to accept and be tolerant of differences that have traditionally separated and isolated kindred spirits and to focus on their shared ideas and vision.

The justification for such collaborative action may be found in Rorty's

pragmatic-liberal postmodernism. Rorty provides a solid foundation for "building

communities of difference," communities in which no voice is silenced. Using Rorty's

vision, I explore the possibility of establishing a foundation for such a community or

mosaic of communities. A community that embraces all of its members. A community

that values its poets and priests without marginalizing its scientists and engineers. A

community whose ethical judgements are based on one criteria: Does a decision or

action improve the quality of human life or does it cause suffering? A community

whose members think of themselves as "we" and not as a collection of disjointed "I's."

In her book, Feminist Thought: A Comprehensive Introduction (1989), while discussing

postmodern feminism, Rosemarie Tong describes such a community. She writes:

> It is a major challenge to . . . reconcile the pressures for diversity and
>
> difference with those for integration and commonality. We need a home in
>
> which everyone has a room of her own, but one in which the walls are thin
>
> enough to permit a conversation, a community of friends in virtue, and
>
> partners in action. (p. 7)

In the concluding chapter, I consider the possible role that higher education may play in

fostering and sustaining such a community.

Procedures

The relationship between American higher education and pragmatic or American

postmodernism (as articulated by Rorty) and Continental postmodernism (as

represented by the writings of Lyotard), provide the major focus for my interest and this

dissertation. Therefore, I propose pursuit of these interests through a dialectical process

grounded in a selected review and analysis of the literature of postmodernism and

education dealing with issues relevant to American higher education and its future. In

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pursuit of that interest, I: 1) discuss the traditional perspective of American higher education and describe the contemporary university and its function; 2) analyze the work of Richard Rorty, concentrating on his consideration of higher education; 3) analyze the work of Jean-François Lyotard, concentrating on his consideration of higher education; 4) compare and contrast Rorty's and Lyotard's ideas, focusing on their differences, the reason for those differences, and their respective treatments of higher education; and 5) consider whether a postmodern reality, specifically that of Lyotard or Rorty, manifests or attempts to manifest itself in American higher education.

A number of problems must be resolved if those individuals who seek to resist the growing pressures of information technology, consumerism and the continuing onslaught of late capitalism are to reach a state of symbiosis with each other. Those members of the academic community who privilege things other than efficiency, technology and the scientific method must put aside their canonical and esoteric philosophical differences. Otherwise, the postmodern university cannot support and facilitate a public environment which structurally protects the freedom and dignity of every individual and a private environment in which each individual has the opportunity to develop a personal language and the awareness to redefine themselves. First, the many esoteric aspects of postmodernism alienate much of its academic and lay audience. This is particularly true of many French postmodern authors and their consideration of such issues as aesthetics, the nature and function of language, including deconstruction, and the sublime. Second, many postmodern writers also believe that the form of their text should reflect and reinforce their vision of postmodern reality; the embodiment of this belief produces a nearly incomprehensible narrative for many readers. Patty Lather and Chris Smithies' 1997 book, Troubling the Angels : Women Living with HIV/AIDS, provides an example of this type of narrative. Third, and

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possibly the most critical and insurmountable problem, is the recurring charge of neoconservatism that modernist intellectuals and ideologues level at postmodernism and its proponents. These accusations have produced an openly fractious relationship between many liberal/leftist theorists and scholars and postmodernists. The long-running public feud between Lyotard and Jürgen Habermas represents one of the better known examples of this "problem."

As indicated above, I now believe that the pragmatic version of postmodernism, as represented by the liberalism of Rorty, provides the basis for an alternative interpretation of contemporary reality that accommodates both the postmodern vision and the alternative modern call for political action. On a fundamental (pragmatic) level, the various liberal-leftist factions, including the postmodernists like Rorty, pursue compatible goals. The liberal and radical modernists share many more ideas with the postmodernist Rorty than they do with conservative and reactionary modernists.

The possibility does exist to articulate a "philosophy" that will accommodate the liberal/leftist modernist without denying the reality of an evolving postmodern culture. As Rorty frequently warns, to achieve such a "philosophy" the historic Western tendency to over-philosophize must be resisted and overcome. I believe that this kind of accommodation remains essential in order for the university, in anything like its current form, to be salvaged.

Significance

At this point, the assertion that higher education attempts to ignore or inappropriately responds to many aspects of postmodern reality carries with it no negative sanction; it exists merely as an observation. The question, however, remains: why should individuals concerned about the future of American higher education also concern themselves with postmodernism? Common sense dictates it should be studied

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because it depicts social reality. In addition, the literature provides a number of reasons.

First, if postmodernism has "penetrated the core of American culture," as Bloland

(1995, p. 1) maintains, and if higher education wishes to retain a claim to social

relevance, those individuals concerned about the prospect of higher learning in America

should become familiar with postmodernism. Second, if postmodern analysis will allow

the Academy to more effectively deal with the uncertainties of the future, i.e., "help us

to articulate some of our own half-formed worries and hunches about changes to come"

(Wills, 1995, p. 60), higher education should become familiar with postmodernism.

Third, if postmodernism has had a "transformative" effect on major segments of the

Academy, including the humanities and the social sciences, to understand the dynamics

of the contemporary American university requires familiarity with postmodernism.

Fourth, and most compelling, postmodernism questions the current foundation of higher

education. If the last reason is true, and postmodernism offers a contextual and local

but accurate description of reality in contemporary America, the continued existence of

liberal higher education in the postmodern era remains in serious doubt. Choices

available to the modernist include: aggression--to directly confront and vanquish

postmodernism; synthesis--to dialectically engage postmodernism in the hope of

creating a new postmodern/post-postmodern field of study that can exist in a

postmodern world; or stasis--to do nothing and discover whether Lyotard correctly

predicts the sounding of "the knell of the age of the Professor" and the metamorphosis

of the modern university into a vast network of computer labs and electronic data bases

and higher learning into performative training (Lyotard, 1993, p. 53).

Bloland's words and warning provide ample reason why everyone who values

and is concerned about the future of the American system of higher education should

concern themselves with postmodernism and familiarize themselves with the thoughts of Richard Rorty:

> Perhaps nowhere are the issues of the postmodern/modern debate more sharply drawn, more clearly illuminated, and more difficult to acknowledge than in higher education in the United States. For higher education is so deeply immersed in modernist sensibilities and so dependent upon modernist foundations that erosion of our faith in the modernist project calls into question higher education's legitimacy, its purpose, its activities, its very raison d'etre. In attacking modernism postmodernism presents a hostile interpretation of much of what higher education believes it is doing and what it stands for. (Bloland, 1995, p. 2)

Nothing better represents the postmodern challenge confronting contemporary higher education that Bloland describes than the emergence and phenomenal success alternative for-profit "drive-thru" universities.

<u>A Postmodern University?: University of Phoenix</u>

In October 1997, <u>The New Yorker</u> published a special edition, "The Next Issue," dedicated to a consideration of the future. Under the heading "The Next University" appears an article titled "Drive-Thru U.: Higher Education People Who Mean Business," in which James Traub describes a university representing the object of Bloland's concern--the University of Phoenix (U. of P.). According to Arthur Levine, president of Teacher's College at Columbia University, the U. of P. "is the first of the new breed" (p. 118). Like McDonald's©, it is a franchise operation with 47 "sites" or "outlets" located throughout the Western U.S. and in Louisiana, Michigan and Florida. Along with being fully accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Universities, and being the second largest private university in the United States, it is

also the "principle subsidiary" and cash cow of a for-profit corporation called the Apollo Group. Traub describes the U. of P. as a "para-university" that has "the operational core of higher education" but lacks both a campus and "an intellectual life" (p. 115).

John Sperling, classically educated at some of the world's most prestigious and elite colleges and universities, founded the University of Phoenix. He holds a B.A. in history from Reed, an M.A. in history from the University of California at Berkeley and a doctorate in economic history from Cambridge. After a period of time working in traditional higher education, Sperling discovered, and acted to satisfy, what he interpreted as an unmet need. Traub quotes Sperling as saying, "Higher education is one of the most inefficient mechanisms for the transmission of knowledge that have [sic] ever been invented. I decided to go back to my economics and conceive of education as a production function, in which you specify the learning outcomes that you want--they're your product--and then do a regression and figure out the most efficient way of producing them" (p. 117). Sperling responded to an evolving demand in a changing culture. The market in which Sperling proves so successful is made up of a new kind of student, or, more appropriately, customer, that, according to Levine, represents 80% of all full-time students in the U.S. Traub quotes Levine who characterizes these students--the students of the future--as wanting "the kind of relationship with a college that they had with their bank, their supermarket and the gas company" (p. 116).

Appropriately, Sperling crafted a product to meet the needs of these students: "working adults in the corporate environment" (p. 117). Identical degree programs on each of the U. of P.'s 46 sites consist of accredited bachelor's degrees in business, nursing and education, and an MBA. Plans exist to expand programs and to begin

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offering more advanced degrees, including the doctorate. In all of its current programs the U. of P. has no traditional day-time courses. All classes are held at night between 6:00 P.M. and 10:00 P.M., and all courses consist of five to six weekly sessions taken one at a time and one after another.

The "practitioner" system (p. 119) is used to staff the University's classes. The U. of P. neither values nor utilizes traditional credentials and research/publication as criteria for evaluating and selecting faculty. Practitioners, rather than scholars or professionally-trained educators, teach classes. Traub writes, "Marketing would be taught by a marketing executive, and accounting by an accountant. In a vocational setting, these teachers had the credentials that mattered" (p. 118). What does the knoll of the age of the professor sound like? It sounds like this: "draw your faculty from the world they were familiar with--the world of work . . . a Ph.D., that don't mean shit" (Traub quoting Sperling, p. 118).

As should be expected, the U. of P. has no tenured, or even traditional full-time, faculty. "Instructors" are paid, in factory parlance, a "piece rate." In other words, U. of P. faculty are not under contract, nor do they receive a salary. Faculty are paid approximately a thousand dollars for each five to six week course that they teach. Katherine Barnett serves as an example of a member of the University of Phoenix faculty. During the day Barnett teaches English and reading in an area public high school. At night she works as Assistant Chair of the General Studies Department and teaches between 25 and 30 courses per year.

The success of both the U. of P. and its parent corporation is phenomenal. During the past decade, enrollment at the University of Phoenix has skyrocketed from 3,000 to 40,000 students. During that same period of time, enrollment trends in all of American higher education have been relatively flat and "some two hundred colleges

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have closed" (p. 116). Since the Apollo Group went public in 1994, its stock, listed on the NASDAQ exchange, has soared in value from an initial offering of two dollars to 35 dollars, "on a split adjusted basis" (p. 115).

Bridging the gap between the modern and postmodern worlds, the University of Phoenix, in addition to its regular classroom activities, also develops new methods of product delivery and marketing, specifically, on-line courses and distance learning. According to Traub, these new forms of technology-based education, combined with store front universities like Phoenix, and "corporate universities," such as Motorola University, will transform American higher education and bring an end to liberal higher learning. Traub contends that corporate universities, organizations through which private business provides training for its own employees, are the fastest growing sector in higher education. According to the article, "the increase in 'classroom contact hours,' for corporate employees in one year, 1992, exceeded the enrollment growth at all the colleges built between 1960 and 1990" (p. 121). Traub contends that "the corporate university is part of a web, not a pecking order--one of several kinds of service 'providers' filling in different aspect of a learners' needs." He then quotes Arthur Levine, who, while speculating on the future of American higher education, wrote, "we'll still have some number of residential colleges and some number of research universities, but most of the rest will disappear." Continuing this line of thought, Traub adds, "Corporations may simply make postsecondary education an in-house function. Non-elite institutions, Levine suggests, will be reduced largely to examining and certifying students for workplace readiness" (p. 122).

Traub ends his article with another clap of the funeral bell foretelling the passing of an age and proclaiming the insight of a Frenchman. Traub once again quotes John Sperling:

I'm not involved in social reform . . . Microsoft is a much more powerful

force shaping the world than Harvard or Yale or Princeton . . . So, if you

can't beat 'em, join' em. (p. 123)

Sperling might just as well have quoted John Milton's fallen Lucifer, "Better to reign in

Hell, than serve in Heav'n" (Milton, 1667/1957, p. 218).

Conclusion

American higher education currently occupies a very precarious position. It has

lost the faith and support, both political and financial, of the society that maintains it

and that it serves. A rapidly evolving external environment makes the situation even

more hazardous, as does an internal environment populated by opponents of liberal

education and supporters intent upon publicly discrediting each other. The culture is

moving from the era of modernism, that began with the Enlightenment movement of the

eighteenth century, into the era of postmodernism. A repudiation of the core beliefs and

values that have sustained the United States since the nation's founding characterizes

this new and evolving era (or philosophical movement), although defying concise

definition. More importantly, for the purposes of this narrative, these beliefs and

values, which include the emancipatory power of education, also provide the basis and

primary justification for the modern liberal university. In addition to what Lyotard

describes as the widespread loss of faith in the credulity of modernist metanarratives,

the pervasive influence of late or consumer capitalism and a growing dependence,

bordering on deification, of computer-based information technology also threaten the

American university.

Without an appropriate but measured response to its changing environments, the

modern university can not survive. Inaction and continued bickering among those who

value higher learning, and would offer an alternative voice, will result in such a

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complete transformation of the structure and mission of American higher education that the university, as we know it, will cease to exist. This narrative works from the assumption that such an occurrence, i.e. the death of the university and the cessation of the liberal education that it provides, is "bad." In other words, liberal higher education is "good" and should be continued, because it contributes in a real way to the quality of human life.

Unfortunately those who would offer an alternative to the continuing and growing privilege enjoyed by positivism, technology and consumerism fail to confront the challenges of postmodernism. The alterative theorists, the non-positivist modernists such as the critical theorists, and the pragmatic postmodernists such as Rorty, share overlapping visions of reality. They collectively possess the potential of developing a voice that may once again allow the university to speak to, and to be heard by, the general public. These potential allies, however, choose to focus on their differences rather than concentrating on their similarities. The unchallenged dominance of the university by traditional modernists, capitalists, bureaucrats and those, like Lyotard, who would replace the professorate with computers and data banks, and higher learning with the most vulgar forms of vocationalism and skill training, partly results from this fractious and often self-aggrandizing behavior.

As discussed in the following narrative, in order for the university and liberal education to survive in the evolving postmodern future, their supporters and advocates must put aside their petty differences. In the spirit of Dewey and Rorty, they must stop over philosophizing and instead focus on issues of mutual interest and the development of a workable methodology. Then they must find the courage to act.

CHAPTER TWO:

RICHARD RORTY:

A PRAGMATIC POSTMODERN VIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

Introduction

In his 1989 book, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity, Richard Rorty writes, "For

most contemporary intellectuals, questions of ends as opposed to means--questions

about how to give a sense to one's own life or that of one's community--are questions

for art or politics, or both, rather than for religion, philosophy, or science" (p. 3). Rorty

represents a unique blending of Continental and American influences. His generally

acknowledged standing as America's most widely recognized and influential

postmodern thinker remains unchallenged. Although he freely acknowledged the

influence of an array of European philosophers ranging from Hegel and Nietzsche to

Foucault and Derrida, he is quintessentially American. He unabashedly and

unwaveringly admires and supports people like John Dewey and Franklin Delano

Roosevelt and the kind of uniquely American liberal pragmatism that they advocated.

In addition to his academic and intellectual accomplishments, he actively champions

liberal or leftist political causes and reforms. He recently helped organized a number of

meetings across the country in an attempt to rekindle a coalition of intellectual and

organized labor that had been a mainstay of the New Deal.

Rorty provides a unique alternative to both traditional modernism and what

might be called cybernetic postmodernism. He understands the powers and ubiquity, as

well the importance of dealing with, the "postmodern condition," but resists the excesses, negativism and tendency of many postmodernists to "over-philosophize" and/or to place seemingly unquestioned faith in technology.

This chapter offers a discussion of Rorty's views, with special consideration of their implications for American higher education. Pragmatic postmodernism, as presented by Rorty, will provide the context for much of the balance of this dissertation.

Postmodernism?

If the American university and its professors are to survive the transition from modernism to postmodernism, in anything approaching their current recognizable forms, i.e., as more than a high-tech vocational school with a staff of technician trainers, and retain any of the hope and promise of their liberal heritage, major changes must occur. In response to this situation, Bloland (1995) suggests that higher education aggressively engage in the modern-postmodern debate. He argues that only by such action can people in the Academy understand and/or successfully meet the challenges posed by an uncertain and potentially hostile future. Hopefully, engagement in such debate will allow those individuals within the university community who value liberal education to move beyond the limitations of egoism and the confines of ideology and dogma. Such action should facilitate the university's successful adaptation to its rapidly evolving environments.

Under ideal circumstances, before a debate, a question must be stated in terms understandable by all participants. Unfortunately, the situation that the university and its professors (and students) find themselves in is not ideal. The near impossibility of providing a precise and consensual definition of postmodernism further complicates the situation. Ironically, to even attempt a definition might be deemed folly by an orthodox postmodernist. If not folly, the task is extremely difficult, because postmodernism, to

borrow an expression from Rorty, is "hopelessly vague." Postmodernism and its proponents do not attempt to create complex and integrated theoretical systems or to delineate philosophical taxonomies. Postmodern ideas are just that--ideas, not a blueprint for political or social agency. Postmodern thought has, however, served to support identification of the social constructs, or metanarratives, upon which our ideas about self, community, truth, knowledge and learning are based and remain contingent. The difficulty of providing a concise consensual definition of postmodernism does not diminish its impact or importance, or its value as an analytical tool to anyone interested in higher education and its political and social context.

The history and origin of postmodernism remains as illusive and nebulous as its definition. Despite the popularly-held view of postmodernism as a French creation of the 1960's, both Carol Nicholson (1989, p. 198) and Val Rust (1991, p. 610) claim that the term "postmodern" first appeared in Arnold Toynbee's A Study of History, originally published in London in 1954. The editors of "The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism," however, contend without reference to a specific source or geographic location, that "The term 'postmodernism' was first used in reference to architecture as early as 1947." Despite the uncertainty over postmodernism's birth date and possible Anglo lineage, its French imprinting and the influence of such well known French thinkers as Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida, Jean Baudrillard and Roland Barth and Lyotard are widely recognized and cannot be denied (Bloland, 1995; Rhoades, 1991a; Cinnamond, 1991; and Lokke & Jaeckle, 1991). Notwithstanding postmodernism's Frankish flavor, the prominence of American philosopher Rorty matches that of the best known French postmodernists (Bloland, 1995; Fitzman, 1990; Nicholson, 1989; Nuyen, 1992; Pratt, 1994; Rust, 1991; Wills, 1995).

<u>Postmodernism as Seen Through French and American Eyes</u>

In an attempt to develop a better understanding of postmodernism and its relevance to the future of American higher education, the ideas of two postmodern authors, the American Rorty, and the Frenchman Lyotard, will be considered. Rorty and Lyotard are two of the world's most influential and widely quoted postmodern thinkers; they have been for much of the past two to three decades. These men are of interest not only because of their identification with postmodernism, and their prestige, standing and influence in the Academy, but also because they specifically address higher education. Although widely recognized as postmodernists, both Lyotard and Rorty merit special consideration because they present fundamentally different visions. Their mutual interest in, and shared focus on, life and the state of knowledge in the technologically advanced nations of the North Atlantic, combined with their differing perspectives and conclusions, make them of special interest and value.

Throughout this narrative, Lyotard and Rorty will represent two fundamentally different responses to conditions existing in contemporary Western culture. Lyotard serves as the representative of a more esoteric Continental postmodernism. This approach associates itself with literary criticism and abstract concepts like deconstruction and endorses the socially and culturally transformative aspects of technology. Alternatively, Rorty serves as the representative of a more pragmatic American postmodernism, associated with more practical concerns like preventing human cruelty and suffering, and improving life. Unlike Lyotard, Rorty questions the privileging of performatively-legitimated technology-based training in higher education. He endorses, and represents others who also believe in, the liberal arts, particularly the humanities, as a primary basis for higher education. However, he also understands the

necessity of utilizing technology and providing vocational as well as provocational
higher education.

The following discussion and comparison of the views of Rorty and Lyotard will
hopefully provide a better understanding of postmodernism and a feel for its complex
and nebulous nature. More specifically, the discussion illustrates the relevance of
postmodernism to American higher education and the importance of the outcome of the
modern/postmodern (and the postmodern/postmodern) debate for the entire academic
community. Rorty's version of postmodernism and views on higher education are
considered below. Lyotard will be considered in more detail in Chapter Three.

<center>The "America Sucks Sweepstake"</center>

Leftists, particularly feminists and critical theorists, frequently criticize
postmodernists for political conservatism, claiming their ideas preclude the possibility
of agency, or collective political action. Rorty finds such criticism of himself
particularly stinging. Richard Bernstein (1990) describes Rorty's reaction to the
accusation of neoconservatism and discusses what he perceives as Rorty's lack of
concern for others. Bernstein writes that "there is one line of criticism that Rorty takes
more seriously than most--that he is insensitive to the real pain, suffering and
humiliation of human beings" (1990, p. 35). Carol Nicholson, a member of the
Department of Philosophy at Rider College, provides an example of this type of attack.
She criticizes Rorty because, in her reading of his work, he does not more directly
address issues of racial, sexual, political and economic inequality (1989, p. 202).

Rorty dismisses much of the criticism directed at him from what he characterizes
as the "revolutionary radical left," as opposed to the "reformist liberal left." He
contends that the criticism is in reaction to his continuing faith and hope that the
historical promises of the United States may yet be fulfilled, and from his unwillingness

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to participate in what he calls the "America sucks sweepstake."[4] Although painfully aware of its shortcomings, Rorty sees his America as neither fatally flawed nor the embodiment of evil. He sees beyond the vision of many of his most vociferous leftist critics, a vision that includes only "racism, sexism, consumerism and Republican Presidents" (Rorty, 1992, p. 141). Alternatively, Rorty writes that he sees "America pretty much as [Walt] Whitman and Dewey did, as opening a prospect on illimitable democratic vistas." He goes on to say that he thinks "that our country--despite its past and present atrocities, and despite its continuing eagerness to elect fools and knaves to high office--is a good example of the best kind of society so far invented" (1992, p. 141). Rorty's hope, his belief in democracy and his continuing faith in America and its political institutions combine with his rejection of metanarratives and representational knowledge to provide the basis for his views on politics, philosophy and education, and the necessary relationships that exist among the three.

In defense of the "institutions and of the practices of the rich North Atlantic democracies" and what he semi-tongue-in-cheek refers to as "postmodern bourgeois liberalism," Rorty writes that they are "possible and justifiable only in certain historical and especially economic conditions" (1985, p. 221). In other words, their existence remains dependent or contingent on a unique set of specific circumstances. To understand these democracies and the liberalism that made them possible and that they, in turn, support, one must understand their context and their relationship to that context. Likewise, to fully understand Rorty and his views about politics, art, truth, knowledge and education, it is helpful, if not necessary, to understand the historical context in which his thoughts and ideas developed. In a personal autobiographical essay, "Trotsky

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[4]Rorty attributes the phrase "America sucks sweepstake" to Jonathan Yardley (1992, p. 141).

and the Wild Orchids," Rorty discusses many of the forces that helped shape his intellectual development and his understanding of reality.

The Historical Rorty

Rorty was an only child born into a financially comfortable family of intellectual left wing political activists who divided their time between New York City's Chelsea Hotel and the Mountains of northwest New Jersey. In the 1930's and 40's Rorty's parents counted among their friends, colleagues and acquaintances some of the world's more famous radicals and intellectuals, including: John Dewey; Carlo Tresca, who was assassinated in New York City on orders of Stalin; John Frank, a secretary to Trotsky at the time of his assassination, Norman Thomas; A. Philip Randolph and Sidney Hooks.

Although Rorty's parents had been members of the American Communist Party, they terminated that relationship during their son's infancy. Their faith in Marxism and their involvement in radical politics, however, continued. Both parents, classified as "Trotskyites" by the Daily Worker (1993, p. 142), (a label which, according to Rorty, they "more or less" accepted) worked for the Workers Defense League. In 1940, after Trotsky's murder, the Rorty family took John Frank into their home for several months, providing him a safe place to hide from Stalin's assassins.

Reflecting on his early surroundings and boyhood experiences, Rorty identifies The Case of Leon Trotsky and Not Guilty, the two volumes that contained the report of the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials, and Trotsky's History of the Russian Revolution as the most influential books of his youth. Describing his feelings about these volumes, Rorty writes, "I thought of them in the way in which other children thought of their family Bibles: they were books that radiated redemptive truth and moral splendor." He then describes an emerging political perspective that he would retain, although in modified form, throughout his adult life: "I grew up knowing that all

decent people were, if not Trotskyites, at least socialists . . . So at twelve, I knew that the point of being human was to spend one's life fighting social injustice" (1993, p. 142).

Dewey's influence on the juvenile Rorty was at least as powerful as that of Trotsky. With the exception of a brief period of Hutchins-induced doubt, Rorty's attraction to Dewey, like his attraction to Trotsky, was to last a life time, serving as a foundation and touchstone for much of his work as an adult. Rorty describes Dewey's pragmatism as the "unofficial religion" of most of the "disillusioned" New York intellectuals who had lost faith in dialectical materialism. Many of these people, like Sidney Hooks, were Rorty family friends. Thus, the language that Rorty spoke as a child, the language of his parents, allowed him to develop, and help determine the form of, the vocabulary that he uses as an adult in his continuing process of recreating himself and redefining his reality.

A few years after his introduction to Trotsky and Dewey, Rorty discovered a wild orchid while exploring the mountains of northeast New Jersey in the area around Flatbrookville in Sussex County, where his family maintained a residence.[5] His discovery quickly developed into a major interest and then into a full-fledged passion. His reading shifted from books by and about Trotsky and the Russian Revolution to books about orchids and botany. Free time not spent reading about orchids he dedicated to searching for new varieties of the plant. He claims that he found 17 of the 40 different "uncommon and hard to spot" species of wild orchids known to exist in the area. Of his childhood passion, he writes, "I prided myself enormously on being the only person around who knew where they grew, their Latin names, and their blooming

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[5] This is the home where Rorty's parents sheltered Trotsky's secretary, John Frank.

times." Expanding on this point, he continues:

> I was not quite sure why those orchids were so important, but I was
>
> convinced that they were. I was sure that our noble, pure chaste North
>
> American wild orchids were morally superior to the showy, hybridized,
>
> tropical orchids displayed in florists' shops. I was so convinced that there
>
> was a deep significance in the fact that the orchids are the latest and most
>
> complex plants to have been developed in the course of evolution. (1993, p.
>
> 143)

Rorty's extended use of metaphors is not only creative and interesting, it is also

multifaceted and full of irony. In addition to Trotsky representing the public domain

and socialization and orchids representing the private domain and individualization--the

flowering of the individual--his relationship with Trotsky precedes his involvement with

orchids. Of additional significance is the fact that, although highly influential and at

one point assuming a position of preeminence, Trotsky had been assassinated and was a

long time dead when Rorty finally chose to incorporate him into a formal personal

narrative. The wild orchids, as described in the preceding quotation, may also serve as a

symbolic surrogate for the United States and its promise of democracy and personal

freedom, or even the post-Enlightenment, postmodern future. The florists' orchids

conversely may be seen as symbolizing the failed promises of the Enlightenment and

the decadence of the Old World.

As we consider various meanings and interpretations that may be applied to

Rorty's extended metaphors, we should also be mindful that, as parasites, orchids feed

on the bodies of the dead and dying hosts. The irony of the orchid was surely in Rorty's

mind when he described the tension and dissonance caused by his new-found passion.

Addressing this point, he writes, "I was uneasily aware, however, there was something a

bit dubious about its esotericism--this interest in socially useless flowers . . . I was

afraid that Trotsky would not have approved of my interest in orchids" (1993, p. 143).

In 1947, at the age of fifteen, Rorty left his parents' home for the University of

Chicago, which he refers to as "Hutchins' College." He left hoping to find a way to

reconcile his twin but incompatible passions--Trotsky and wild orchids. He hoped to

find an intellectual and aesthetic framework that would allow him to "hold reality and

justice in a single vision" (Rorty quoting William Butler Yeats, 1993, p. 143).

The following definition of "reality" and "justice" provided by Rorty reflects his

feelings of confusion and dissonance as he left New York City and the mountains of

New Jersey for the Chicago and Hutchins' College:

> By reality I meant, more or less, the Wordsworthian moments in which, in
>
> the woods . . . [searching for orchids] . . . I had felt touched by
>
> something numinous, something of ineffable importance. By justice I
>
> meant what Norman Thomas and Trotsky both stood for, the liberation of
>
> the weak from the strong. I wanted to be both an intellectual snob and a
>
> friend of humanity--a nerdy recluse and a fighter for justice. I was very
>
> confused, but reasonably sure that at Chicago I would find out how grown
>
> ups managed to work the trick that I had in mind. (1993, p. 143)

His hopes and expectations went unfulfilled. He found criticism and doubt rather than

affirmation and answers. Dewey and pragmatism became the frequent target of

"sneers" from a faculty committed to the search for moral and political absolutes. The

teenage Rorty found his new environment and its intellectual climate initially seductive.

After a brief flirtation with Christianity, he was seduced by the allure of Platonism,

which he describes as having "all the advantages of religion, without requiring the

humility which Christianity demands" (1993, p. 145). But, as with religion, he found himself unable to believe in classical philosophy's absolutes.

According to Rorty his disillusionment climaxed as he was leaving Hutchins' college for Yale to begin his doctoral studies in philosophy and the beginning of a forty year quest for a "coherent and convincing way of formulating [his] . . . worries" (1993, p. 146). The last and longest leg of Rorty's intellectual and emotional odyssey began with his introduction to Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit and Proust's Remembrance of Things Past. Rorty provides the following reflection on his attraction to these two very different men:

> It was the cheerful commitment to irreducible temporality which Hegel and
>
> Proust shared--the specifically anti-Platonic elements of their work--that
>
> seemed so wonderful. They both seemed able to weave everything they
>
> encountered into a narrative without asking that narrative have a moral, and
>
> without asking how that narrative would appear under the aspect of
>
> eternity. (1993, p. 146)

Rorty describes Remembrance of Things Past as "the book which took the place of Wild Orchids once I left Flatbrookville for Chicago"(1993, p. 146). Proust remained a commanding figure throughout Rorty's life. Rorty discusses this influence at length in his most widely read and influential book, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (1989). Not until he was a member of the faculty at Princeton did Rorty first "encounter" the seminal postmodern writer/thinker Derrida. He credits his Princeton colleague, Jonathan Arac, with the introduction, an event that "coincided" with Rorty's "rediscovery of Dewey" (Rorty, 1993, pp. 40-41).

This brief consideration of Rorty's intellectually formative years hopefully renders his views on reality more meaningful by placing it in the context of his personal

historical reality. In the following section, the results of Rorty's quest will be considered. Particular attention will be given to those aspects of his evolving thought that relate to, and form the foundation for, his views on higher education.

The Essential Rorty

Most authors trace the origins of modernism to the Enlightenment. Rorty's interpretation, however, deviates from convention. He views the Enlightenment not as a revolutionary movement but as a bifurcation of the dominant current of Western thought. In essence, Rorty sees the Enlightenment as the beginning of a split in traditional Western thought that created two major camps which, although they adopt and utilize different methodologies, remain rooted in the same intellectual tradition. People who refuse to break faith with Medieval beliefs and traditions populate one camp, while members of the other group repudiate the past to embrace the "now"--the modern (1982).

As the Enlightenment saw science assail the sanctity of theology, the nineteenth century for a variety of reasons, including the failed promises of the Industrial and French Revolutions, saw Euro-America's belief in the sovereignty of science, reason and the inevitability of progress begin to crumble. In the words of W. T. Jones (1969), the Enlightenment Man was replaced by the Underground Man, who metaphorically embodies the disillusionment and angst that manifests itself in Dostoevsky and his novel, <u>Notes From the Underground</u>. The Enlightenment Man was self-confident and self-assured and conceived of himself in harmony with, but capable of mastering, his environment. Underground Man was "uneasy, anxious, alienated, and introspective. He was increasingly unsure of himself--doubtful of the validity of his values, of his ability to communicate in a meaningful way with others and of his ability to know himself" (Jones, 1969, p. 10). While displacing the eighteenth-century Enlightenment

Man, the Underground Man of the nineteenth century served as a prototype of the anti-hero of the twentieth century, including the Postmodern Man. Thus, for Rorty the true fracturing of Western thought came not with the Enlightenment and a dispute over the best methodology for discovering the Truth, but rather with the repudiation of the very idea of "Truth" itself, be it metaphysical or physical.

Rorty provides the following description of the intellectual evolution that began in the nineteenth century and came into full fruition with the advent of postmodernism:

> Up to Kant, the secular intellectual saw the knowledge gained by the
> advancing natural sciences as the point of his life . . . the moral
> equivalent of the Christian's love and fear of God . . . But the nineteenth
> century also saw the rise of a new sort of secular intellectual, one who had
> lost faith in God . . . whose consciousness is dominated by a sense of
> the contingency of history, the contingency of the vocabulary which he
> himself is using, the sense that nature and scientific truth are largely beside
> the point and that history is up for grabs. This sort of intellectual . . .
> sees the religion "of science" or "of humanity" as just as self-deceptive as
> the old-time religion. His thought tends toward Nietzsche's view of
> science as merely a prolongation of theology, of both as forms of the
> "longest lie." (1982, pp. 228-229)

Rorty characterizes Western thought as a continuous line that, beginning with Plato, and receiving essential support from such men as Thomas Aquinas and Immanuel Kant, has spanned and dominated the last twenty five hundred years. Although the intellectual and philosophical history of the Eurocentric world[6] can be characterized as

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[6] In The Transparent Society (1992), the Italian postmodernist, Gianni Vattimo,

neither static nor monolithic, according to Rorty and numerous other critics, Western

thought depends on a unifying series of consensual epistemological assumptions and

beliefs that are held with the same unquestioning fervor as articles of religious faith.

These basic epistemological beliefs define reality for Westerners while conditioning and

determining their perceptions. The existence of an independent, objective and knowable

reality is an essential article of Western faith. Although history has been sprinkled with

nay sayers, the defining question has not been "if" an independent/objective reality

exists, but rather "how" to best discover objective and representational knowledge of

that reality, i.e., not whether truth exists, but how one may best discover the "Truth."[7]

The fundamental debate has primarily been methodological, not ontological or

metaphysical. Rorty further argues that the intellectual energy of the West has been

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provides an eloquent and concise discussion of the historic impact of Eurocentricism and

its relationship to postmodernism. A particular focus of Vattimo's work is the connection

between mass media and the declining influence of Europe and the European perspective

(Eurocentricism) throughout the world.

[7] Rorty distinguishes between the capitalized and uncapitalized when he writes,

"All this is complicated by the fact that 'philosophy,' 'truth' and 'goodness,' are

ambiguous terms. Uncapitalized, 'truth' and 'goodness' name properties of sentences, or

of actions and situations. Capitalized, they are the proper names of objects--goals or

standards which can be loved with all one's heart and soul and mind, objects of ultimate

concern. Similarly, 'philosophy' can mean simply what Sellers calls 'an attempt to see

how things, in the broadest sense of the term hang together, in the broadest possible sense

of the term" (1982, p. xiv).

wasted in futile attempts to solve a series of unanswerable "philosophical problems"[8] that supposedly will, when resolved, lead to the revelation of the Truth.

The development and continued existence of an epistemological hierarchy, or hierarchy of knowledge, a byproduct of the Western philosophical tradition, has had a profound effect on the form, structure, organization, administration, content and function of higher education. Possibly the most famous and earliest depiction of this hierarchy is Plato's "Parable of the Cave" used to illustrate his understanding of the different types and qualities of knowledge accessible by man. The shadowy reflections of the physical world, the domain of the common man, may be found at the most base level. This world stands opposed to the realm of the Philosopher King, he who dedicates his life to the contemplation of the Good, a dominion bathed in purifying sunlight. Although the Philosopher King, and his more contemporary kindred spirits, the Clergyman, the Scientist and the Professor, may have sprung from the common people, they are no longer of the people; for they have been both liberated and elevated

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[8] Rorty provides the following rather sardonic definition of "Philosophical Problems" as: "Problems which professors of philosophy have a moral obligation to continue working on, whatever their current preoccupations. The Nature of Being, the Nature of Man, the Relation of Subject and Object, Language and Thought, Necessary Truth, Freedom of the Will--this is the sort of thing which philosophers are supposed to have views about but--which novelists and critics, historians and scientists, may be excused from discussing" (Rorty, 1982, p. 31). The traditional "Philosophical Problems" discussed by Rorty that constitute the primary focus of the scholarly endeavors of most professional Philosophers, should not be confused with Camus' "one philosophical problem"--deciding whether life is or is not worth living, i.e., suicide.

by their lofty quest for intimate personal knowledge of the Good, i.e., the Truth. The only life worth living, for Plato, dedicated itself to the philosophical contemplation of the ideal, a life not significantly different from the life lived by the idealized modern university professor.

According to Rorty, largely because of the work of Immanuel Kant, although in a modified form, Plato's hierarchy survives today. As FDR emerged as the patrician savior of capitalism, so Kant saved the Western intellectual aristocracy from the assaults of the empiricists and sceptics. If the empiricists were correct, and information derived through sense perception is the ultimate source and test of humanity's knowledge, the gatekeeper serves what function? Could not "Everyman" see and hear and touch and taste? As Plato had produced "forms" to protect civilization from the Sophist, in Rorty's view, Kant produced analytical a priori, synthetic a posteriori and synthetic a priori knowledge to protect the enlightened world, the hierarchical world of the gatekeeper (the Philosopher, the Clergyman, the Professor, the Scientist) from the assault of the empiricist.

Along with Rorty, many postmodern thinkers such as Foucault, Derrida and Lyotard stress not only the existence of a hierarchy of knowledge, but also condemn its influence on Western civilization. According to Morris Dickstein, these men, by "raising the right questions, self-consciously refining their techniques, destroying complacent assumptions, especially the illusion of objective reality," perform the proper but frequently neglected functions of the philosopher, the social thinker and the critic (1992, p. xi).

Rorty divides the philosophical and, in effect, the academic history of the United States into three periods. During the first period, which began in the colonial times and lasted until World War I, "philosophy defined itself by its relation to religion" (Rorty,

1982, p. 61). The second period, characterized by Rorty as "the heroic period of Deweyian pragmatism," was both short lived and unique. For the only time in the nation's history, philosophers made a concerted effort to use "intelligence" as a tool in addressing the society's problems and providing a better life for all of its members. The third and final period which Rorty called the "professionalizing period" quickly eclipsed this golden age of American intellectual history/philosophy. Rorty states that during this period, which began with the end of World War II, "philosophers attempted halfheartedly to define their activity in relation to mathematics and the natural sciences" (1982, pp. 61-62). In summary, according to Rorty, except for a brief period of what might be called enlightened humanism, the history of American philosophy can be divided into two distinct and dichotomous periods that flanked the World Wars. Before World War I religion dominated; following World War II mathematics and science dominated.

This shift, although profoundly important, is methodological. It does not reflect a change in the fundamental belief in the existence of an independent knowable objective reality. "God" is the name of choice used by the Scholastic philosopher of the Middle Ages and the Clergyman of the nineteenth century when referring to "The Good," while the contemporary scientist chooses to call it "natural law." According to Rorty,

> The Platonist would like to see a culture guided by something eternal. The positivist would like to see one guided by something temporal . . . But both want it to be guided, constrained, not left to its own devices. For both, decadence is a matter of unwillingness to submit oneself to something out there. (1982, p. xxxix)

In this context, science may be seen as the Western world's last great attempt to save God.

The American Imprint

Bloland argues not only that, "Colleges and universities are particularly susceptible to the postmodern critique that denigrates hierarchy . . ." (1995, p. 5) but also, because American higher education operated in a "modernist context" (1995, p. 5), the hierarchy finds basis in, and draws its legitimacy from, the near-universal acceptance of the scientific metanarrative. Bloland writes:

> Modernism is associated with science and the scientific method of thinking and doing, and science is tightly connected to higher education. For one hundred fifty years, higher education has promoted the notion that science and its forms, scientific research, scientific methods, and progress that results from science, are the principle guarantors of the legitimacy of higher education. The belief in science and its assumptions and methods have provided the basis for creating and justifying the prestige hierarchies between and within colleges and universities and the reward structures among academics. (1995, p. 9)

To support his observations about higher education's dominance by a scientifically-predicated hierarchy, Bloland reviews the work of Derrida, Foucault, Lyotard and Baudrillard.

John W. Wills (1995) indirectly questions Bloland's assertion that the postmodern critique is relevant to American higher education when he asks, "why should the vast majority of academics who are caught up in neither postmodernism nor

in 'pomo'-phobia[9] care about these issues?" The issues to which Wills refers stem from

the debate within the academy between advocates of modernism and postmodernism

and between the proponents of different postmodern perspectives. Wills affirms

Bloland's contention about postmodernism's relevance to higher education when he

answers his own question by saying, "almost any form of postmodernism raises basic

questions about what we do in the Academy and may help us to articulate some of our

own half-formed worries and hunches about changes to come" (1995, p. 60).

If Rorty and the postmodernists are correct, the implications are profound. For

them, the Western intellectual tradition, based partially on a fundamental belief in the

hierarchy of knowledge and an acceptance of science and the scientific method, has

made possible, and provided justification for, most of the human-caused calamities and

much of the evil that afflicts the modern world (Bloland, 1995; Lyotard, 1993a; Rorty,

1982 and 1989a; and Vattimo, 1992). These include imperialism/colonialism, World

Wars, fascism and Stalinism, genocide, crass materialism and oppression, cruelty and

exclusion based on race, religion, gender, class, life style and creed. The effects on the

university, although not as palpable or overtly repugnant as a fascist's gas chamber or

an overseer's lash, are no less broad or profound, and the results no less devastating. In

the vision of many postmodernists, the modern university functions as an elitist

instrument of oppression and social control that separates itself from the greater society

and, in so doing, renders itself irrelevant.

This point is clearly made by Linda Ray Pratt (1994), a professor of English at

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[9] Pomo-phobia is an irrational, excessive and persistent fear of postmodernism

that grips those members of the Academy who most passionately embrace modernism

and place their faith in science.

the University of Nebraska and past president of the AAUP, who describes the growing

chasm that exists between the university and the society which supports it. She asserts

that a major area of difference between university faculty and the general public is the

value of a liberal arts curriculum. In support of this claim, Pratt maintains that "Within

the faculty there is a strong [concurrence], though there are intense disagreements about

the choice of books and the appropriate balance between research and teaching. But in

the public at large, there is a growing consensus for a different kind of education, one

that is skill-based and performance tested" (1994, p. 48).

Rorty agrees with Pratt that a developing gulf separates much of the faculty of

American universities and the public that supports them. Attempting to identify a cause

of this unfortunate and rapidly evolving situation, he writes,

> Part of the explanation, I think, is that American intellectuals in Dewey's
>
> day thought their country was a shining historical example. They
>
> identified with it easily. The largest single reason for their loss of
>
> identification was the Vietnam War. The war caused some intellectuals to
>
> marginalize themselves entirely. Others attempted to rehabilitate Kantian
>
> notions in order to say . . . That the War not merely betrayed America's
>
> hope and interests and self-image, but was immoral, one which we had no
>
> right to engage in the first place. (Rorty, 1983, p. 219)

Rorty adds that he believes that Dewey would have found such "self-castigation" to be

pointless and counterproductive. He concludes his comment by observing that although

America's anti-war intellectuals, who included a significant percentage of America's

higher education faculty in their ranks, may have found such behavior cathartic in the

short run, "their long-run effect has been to separate intellectuals from the moral

consensus of the nation rather than alter that consensus" (Rorty, 1983, p. 219). Rorty

reinforces both his point and Pratt's, when he writes:

> The rise of literary criticism to preeminence within the high culture of the
>
> democracies--its gradual and only semiconscious assumption of the
>
> cultural role once claimed (successively) by religion, science, and
>
> philosophy--has paralleled the rise in the proportion of ironists to
>
> metaphysicians among the intellectuals. This has widened the gap between
>
> the intellectuals. For metaphysics is woven into the public rhetoric of
>
> modern liberal society. (1989a, p. 82)

Despite his criticism of the Western intellectual tradition, Rorty is not a nihilist

nor does he deny the social or potential personal value of higher education. He writes,

"truth is eternal and enduring, but it is hard to be sure when you have it. Truthfulness,

like freedom, is tempered, contingent, and fragile. But we can recognize both when we

have them" (1995, p. 205). When attempting to find the truth, Rorty suggests that we

need not turn to the Continent but rather look to our own backyards. Instead of seeking

answers in the works of Plato or Aristotle, we should read James and Dewey. Along

this line of reasoning, Rorty suggests that pragmatism cuts across these

transcendental/empirical distinctions by questioning the common presupposition that an

invidious distinction need be drawn between kinds of truth. For the pragmatists, true

sentences are not true because they correspond to reality, and so there is no need to

worry about what "makes" it true (1983, p. xvi).

Instead of absolute answers and criteria, Rorty sees only social constructs, i.e.,

ideas "constructed by a community to facilitate its inquiry" (1983, p. xlii). At this

juncture, Rorty points out a similarity between the American pragmatists and the French

postmodernists. After citing a quote from Jean-Paul Sartre about the potentially

negative political and social implications of a culture not anchored to some vision of the Truth,[10] Rorty writes,

> This hard saying brings out what ties Dewey and Foucault, James and Nietzsche, together--the sense that there is nothing deep down inside us except what we have put there ourselves, no criterion that we have not created in the course of creating a practice, no standard of reality that is not an appeal to such a criterion, no rigorous argumentation that is not obedience to our conviction. (1983, p. xlii)

For Rorty a criteria does exist for evaluating truth, and it exists historically, a product of experience that emerges from human practice.

Private Irony and Public Hope

I would like to conclude this discussion of Rorty's more general philosophical views by returning to his hope to "hold reality and justice in a single vision" before we move on to consider his more specific ideas about education. Rorty attempts to resolve the dilemma and/or diminish the dissonance that results from concurrently embracing Trotsky and wild orchids in his 1989 book, Contingency, Irony and Solidarity. Even one of his vocal critics, Richard Bernstein, describes the book as "disturbingly challenging" (1990, p. 35). Describing the book's thesis, Rorty writes,

> There is no need to weave one's personal equivalent of Trotsky and one's

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[10] The following is the quote from the always hard Sartre: "Tomorrow, after my death, certain people may decide to establish fascism, and the others may be cowardly or miserable enough to let them get away with it. At that moment, fascism will be the truth of man, and so much the worse for us. In reality, things will be as man has decided they are" (1946, pp. 53-54).

personal equivalent of my wild orchids together. Rather, one should try to

adjust the temptation to tie in one's moral responsibilities to other people

with one's relation to whatever idiosyncratic things or persons one loves

with all one's heart and soul and mind. (1992, p. 147)

This may surprise and dismay some who, like the youthful Rorty of days past, long to

unite public responsibility and private passion. Rorty would say that this confusion is

the product of a modernist mind set. If we see Trotsky and wild orchids, respectively,

as metaphors for public responsibility and private passion, we come full circle, returning

to the leftist accusation that Rorty is a neo-conservative who denies agency and tolerates

human cruelty and humiliation. In <u>Contingency, Irony and Solidarity</u>, Rorty addresses

this issue, not with poetic metaphors, but by creating the "liberal ironist."[11] Rorty's

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[11] A liberal ironist is a person who is concurrently a liberal and an ironist. Rorty

defines an ironist as

someone who fills three conditions: (1) She has radical and continuing

doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been

impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or

books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in her

present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3)

insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her

vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power

not herself. (1989, p. 73)

Rorty adopts Judith Shaklar's definition of a liberal: "people for whom 'cruelty is the

worst thing they do'." (1989, p. 74).

The liberal ironist will be more fully considered in the following discussion;

beliefs about the proper relationship between the public and the private, and the nature and function of the liberal ironist, merit additional consideration because they provide the basis, and determine the outline for, his beliefs about American education.

As we have seen, Rorty rejects the existence of first principles and the idea that truth is discovered rather than found. For him, all truth is contingent--dependent on and shaped by its context, the cultural setting in which it exists, or, more appropriately, where it was created. In effect, each culture produces a distinctive/unique version of truth. Rorty also believes that truth is dynamic, in addition to being contingent. His truth is continually being redefined to meet the unique needs and demands of its parent culture. Thus, no absolute criteria, e.g., discovered truth or first principles, exists to evaluate the representational accuracy of various visions of reality or the legitimacy of different versions of truth in either the public or private domain. Therefore, no moral or philosophical justification exists for privileging any one truth or reality over any other.

Because truth exists initially as a social construct and language provides the vehicle or medium through which people communicate their vision and understanding of reality, Rorty views truth as being a product of language. The idea that an inseparable and defining relationship exists between language, reality and truth is certainly not original to Rorty. This idea, however, proves critical to the development and understanding of his thought.

We have earlier seen that, as a youth, Rorty was vexed and driven by an insatiable passion to "hold reality [wild orchids] and justice [Trotsky] in a single vision" (1992, p. 143). The liberal ironist, after a forty-year quest, resolves the

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however, for the definitive discussion see Chapter Four, "Private irony and liberal hope," of Contingency, Irony and Solidarity (Rorty, 1989, pp. 73-95).

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dilemma not by discovering an answer but by dismissing the question, declaring that it need not be asked.

Understanding the differences between a liberal ironist's and the more traditional modernist's perceptions of the function and purpose of language remains essential to understanding how Rorty arrived at such a solution. A prototypical traditional modernist sees language as both transparent and representational. Their idea of language is intimately involved with, and relates to, their understanding of the nature of reality, knowledge and truth. Not only do they believe that reality exists outside of human consciousness, they also believe that it exists in a knowable and rational form. In addition, they contend that human beings are constructed in such a way that they can obtain intimate and relatively accurate knowledge of that reality. The application of the individual's intellect and the utilization of reason accomplished this feat. Thus, traditional modernist knowledge represents reality. In other words, it reflects a true picture of what is really "out there." Finally, they contend that, because we are all constructed in essentially the same way, and because reality is autonomous, immutable and omnipresent, everyone's knowledge of reality remains essentially the same. For example, a tree's falling remains independent of a human's hearing, but if several people are present and hear the same tree fall, they can agree that the tree has fallen.

Knowledge so obtained can be judged True because it can be independently verified by any normal, i.e., rational, human being by comparing it to reality. If a dispute arises over the status of the tree, if anyone questions the statement "a tree has fallen," the question can be resolved by consulting the fallen tree for verification. The tree becomes the criteria that validates the truth of the statement and legitimates the claimed knowledge of reality. In effect, independent, rational knowledge of reality becomes both the source and the criteria for evaluating Truth.

Within this modernist context, language represents an accurate reflection of Truth. It acts as the vehicle or instrument or tool that humans use to capture and communicate reality. For the traditional modernist, language neither adds nor detracts from reality. Language simply reflects reality as a non-fun-house mirror captures our undistorted image. In effect, we see through language as we look through a transparent pane of window glass to see what is on the other side. Lyotard describes this understanding of language as the "ideology of communicational 'transparency'" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 5).

Things are quite different in Rorty's world. Not only does he reject the traditionalist modernist's notion of reality, knowledge and truth, he also rejects their notion of language and communications. Ironically, Rorty's notion of language and vocabulary shares much in common with the ideas of Romanticism which grew from the eighteenth-century idea that "truth was made rather than found." Fully aware of the political implications, both good and bad, of these ideas, Rorty cites the French Revolution and its idea that "the whole vocabulary of social relations, and the whole spectrum of social institutions, could be replaced almost over night" (1998a). As further example and warning, he offers Orwell's discussion of doublespeak in his 1948 novel, 1984. Rorty believes that Orwell's discussion of human cruelty and the dangers of the misuse of language are so important that he dedicates Chapter 8, "The last intellectual in Europe: Orwell on cruelty," of Contingency, Irony and Solidarity to a discussion of the author and his book (1998a, pp. 168-189).

In effect, Rorty believes that reality cannot exist outside of language. This statement should not be construed as saying that Rorty believes that nothing exists outside of human consciousness. In the following statement he explains his belief about the difference between the world and our understanding or knowledge of it:

We need to make a distinction between the claim that the world is out there and the claim that truth is out there. To say that the world is out there, that it is not our creation, is to say, with common sense, that most things in space and time are the effects of causes which do not include human mental states. To say that truth is not out there is simply to say that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human language, and that human languages are human creations.

Truth cannot be out there--cannot exist independently of the human mind--because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but descriptions of the world are not. Only descriptions of the world can be true or false. The world on its own--unaided by the describing activities of human beings--cannot. (1998a, pp. 4-5)

He later adds, "the world does not speak, only we do" (p. 6). Rorty clearly says not that we or our reality do not exist, but rather that the only knowledge that we can have of reality, both individually and collectively, are creations of a non-representational and very opaque human vocabulary. Although acknowledgment of the relationship among language, truth and the world is critical to the "liberal ironists," before their importance and function can be fully understood, they must be broken down into their constituent parts, analyzed and then reassembled. Once this has been done, the liberal ironist becomes more transparent.

Rorty's working definition of a liberal is parsimonious and straight forward: "Liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do" (1998a, p. xv). Trotsky and Norman Thomas were liberals. The definition of an ironist is more complex. S/he is "the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her own most central beliefs and desires--someone sufficiently historicist and nominalist to have

abandoned the idea that those central beliefs and desires refer back to something beyond the reach of time and chance" (Rorty, 1989a, p. xv). Sartre with his passion for personal responsibility, or Camus with his involvement in the French Resistance, were ironists. By combining the liberal and the ironist, Rorty creates the "liberal ironist," whom he describes as, "people who include among the ungroundable desires their own hope that suffering will be diminished, that humiliation of human beings by other human beings may cease" (1989a, p. xv). A "liberal ironist" could concurrently embrace Trotsky *and* wild orchids.

According to Rorty, the majority of people who think of themselves as liberal do not agree with many of his ideas, particularly those about contingency and irony. Most of these nay-saying or non-ironist liberals Rorty describes as "liberal metaphysician[s]." Such people are liberals because they agree with Rorty's assertion about cruelty. They are metaphysicians, however, because they also believe that a moral statement like, "cruelty is the worst thing a person can do," cannot "rationally" be made without recourse to an external authority, such as the Word of God, or inalienable rights. A liberal metaphysician might cynically ask, "Why not be cruel?" Such a question exemplifies the "over-philosophizing," the turn of mind that allows a person to demand justification before sanctioning human cruelty. That concerns Rorty, and he warns against it.

For the liberal ironist, the question becomes at best moot and at worst dangerous. Rorty tells us that, "For the liberal ironist, there is no answer to the question 'why not be cruel?'--no non circular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible" (1989a, p. xv). The ironist has been taught by her/his parents and schools, and by the culture at large, that cruelty is bad and s/he believes it passionately. They, however, can offer no proof for their belief nor do they feel a need or desire to try.

Rorty and the liberal ironist believe that we must simply stop wasting time searching for that which does not exist. We must understand the incommensurableness of the public and the private domains, accept that we will never discover a rational foundation upon which to base our beliefs and actions. We must simply act on our beliefs. While the metaphysical liberal engages in a quest for nonexistence first principles and final answers, people, real people, continue to suffer. This possibly unnecessary and potentially preventable suffering represents another example of the type of terror necessarily attendant upon the modernist metanarrative. Alternatively, for Rorty, our individual suffering and the suffering of other human beings provides the only justification required for action.

The meaning of Trotsky and wild orchids is revealed: in the United States and similarly wealthy and democratic cultures the public--the domain of the liberal--and the private--the domain of the ironist--are uniquely distinct and should be separate. Each serves different purposes. Each is driven by different passions. If only one message may be learned from Rorty, it might be that difference does not necessarily justify privilege. Individuals have both public and private lives, they can be both liberals and ironists. People pursue both reality and justice, but they can never hold them in a single vision. The young Rorty found this incompatibility of passion the cause of great dissonance and distress. The mature Rorty finds it the cause of comfort and hope, because the separation of "the domain of the liberal [public hope] and the domain of the ironist [private irony] . . . makes it possible for a single person to be both" (1989a, p. 198).

The political course of action open to the liberal ironist unfolds. No longer fettered by wasteful and meaningless over-philosophizing in the search for nonexistent first principles, no longer feeling a need to justify abhorrence of human suffering and

humiliation and their resultant passion for democracy, the liberal ironist may actively enter the political arena. S/he, like Rorty, reforms rather than revolts, and language is his/her primary instrument. The objective of political action is to promote democracy and optimize personal/individual freedom by strengthening democratic institutions and their structural safeguards. A new vocabulary that challenges the old must be created. This action changes the rules of the prevailing word game. It produces a new language that will result in the creation of a new more humane, tolerant and inclusive reality-- Rorty's "liberal utopia." In explaining how we might help to create such a utopia, in addition to warning us to guard against being seduced by common sense,[12] Rorty also suggests that we view the process of altering an existing vocabulary as long-term and developmental. He hopes that each generation will be a little more liberal and a little more imbued with a sense of the ironic than the generation that preceded it. Based on this reasoning, Rorty privileges education as a liberalizing social influence.

The following quotation, which contains Rorty's reflection on his lifelong hero's views on democracy and education, I offer as both a conclusion and an introduction:

> [John] Dewey offered neither the conservative's philosophical justification of democracy by reference to eternal values nor the radical's justification of it by reference to decreasing alienation. He did not try to justify democracy at all. He saw democracy not as founded upon the nature of human beings or reason or reality but as a promising experiment engaged in by a particular herd of a particular species of animals--our species and our herd. He asks us to put our faith in ourselves--in the utopian hope characteristic of a democratic community--rather than asking for reassurance or backup

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[12] Rorty pointed out that "The opposite of irony is common sense." (1989a, p. 74)

from outside.

This notion of a species of animals gradually taking control of its own evolution by changing its environmental conditions leads Dewey to say . . . that "growth itself is the moral end" and also to say that "to protect, sustain and direct growth is the chief *ideal* of education." (1989b, p.6)

Rorty on Education

Summary Review

Rorty's ideas and beliefs resulted from a life-long struggle to reconcile conflicting passions. Driven by years of frustration, and an inability to believe in God, first principles or the divinity of science, Rorty created the liberal ironist reformer and reached the conclusion that "common sense," compromise and unity are not always possible or even desirable. This realization led to his controversial separating of the public and private domains and his emerging affirmation of contingency, irony and solidarity. Many of Rorty's views, which have significant political implications, have stimulated critics from both extremes of the political spectrum. Of specific interest to this narrative, and of particular concern for Rorty, is the leftist charge of neo-conservatism based on Rorty's perceived denial of political agency--a major concern of radical feminists.

The final major theme emerging from Rorty's work that influences his ideas about education deals with the function of language and its relationship to reality. He believes that our language shapes, even produces, our vision and understanding of reality, both personal and private. He further contends that reality can be modified by altering the language used to describe it.

Although a philosophy of education can be inferred from Rorty's writings, such an act of interpretation is not necessary. He explicitly describes his views and opinions

concerning education. The reader, however, should be aware that Rorty would not describe his views on education as a philosophy. He expresses concern about "the relevance of philosophy to education," adding that he has the same concerns about philosophy's relevance to politics (Rorty, 1990, p. 41). He then explains that the kind of politics in which he chooses to participate "is the enterprise of developing institutions which will protect the weak against the strong." This statement significantly speaks to the heart of his major body of work, and also provides the foundation and justification for his views about education. Rorty summarizes those views in the essay's introduction. He believes that education appears to

> consist of two quite distinct enterprises: lower education is mostly a matter of *socialization*, of trying to inculcate a sense of citizenship, and higher education is a mostly a matter of *individuation*, of trying to awaken the individual's imagination in the hope that she will become able to re-create herself.

Reflecting on what he has just written, he adds that he is "not sure" how philosophy could much further any of these "enterprises." Immediately after making that statement, he qualifies it by speculating that, if philosophy has any "social function," it is a "therapeutic one," specifically "helping people get out from under outdated philosophical ideas, helping break the crust of convention." He then suggests that "new, concrete alternatives," such as developing "a good new way of setting

college entrance exams or licensing teachers" are much more effective facilitators of socially and individually useful educational "enterprise" than philosophy (1990, p. 41).

Political Bifurcation

The opinions about education described above summarize a position that Rorty

had more fully developed the preceding year (1989) and presented in the keynote address of the 75th annual meeting of the Association of American Colleges. The address was reprinted later that same year in Dissent under the title "Education Without Dogma" and again in Liberal Education under the title "Education, Socialization, & Individuation." This document adopts as source the version published by Liberal Education (1989b). In that article, Rorty states his belief that contemporary American education is the "satisfactory" product of tacit compromise between members of the political right, whom he describes as "conservative(s)," and members of the political left whom he describes as "radical(s)." He believes that the structure and function of education in the United States is shaped, if not determined, by an ongoing political struggle between these two major opposing ideological groups. Therefore, Rorty's perception of, and reaction to, these vying groups, and his understanding of the political environment in which American schools function, must be considered to contextualize his views and ideas about education.

According to Rorty, the "right"--or conservative--believes that a primary function of society is the inculcation of it members with the Truth--"old, familiar, self-evident truths" (1989b, p. 2). In modern societies, formal education exists as primary means of accomplishing this function. In contrast, the "left" sees these Truths as "part of the crust of convention that needs to be broken through, vestiges of old-fashioned modes of thoughts from which the new generation deserves to be freed" (1989b, p.2). For a radical, encouraging students to accept and internalize conservative Truths represents betrayal. Such encouragement amounts to teaching students to be the instruments of their own victimization.

Although Rorty never specifically uses the term to describe them, most of the individuals, both conservatives and radical, that he discusses qualify for the label

"modernists." As such, they all privilege freedom and view its propagation as the prime

objective of education. Their disagreement, therefore, is not over the ultimate end of

education, but rather over the best way to accomplish that end. As described by Rorty,

both the right and left believe that there exists a necessary and natural connection

between Truth and Freedom. He also asserts that they "Both argue for this connection

on the basis of distinctions between nature and convention and between what is

essentially human and what is inhuman. Both accept the identification of both truth and

freedom with the essentially human" (1989b, p. 2).

Conservatives and radicals also disagree about the relative virtues of America's

social, political and economic systems and institutions. Specifically, "They differ over

whether the present socioeconomic setup is in accordance, more or less, with nature,"

and whether that "setup" contributes to or thwarts the realization of human

potentialities. While conservatives believe that the "acculturation of society's norms"

will produce freedom, radicals see increased alienation as the only possible result of

such action (1989b, p. 2). In other words, conservatives basically support the existing

socioeconomic and political systems that exist in the United States.

Rooted deeply in the rationalist-Christian/modernist tradition, conservatives, as

described by Rorty, also believe that humans are rational beings, who exist in a rational

and knowable world. Although not fully satisfied with the status quo, conservatives

generally support public education as it currently exists, because they believe that it

promotes reason, values the truth and "sets forth some of the traditional slogans of our

society." And though they see it as significantly flawed, most conservatives believe that

the current educational system is still far better than any of the alternatives offered by

the left. According to Rorty, "what the right describes as cultivating the young, the left

describes as alienating them from their true selves" (1989b, p. 4).

The left, as portrayed by Rorty, believes that American society deprives its young--its students--of both their freedom and their "essential humanity." Society does this so that by the time young people enter the adult population and join the work force "they may function as frictionless cogs in a vast, inhuman, socioeconomic machine" (1989b, p. 4). In other words, radicals believe that maintaining the status quo insures that the most privileged segments of the society retain their privilege while the most marginalized remain marginalized.

Unlike the right, the left does not necessarily believe that the truth is out there waiting to be discovered by rational inquiry and scientific investigation or that it is manifest in either middle class norms or the inalienable rights described in "The Declaration of Independence." Truth, for the left, will be discovered after a person undergoes liberation from the distorting, marginalizing and alienating influences of society, according to Rorty. Thus, in direct opposition to conservatives, radicals hold that the educational system should strive "to make the young realize that they need not and should not consent to this alienating process of socialization" (1989b, p.2).

Summing up, Rorty views conservatives and radicals as agreeing on general "abstract philosophical topics," i.e., the existence of a fundamental knowable Truth, the virtues of freedom and the necessary and natural relationship between the two. They differ, however, over political issues, such as how best to achieve freedom, and the merits of our social and economic systems. In essence, Rorty contends that politics, not philosophy, fundamentally separates the left and the right in the United States.

Consistent with his embrace of the ironic, Rorty concurrently embraces and rejects aspects of positions associated with both the right and the left. For example, he believes the conservatives incorrect in thinking that humans possess either a "truth-tracking faculty" called "reason" or a "true self" which education brings to

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consciousness. Both conservatives and radicals conceive of Truth as that which the individual sees after various constraints have been removed. Alternatively, Rorty defines truth as "whatever beliefs result from free and open encounter of opinions, without asking whether this result agrees with something beyond the encounter . . . whether this be conceived as the will of God, or the layout of Plato's realm of the Ideals, or the encounter of atoms in the void" (1989b, p. 5). As we have seen, Rorty rejects the upper-case universal Truth in favor of a lower-case localized truth. Cast in postmodernist language, the conservatives and the radicals embrace the grand or metanarrative, while Rorty favors the local "petite" narrative.

Rorty also rejects radical and conservative ideas about freedom and its necessary connection to truth. He does believe that a relationship exists, but he describes the relationship between freedom and truth as an individual's freedom to engage the members of his/her community in dialogue without fear of restraint and the ability to act on the ideas that emerge from that dialogue without fear of restraint. No mystical dimensions to Rorty's freedom, or the lower-case truth that it produces, exist. For Rorty, truth is simply the product of sociopolitical freedom, the sort of freedom found in liberal bourgeois democracies.

After citing Dewey as his inspiration, Rorty admonishes his audience to substitute hope for truth. He believes that we should place our faith in ourselves, not in God, First Principles or the "true self." Alternatively, Rorty believes that

> There is no such thing as human nature in the deep sense in which Plato
> and Strauss use this term. Nor is there such a thing as alienation from
> one's essential humanity due to societal repression in the deep sense made
> familiar by Rousseau and the Marxists. There is only the shaping of an
> animal into a human being by a process of socialization, followed (with

luck) by the self-individualization and self-creation of that human being through his or her own later revolt against that very process. (1989b, p. 5)

In addition to placing hope in ourselves, Rorty believes that our hope should be placed in democracy, which he describes as a "promising experiment engaged in by a particular herd of a particular animal" (1989b, p. 5). Whatever solace we know, we derive from the feeling of solidarity that we have with other people.

These ideas constitute the heart of Rorty's work and provide justification for dichotomizing our lives as well as our education. As discussed earlier, Rorty believes that, if our lives are to have meaning, we must take charge of our personal environments and begin the lifelong process of recreating ourselves in our own terms and in our own languages. The self that we strive to create must reflect our abhorrence of human suffering and manifest a desire to make life better for ourselves and those around us, those who live in our community. To engage in this private quest, we must have freedom from public constraints, i.e., social, economic and political forces that limit our personal freedom and prevent us from pursuing our personal passion(s). Rorty contends that the best way to insure freedom is to support and strengthen bourgeois democratic institutions. As we have seen, separation of the public and the private plays a critical role in the development and understanding of Rorty's personal and political thought. This separation is also important to the development of his ideas about education, and to our understanding of those ideas.

Educational Bifurcation

The divergent political perspectives of the right and left, as might be expected, translate into dramatically differing views about education and its role in our society. According to Rorty, these differences and the ongoing struggle for dominance that they stimulate have produced an unspoken compromise that divides education in America

into two apparently antagonistic subsystems.[13] As a result of this tacit and unspoken

understanding, control of primary and secondary education falls to the right, while

control of postsecondary or higher education is ceded to the left. Consequently, all

substantive policy concerning secondary and elementary schools, including curricular

form and content, is effectively determined by "local consensus" through popularly

elected local school boards. Teachers in these schools enjoy no real autonomy or

substantive control over what or how they teach. By comparison, most college and

university faculty function in an environment essentially impervious to local political

pressure. Compared to elementary and high school teachers, they function

autonomously, setting their own agendas and determining what they teach and its

manner of presentation. The university environment that Rorty describes is reminiscent

of Cohen and March's "organized anarchy" in which the faculty function as defacto

policy makers much like Lipsky's "street-level bureaucrat."

Because the pre-university and post-secondary subsystems that make up the

American educational system are both ideologically driven, their respective

technologies, and organizational structure and culture, along with their goals and

missions, are quite different. According to Rorty, socialization, which he defines as,

"getting the students to accept the moral and political common sense of the society as it

is" (1989b, p. 4), serves as the primary goal of elementary and secondary schools. In

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[13]Rorty does not suggest that the division of American education results from a

political conspiracy or even a conscious decision. The structure that he describes

naturally occurs as a result of the balance of power, or equilibrium, that exists in the

struggle for political dominance between "conservatives" and "radicals," in which the

right currently controls K-12 education and the left controls post-secondary education.

other words, high school and grade school and their faculties assume responsibility for teaching students to be good citizens and for insuring that they have the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully function in the larger society as well as in their own local communities. Rorty does not dispute, in fact, he defends, the right of any society to "inculcate" its citizens. He also believes society may expect schools to teach its students what it generally believes to be true and how to function as good citizens. As described by Rorty, faculty staffing primary and secondary schools, reflecting the mission of their institutions and the nature of their duties, tend to be more conservative then their colleagues in colleges and universities.

When a person moves from high school to a college or a university s/he confronts faculty more liberal than those s/he knew in high school, and an institution whose primary function is "individuation." This process Rorty describes as encouraging students to be "a little more conscious of the cruelty built into our institutions, of the need for reform, of the need to be skeptical about the current consensus" (1989b, p. 4). In essence, an American university or college should teach its students to question the values and the language that they were taught in grade school and high school. The teachers in elementary and high schools should help students master the vocabulary of their society and speak the language of their parents. Once students reach a college or a university, their professors should encourages them to develop and speak a personal language, a language of their own creation, a language of self-creation.

Rorty's views about American education clearly reflect the imprint and results of his long-time struggle to integrate his public and private passions. We have seen that, after years of searching for a solution, he came to the realization that he had been on a fool's errand. He now believes not only in the impossibility of reconciliation of

one's public and private passions, but also that such a reconciliation remains undesirable. Although both are meritorious, because of their potential conflict--one privileges the self or the private while the other privileges the community or the public--both passions can be concurrently pursued with equal enthusiasm and without prejudice toward either only when separate and pursued independently. This does not mean, however, that an individual's success in, or the state of, either domain is independent. Although the private and the public must be viewed separately, Rorty believes that the realization of private irony depends upon the institutional and structural embodiment of public hope. The two seemingly contradictory, but necessary and interdependent components, of the American educational system that Rorty calls "socialization" and "individuation" have a similar relationship and function.

Socialization

Socialization acts as the first branch in Rorty's bifurcated educational model or system. The chronological ordering suggested by Rorty is not coincidental. He describes an educational process both developmental and sequential. Socialization must come first, because it provides the necessary foundation that both supports and makes possible the second phase, individuation.

Socialization teaches students society's values, including the importance of democracy and freedom, and the necessity of supporting, strengthening and improving society's institutions. Rorty contends that socialization has historically been, and should continue to be, the primary function of elementary and secondary schools. Although most teachers find impossible the total separation of their beliefs from what they teach, he maintains that schools and their teachers should strive to assume an ideologically neutral posture and resist editorializing about, or passing judgement on, the content of the materials or the social values that they teach. For example, a high

school teacher might believe that capitalism and democracy are fundamentally flawed economic and political systems that should be replaced by mercantilism and monarchy, but s/he should attempt to resist the temptation to share those beliefs with students. According to Rorty, the purpose of socialization and the function of elementary and high schools and their teachers is "familiarizing" the nation's young with what the society holds to be true, "whether it is true or not." If teachers find these truths unacceptable and are unwilling or unable to keep their own counsel, Rorty believes they should "find another profession," i.e., they should not be engaged in the socialization of young people (Rorty, 1990, p. 42). Discussing this aspect of Rorty's views about K-12 education, Fritzman writes,

> Neither primary and secondary nor higher education should be concerned principally with purveying truth. The central purpose of primary and secondary education is socialization, although Rorty allows that social criticism is a component of the tradition that is conveyed. Teachers must allow their doubts about the truth of what they teach to affect what is taught "only on the margins." (1990, p. 378)

As amazing or offensive as this may sound to some people, Rorty believes that the nation's elementary and secondary schools are not a fitting place for the "America sucks sweepstakes" or people who promote it.

Rorty states that Dewey strongly influences his ideas about the social function of education, and his belief that the socialization of young people should be an essential part of America's public schools. Rorty validates his understanding of Dewey's understanding of socialization, which he describes as students "acquiring an image of themselves as heirs to a tradition of increasing liberty and raising hope." He adds that children should be taught

to think of themselves as proud and loyal citizens of a country, which,

slowly and painfully, threw off a foreign yoke, freed its slaves,

enfranchised its women, restrained its robber barons and licensed its trade

unions, liberalized its religious and moral tolerance, and built colleges in

which 50 percent of its population could enroll--a country that numbered

Jefferson, Thoreau, Susan B. Anthony, Eugene Debs, Woodrow Wilson,

Walter Ruther, FDR, Rosa Parks, and James Baldwin among its citizens.

(1989b, p. 7)

In other words, Rorty believes that pre-college students should be inculcated with the

narrative of freedom, which includes an array of heroes worthy of emulation.

Rorty argues that such a narrative can have meaning only when supported by a

firm foundation of information. Children must be taught the social, cultural, economic

and political history of their country in order to develop solidarity with other human

beings as adults. If people are to comprehend the importance of the Wagner Act, the

NLRB and FDR, if they are to understand how they benefit from the sacrifice and

suffering of people like Walter Ruther and Caesar Calves, Rorty believes that they must

be well grounded in the fundamentals of our economic and political system. For

example, as high school students, they should be taught the history of the American

labor movement and how a coalition of government and business conspired to suppress

the attempts of America's industrial workers to organize.

Despite his almost innate leaning to the left, Rorty agrees with the conservatives

on one major issue--that primary and secondary schools (socialization) should be

content-based. He believes that to be good citizens, and to be properly prepared to enter

a college or a university and begin the process of self-creation, students must be

"culturally literate" when they leave high school. They should know how to spell and

punctuate a sentence. Rorty argues that achievement of this state justifies the conservative demand that school should be a place where "information is stacked up in the heads of students." Rorty expresses solidarity with his friend and University of Virginia colleague, E. D. Hirsch, and, on this issue, with the conservatives. However, he distances himself from those who emphasize process and place student interest over the curricular content; here his ideas seem to conflict with those of Dewey. In response to critics who claim that an information-based curriculum does not maintain student interest, Rorty writes, "Sure, they get bored, but boredom is not the worst thing that can happen to a kid. Ignorance is much worse" (1989c, p. 29).

Once students have been socialized and they achieve a state of cultural literacy, they may move on to a university or college and begin the process of individuation, except for those confronting external barriers to their progress. Socialization accomplishes a number of objectives, whose respective values vary depending on the perspective of the observer. For the student, socialization provides a basic grounding in, and a working knowledge of, the rules of their society. This is essential to student development of the knowledge and skills necessary to successfully function as an adult and to adequately take advantage of the opportunities offered by a university education. From the perspective of the society, socialization remains necessary in order for the student to function as a good citizen, i.e., know the difference between socially acceptable and anti-social behavior. Socialization also teaches individuals to act in a way that contributes to the good of their community and the general welfare of its residents. Finally, from the perspective of higher education, the socialization that takes place in elementary and secondary schools is a necessary precondition to the individuation that hopefully occurs once the student reaches a college or a university. Rorty assumes that education, including socialization and individuation, does not take

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place in a vacuum, but rather is developmental and sequential.

Individuation

Ironically, the relationship between the functions of precollege and college education, i.e., between socialization and individuation, as described by Rorty, appears to be contradictory--one teaches and the other unteaches. However, these two functions, if properly implemented, actually have a necessary and complementary relationship. Elementary and secondary school provide students with the necessary basic skills and information, or literacy, needed when they enter the university and begin their higher learning.

In thinking about the relationship that exists between secondary and postsecondary education in Rorty's model, I am reminded of something I read many years ago. The story is analogous to, and well illustrates, the how and why of Rorty's educational paradigm. The author, whose identity I cannot recall, speculated that Einstein would have been a rather common place caveman. He then argued that what set Einstein apart was not his innate intelligence, towering intellect or incomparable creativity, positing that a number of conditions and factors were necessary to transform what would have been an average Neanderthal into one of the most influential people in Western, if not world, history. According to the author's thesis, context, language and cultural literacy are all important. The Einstein we know could have only existed in a relatively wealthy and technologically advanced/developed culture supporting him and his work. Our Einstein required a private audience who could understand and appreciate the significance of what he was saying and then translate his thoughts into a publicly accessible narrative. Finally, according to the story, Einstein required the language of higher mathematics and physics. Although he transformed those languages, along with a good part of humanity's views on reality, without a basic level of cultural

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literacy and mastery of a language(s) that allowed him to conceptualize his ideas and express his thoughts, he would have been unable to speak and we would have been unable to listen.

Because of its developmental aspect, socialization does not end when a student graduates high school. In a very real sense, only then may the final phase of socialization begin--the part called individuation. Rorty provides the following description of the "social function"of American higher education:

> to help students see that the national narrative around which their socialization has centered is an open-ended one. It is to tempt students to make themselves into people who can stand to their own pasts as Emerson, Anthony, Debs, and Baldwin stood to their pasts. (1989b, p. 8)

In Rorty's words, this is done in the hope that students will begin noticing "everything that is paltry and mean and unfair in their surroundings." His objective is to help students become liberal reformers who will strive to make America a better place for all its residents, not to convert them into nihilistic or radical revolutionaries. To insure that students do not lose hope or faith in the promise of America, they must be well grounded in the history, culture and mythology of the United States. In addition, they must have a commitment to the promises and virtues of American bourgeois democracy.

This grounding, i.e., socialization, that students receive in elementary school and high school becomes critical to the success of both university students and faculty. Only with such adequately prepared students can faculty safely and successfully carry out Rorty's charge to "make vivid and concrete the failures of the country of which we remain loyal citizens to live up to its own ideals--the failure of America to be what it knows it ought to become." By performing this task, faculty fulfill what Rorty

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describes as the traditional function of the reformist liberal left, as opposed to the revolutionary radical right and "the most valuable function of American college teachers in the humanities and social sciences" (1989b, p.8).

According to Rorty, individuation has as its major objective making students aware that things can be made better. Individuation allows student belief in the virtues and possibility of liberal reform and prevents their becoming passive or revolutionary. This is important because, in Rorty's view, "the only important political distinction . . . is that between the use of force and the use of persuasion" (1998a, pp. 83-84). Consistent with this line of thought, Rorty's liberal ironist's "preferred form of argument is dialectical in the sense that she takes the unit of persuasion to be a vocabulary rather than a proposition. Her method is redescription rather than inference" (1989a, p. 77).

As envisioned by Rorty, non-vocational higher education, like the entire educational process, should be both developmental and progressive. A given generation of students will hopefully be liberalized in their views as a result of their initial socialization and subsequent individuation. With any luck, "the best" of cohorts will be motivated to modify, i.e., liberalize, the "conventional wisdom" that they and their society holds true. This modification will then result in a slight altering of the socialization of the succeeding generation of students. The vocabulary and language that society uses to describe, or create, its reality will become a little more liberal. In this context, i.e., Rorty's idealized context, to become more liberal is to become more sensitive to the suffering of other human beings, to move a little farther from an "I" and a little closer to a "we" perspective. This movement forms the basis for solidarity with other human beings. The solidarity that Rorty envisions does not extend to all human kind, but is restricted to the members of one's community. Solidarity is both localized

and selective, because we can only communicate with and understand other people if we speak the same language(s)--experience the same reality.

The following statement both describes and reflects Rorty's affirmation of the virtues and nature of social evolution and reflects his privileging of liberal reform and hope over radical revolution and Truth. In his words,

> To hope that this way will only be *somewhat* different is to hope that the society will remain reformist and democratic rather than be convulsed by revolution. To hope that it nevertheless will be *perceptibly* different is to remind oneself that growth is indeed the only end which democratic higher education can serve, and also to remind oneself that the direction of growth in unpredictable. (1989b, p. 7)

Although a staunch supporter of the historical promise of America and its brand of bourgeois democracy, Rorty is neither provincial nor jingoistic. Reflecting his reformist nature, he envisions beginning with a local narrative, local solidarity, and building outward. Education exposes students to more and more different final vocabularies, a process dependent on and necessitating what Rorty refers to as "enlarging the canon" (1989a, p. 81). This exposure allows the boundaries of our community to progressively expand. Rorty suggests that after we have inculcated a "narrative of national hope" we should consider "setting it in the larger context of a narrative of world history and literature--all against the background of the world picture" (1989b, p. 7). As the number of people with whom we feel solidarity increases, so should the actualization of the liberal's dream of eliminating cruelty and humiliation.

An expansion of the bounds of human solidarity resulting in a decrease in human suffering addresses one of the two major objectives of non-vocational higher

education. It also addresses one of Rorty's two passions. Trotsky has been served, but the wild orchids remain untended.

Although the separation of socialization and individuation from one another remains critical to the educational model that we attempt to extract from Rorty's writings, neither can or should be separated from his idea of contingency. As discussed, Rorty rejects the idea of absolute truth in all its possible forms, replacing it with a localized or contingent truth. For Rorty the truth of a thing is determined by, or contingent upon, its context. Therefore, he stresses the importance of viewing all things in relation to all others. Consistent with this understanding, he rejects all hierarchies of knowledge, i.e., privileging of one truth over any other truth. He believes that all anyone can ever say with any authority is that at a specific point in time a thing is true for us and others who share our current final vocabulary and speak our language, i.e., other members of our community. This sharing of truth(s) or beliefs is the basis for human solidarity. In fact, socialization determines who we are. Confirming the reductionary effect that unchallenged socialization has on the individual, Rorty writes that people consist only of "what has been socialized into them--their ability to use language, and thereby to exchange beliefs and desires with other people" (1989a, p. 177). Although socialization performs many essential and beneficial functions, it allows us the ability to speak only a language imposed on us by others, to know only truths and a reality not our own. This type of "programmed" exchange, whereby we trade with others ideas that are not really our own, actually prevents true solidarity. If individuals speak exclusively the language of their culture, they come together on a false basis created by someone or something outside themselves, apart from their real desires. This makes impossible honest, personal interaction between self-defined individuals as a basis for the sharing communities, i.e., the solidarity, that Rorty projects

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as the answer to a search for reality. Such communities, such solidarity may exist only if the individual looks beyond her/his basis of socialization to imagine something different. They must struggle to redefine themselves and their reality in a language of their own creation. Communities and solidarity cannot exist without socialization, but untempered socialization precludes the possibility of communication between self-defined, as opposed to other-defined, individuals.

Within this context, a prime objective of higher learning, or individuation, is to help students become liberal ironists and experience solidarity by instilling within them a sense of contingency and irony. Rorty bases his belief that this should be the sole function of colleges and universities in the area of nonvocational education on the conviction that "the point of social organization is to let everyone have a chance at self-creation to the best of his or her ability, and that . . . goal requires, beside peace and wealth, the standard 'bourgeois freedoms'" (1989a, p. 84). As we have seen, Rorty bases this conviction on "the historical fact" that, without the protection of bourgeois liberal society, or similar social and political institutions, "people will be less able to work out their private salvation, create their private self-images, reweave their webs of belief and in the light of what ever new people and books they happen to encounter" (1989a, pp. 84-85) while studying at the university. The most that a society or a university can do is to create an environment in which every individual has the opportunity and freedom to search for wild orchids. In such a situation, Rorty believes that only two appropriate areas of public concern exist: "(1) how to balance the needs of peace, wealth, and freedom when conditions require that one of these goals be sacrificed to one of the others and (2) how to equalize opportunities of self-creation and then leave people alone to use, or neglect, their opportunities" (1989a, p. 85).

At the heart of individuation and a university education must exist a willingness

to step beyond socialization while retaining its hope, and to champion democracy and the rights of others while engaging in the egoistic pursuit of self-creation. The liberal ironist concurrently serves two passions without privileging/marginalizing either. To help us become liberal ironists remains the objective of higher learning in Rorty's postmodern liberal utopia. Consistent with his postmodern vision, Rorty does not provide a blueprint for university faculty and administrators explaining how they can guide and facilitate their students' individuation. He does, however, provide some interesting reflections and some worthwhile ideas that merit further consideration. Reminiscent of his warning against over philosophizing, Rorty writes:

> Carrying out this function cannot be made a matter of explicit institutional policy because if it is being done right, it is too complicated, controversial, and tendentious to be the subject of agreement in a faculty meeting. Nor is it the sort of thing that can be explained easily to the governmental authorities or trustees who supply cash. It is a matter that must be left up to the individual college teacher to do or not to do as they think fit, as their sense of responsibility to their students and their society inspires them. (1989b, p. 8)

Rorty and Postmodern Higher Education

The following section primarily concerns itself with Rorty's vision of the mission and function of higher education in an evolving postmodern future. His ideas about, reflections on and recommendations for American higher education represent well Rorty's "philosophy" regarding the relationship between learning and socialization and individuation.

What Students Should Know When They Go to University

Transmitting information should be the responsibility of primary and secondary

schools, not of colleges and universities. However, according to Rorty, "The high schools are not doing their jobs" (1989b, p. 8). Students are not adequately prepared, i.e., culturally literate, when they graduate high school to enter the university. Rorty partly attributes this unfortunate circumstance to a lack of financial resources and to a set of changing social and cultural conditions that someone like Dewey could never have anticipated. He contends that Dewey never conceived of students graduating from an American high school and not knowing who came first: "Plato or Shakespeare, Napoleon or Lincoln, Frederic Douglas or Martin Luther King, Jr." Rorty further argues that Dewey assumed that nothing could prevent elementary and secondary schools from "piling on information; the problem he saw was getting them to do other things as well" (1989b, p. 8). Dewey was wrong, however, according to Rorty, because,

> He could not have foreseen that precollege teachers would be paid one-fifth
>
> of what doctors are paid. Nor did he foresee that an increasingly greedy
>
> and heartless American middle class would let the quality of education a
>
> child receives become proportional to the assessed value of its parent's real
>
> estate. Finally, he did not foresee that most children would spend thirty
>
> hours a week watching televised fantasies, nor that the cynicism of those
>
> who produce these fantasies would carry over into our children's
>
> vocabularies of moral deliberation. (1989b, p.7)

The failure of high schools and grade schools to fulfill their responsibilities means that universities must serve as "finishing schools" and complete the student's socialization (1989b, p.8). Because society forces university faculty to do remedial work, which Rorty describes as "just an extra chore, analogous to the custodial function forced upon high school teachers" (1989b, p.8), they are denied the opportunity and freedom to

passionately engage students and facilitate their individuation. In addition to denying students the opportunity to engage in higher learning or what Rorty calls "edification," deferring socialization until after students graduate high school is undesirable because, by the time they reach the university, "students are too old and too restless to put up with the process." Rorty concludes his consideration of remediation by observing that, although students may benefit from developmental classes, "Carrying out such remedial tasks is not the social function of colleges and universities." Because of the developmental relationship between socialization and individuation, until grade schools and high schools begin doing or are allowed to do their jobs, colleges and universities will never be able to do theirs.

What Students Should and Should Not Learn in University

The following discussion is cast within the context of the observations and warnings considered in the preceding section. Because K-12 education and its inadequacies and/or reform do not represent the primary focus of this dissertation, this discussion moves on to consider Rorty's views about the future of the American University. However, the close and necessary interrelationship between K-12 and higher education must be acknowledged. The relative success of elementary or high school teachers in their respective classrooms remains basically independent of the performance, and success or failure, of their collegiate colleagues. The relationship as described by Rorty, however, is not reciprocal. If primary and secondary teachers fail to adequately do their jobs, i.e., to successfully socialize their students while helping them achieve at least a minimum level of cultural literacy, the mission and the task of the university professor are substantially altered and made much more difficult, if not impossible. Thus, primary and secondary education may choose to ignore, or assume a politically hostile posture toward, higher education with relative impunity. Higher

education does not share that luxury. It can not ignore, let alone damage or do harm to, K-12 education without harming itself.

Therefore, Rorty believes that questions like, "What should students learn in college?" should be left unasked. From his perspective, a more appropriate question is, "What should they [students] know when they come out of higher school?" (1989b, p. 9). Grade schools and high schools are the places where information should be piled on the heads of students. According to Rorty, "By the time students reach college, they should have finished absorbing the best that has been thought and said and should have started becoming suspicious of it" (1989b, 9).

University students, with the help of the faculty, will use what they learned during their pre-college years as a foundation on which they may develop a new personal language complete with its own unique final vocabulary. This difficult task must be undertaken without recourse to metanarratives and without the use of transparent metalanguages. In Rorty's "ironist view," there is "no center for the self" nor is there such a thing as "a 'natural' order of justification for beliefs or desires." There are only "different ways of weaving new candidates for belief and desire" (Rorty, 1989a, pp. 83-84). Critical to determining the appearance of the fabric produced by this weaving is the "appearance-reality distinction" and the contingency of our language-- "whether what the common sense of our own culture shares with Plato and Kant is a tip-off to the way the world is, or whether it is just the characteristic mark of the discourse of people inhabiting a certain chunk of space-time" (Rorty, 1989a, p. 76). This remains higher education's final object of inquiry.

Rorty believes and argues that neither vocational training nor the transmission of information serves as the objective of higher education. Rather, the facilitation of students who must select the final vocabulary that they will use to define themselves

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and determine the contours of their reality acts as that objective. Rorty hopes that colleges and universities will help produce the kind of individual who will "notice suffering when it occurs" and "not be limited by her own final vocabulary when faced with the possibility of humiliating someone with a quite different vocabulary" (1989a, p. 93). This kind of person he earlier defined as a liberal ironist. This kind of person Rorty would surely define as educated, or possibly edified.

<div align="center">The Golden Mean: Training and Edification</div>

Vocationalism

Vocationalism acts as one of the major forces shaping the contours of the university and American post-secondary education. Rorty differentiates the process of individuation in higher education from vocational education or training. He writes that

> a lot of college is--explicitly or implicitly--vocational training. Our hope is that college will be more than vocational school . . . we hope that students can be distracted from their struggle to get into a high-paying profession, and we hope that the professors will not simply try to reproduce themselves by preparing the student to enter graduate school in their own disciplines. (1989b, p. 4)

He adds,

> The point of nonvocational higher education . . . is to help students realize that they can reshape themselves--that they can rework the self-imaging foisted on them by their past, the self-image that makes them competent citizens--into a new self-image, one which they themselves have helped to create. (1989b, p.5)

He uses the term "edification" to describe the process of individuation and to distinguish it from vocational, technical or professional training.

The Importance of Compromise

Although Rorty believes that forces of vocationalism pose a serious threat to the postmodern university, he remains aware of the demands of the real world, including expectations of parents, tax payers, politicians, policy makers and students. As the nation's over-all educational system must accomplish two seemingly antagonistic primary objectives--socialization and individuation--postsecondary education must also strive to accommodate two seemingly antagonistic functions. Rorty argues that administrators should not deny or avoid responsibility for the vocational training that all of the above groups impose on higher education. Rather, he suggests that the "proper business" of American colleges and universities should be to develop and offer a proper "blend of specialized vocational training and provocation to self-creation" (1989b, p. 8). Although he never specifically says so, Rorty seems to believe that concern for the future of vocationalism in higher education is not necessary. It has adequate supporters and advocates, with enough political, economic and social power, to insure that it remains an integral part of the American educational system. The difficult task is not avoiding and/or denying the necessity of vocation. Insuring that the American university avoids conversion into an upscale vocational-technical training school, i.e., avoids consumption by vocationalism, remains a difficult task.

To achieve détente, and to insure the development of a symbiotic relationship between vocational training and edification, requires aware and politically savvy faculty, and skilled and proactive administrators--individuals willing and able to strike a curricular balance between historically antagonistic forces and interests. Only through such willingness will the supporters of edification ever develop the political and economic support necessary to the successful pursuit of their agenda. That agenda includes humanizing the university and developing a faculty and curriculum that will

facilitate student individuation while simultaneously increasing their awareness of, and sensitivity to, the suffering of others.

Function of Administrators in Higher Education

At this point, those of a more sarcastic bent might argue that Rorty begins to sound a bit like Tennessee Williams' Blanche Dubois. He believes that higher education administrators, required to serve the two-headed master of vocationalism and individuation, must accomplish this extremely difficult task partly through indirection. Although the administrator needs to be more concerned about controlling than cultivating vocationalism, the achievement of an environment conducive to individuation remains difficult. It may not be done through direct administrative action or "explicit institutional policy," but rather requires hope, cunning, insight and patience.

Rorty believes that "if it is being done right," individuation or edification remains "too complicated, controversial, and tendentious" to be either "the subject of agreement in a faculty meeting" or easily explained and/or safely presented to "governmental authorities or trustees who supply cash" (1989b, p. 8). He therefore argues (and those of a less sarcastic mind, like Cohen and March or Clark Kerr surely concur) that administrators can only attempt to insulate faculty and students from as many unnecessary internal and external distractions as possible. Concurrently, they must strive to create a supportive environment in which faculty and students have the necessary resources, including autonomy and freedom, to do their jobs. In other words, an administrator in Rorty's idealized university should make sure that the lights are on and the roof does not leak, that the bills are paid and the politicians and other critical external constituents are pacified or at least distracted. Once these staff functions have been tended to, the wise ironic administrator should be prepared to get out of the way and rely on the "kindness" of the faculty. Higher education or edification, unlike skill

training or information transfer, "is a matter that must be left up to the individual college teacher to do or not to do as they think fit, as their sense of responsibility to their students and their society inspires them" (Rorty, 1989b, p.8).

For Rorty's ideal university to ever achieve fruition, administrators must overcome a number of potentially lethal obstacles, including a suboptimal K-12 educational system, under-prepared students, and the forces of vocationalism. In addition, they must also deal with a powerful threat from within--faculty members who misguidedly see "reproducing current disciplinary matrices" (Rorty, 1989b, p. 8) as a professional obligation and a critical part of their academic calling. Although authoritarianism remains anathema to Rorty's administrators, they do not view their institutions or the faculty with a blind eye. Administrators should be ever-vigilant, attempting to insure that members of the faculty do not use undergraduate school as a place for screening students. In that place, the brightest and most gifted undergraduate students are identified, selected and groomed by proprietary professors seeking to clone themselves, i.e., to recruit candidates for graduate or professional school in the professors' respective disciplines.

In the educational "utopia" that Rorty believes would be possible if the elementary and high schools graduated socialized and culturally literate students, vocationalism would remain in proper balance, university faculty would be neither parochial nor egoistic, and administrators in higher education would not concern themselves with the "integrity of the curriculum" or what Rorty refers to as "connecting learning." They would instead be free to create an environment in which an unfettered faculty was subtly encouraged to develop and teach whatever courses interested them.

True to his reformist nature, Rorty defends college and university administrators as critical to the future of American higher education, while also pointing out how they

may improve. He writes, "To say that, what ever their faults, American colleges and universities remain bastions of academic freedom is to say that the typical administrator would not dream of trying to interfere with a teacher's attempt to carry out . . . [their] responsibilities" (1989b, p.8).[14]

The Importance of the Faculty

As might be assumed from the previous discussion, faculty provide the foundation for Rorty's university and the higher learning or edification that takes place there. Rorty becomes vehement about the importance of cultivating personal relationships between teacher and students. He considers these relationships critical to the success of individuation, which, in his view, represents the most important function of nonvocational higher education. Not only must the faculty actively engage their students, the relationship between teacher and student must be what Rorty characterizes as "erotic" (1989b, p. 9). By that, he means the relationship between the student and his/her professor finds basis in a strong mutual commitment to their respective areas of study and is characterized by shared emotional zeal, or passion. Rorty hopes that through such a relationship the student will become inspired by the teachers' enthusiasm and excitement and develop an equally strong passion for the material they study.

In addition to helping instill passion in their students, faculty play another important role in the student's non-vocational education The faculty also help students begin the process of questioning what they learned in elementary and high school.

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[14] Rorty's well-documented admiration for Dewey might be partly based on their respective championing of personal and academic freedom. In addition to all his many other accomplishments, Dewey helped found the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU).

According to Rorty, undergraduate university teaching should "make vivid and concrete the failure of the country of which we remain loyal citizens" (1989b, p. 9).

<u>What Faculty Should Teach</u>

Rorty writes that "We revise our own moral identity by revising our own final vocabulary" (1989a, p. 80). He describes the ironist's search for a better final vocabulary than the one she currently uses as "dominated by metaphors of making rather than finding, of diversification and novelty rather than convergence to the antecedently present. She thinks of final vocabularies as poetic achievements rather than as fruits of diligent inquiry according to antecedently formulated criteria" (1989a, p. 77). Because, for the ironist, nothing exists beyond vocabulary, neither recourse to metanarratives nor to first principles, Rorty reminds us that "Nothing can serve as a criticism of a person save another person, or of a culture save another culture--for persons and cultures are for us, incarnate vocabularies" (1989a, p. 80). Thus, the most that a university or a professor can do for their students is to enlarge their acquaintance with other people who have developed alternative final vocabularies. Rorty believes that "The easiest way to do that is to read books" (1989a, p.80). The teachers or professors, whom Rorty identifies as "literary critic[s]" and "moral advisors," guide their students to books likely to "provide candidates" for their final vocabulary. Individuals are selected for such an important task not because they have "access to moral truth," but because they have "an exceptionally large range of acquaintance . . . They have read more books and are thus in a better position not to get trapped in the vocabulary of a single book" (1989a, pp. 80-81). A good teacher, drawing on her/his passion for learning and on past experiences, will be able to help their students weave the books that they read into a "beautiful mosaic"--into a personal final vocabulary of their own creation.

According to Rorty, this most important of accomplishments may be realized only if the student experiences a truly personal relationship with teachers. With more than a touch of irony, he writes that

> Most of these relationships are with the dead teachers who wrote the books the students are assigned, but some will be with the live teachers who are giving the lectures. In either case, the sparks leaping back and forth between teacher and student, connecting them in a relationship that has little to do with socialization but much to do with self-creation, are the principle means by which the institutions of a liberal society get changed. (1989b, p. 9)

Conclusion

Rorty's ideal university consists of an administration that functions as the faculty's non-intrusive care-giver/care-taker and champion; a fully socialized and culturally literate student body; a politically viable curriculum that prepares students to both earn a living and live a life; and a faculty who are not only free, but encouraged to followed their bliss and to take their students with them on their wonderful quests. In fact, the faculty should enlarge the canon to include a set of classic texts that are "as rich and diverse as possible" (1989a, p. 81). For Rorty, "this task of enlarging the canon takes the place . . . of the attempts by moral philosophers to bring commonly accepted moral institutions about particular cases into equilibrium with commonly accepted general moral principles" (1989a, p. 81).

Rorty proves to be true to himself. He establishes himself as a man who chooses to hope and to celebrate his capacity to love and to communicate with others. He refuses to allow himself to be seduced by the absurd and, like the fascists, embrace it as a religion, or, like Xerxes, become consumed with rage and squander his time and

energy flailing the Helespont. In a bit of introspective reflection, he writes,

> The only point of having real life professors instead of computer terminals, videotapes, and mimeographed lecture notes is that students need to have freedom enacted before their eyes by actual human beings. That is why tenure and academic freedom are more than just trade union demands. Teachers setting their agendas--putting their individual, lovingly prepared specialties on display in the curriculum cafeteria, without regard to any larger end, much less an institutional plan--is what nonvocational higher education is all about. (1989b, p. 9)

Rorty might be asking us to join him on a fool's errand, but within the context of his assumptions, what alternatives could be more attractive?

CHAPTER THREE

JEAN-FRANÇOIS LYOTARD:

A CONTINENTAL POSTMODERN VIEW OF HIGHER EDUCATION

"Lamenting the 'loss of meaning' in postmodernity boils down to mourning the fact that knowledge is no longer principally narrative" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 26).

Introduction

Steven Connor (1996) describes Jean-François Lyotard as a "writer whose work has oriented and continues to orient discussion of social, economic and political postmodernism" (p. 2). Connor adds that, although Lyotard's work and publications deal with a wide range of topics, including linguistics, psychoanalysis and ethics, The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge, which contains "Lyotard's account of postmodernity . . . established his reputation in the English-speaking world" (p. 2). Lyotard's importance and influence is echoed by the widely quoted critic of postmodernism, John McGowan. In Postmodernism and Its Critics (1991), McGowan credits "Lyotard's widely read The Postmodern Condition" with placing postmodernism "at the center of critical discussion in the arts and literary criticism" (pp. 180-181).

Lyotard, like Rorty, associates the beginning of modernism with the Enlightenment and the French Revolution. While self-consciously attempting to break with the past, modernism adopted science as its primary instrument of intellectual inquiry. Lyotard argues that modernists appropriated two legitimating metanarratives,

one rooted in the Enlightenment and the French Revolution, the other in Hegel and the tradition of the University of Berlin, in an attempt to substantiate the superiority of scientific knowledge over all other forms of knowledge, particularly traditional narrative knowledge. Lyotard asserts that, as a result of these actions, scientists and scientific knowledge statements were privileged, while all other forms of knowledge were marginalized and their respective senders silenced. In addition to achieving a position of preeminence in the educational-research communities, the legitimacy of science became linked to the credibility of the modern State. Consequently, the State became a major champion of science and assumed responsibility for the dissemination of the knowledge that it produces. This it did through the development of public policy and the allocation of resources to support research and mass public education.[15]

Although what Lyotard refers to as the legitimation narratives of emancipation (the French) and speculative unity (the German) temporarily allowed modernists to establish a science-privileging knowledge hierarchy, they also contained an initially unseen but ultimately fatal flaw that led to their loss of "credulity." As popular faith in modernist metanarratives erodes, the status of science, the legitimacy of scientific knowledge statements and the influence of the science-privileging state erodes along with it. Once the unity imposed by the near-universal acceptance of science and the State that it helped legitimate began to crumble, the future decline of modernism and the ascent of postmodernism was assured.

Lyotard believes that the delegitimization of science made possible the voice

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[15] In 1997, the federal government provided 59.4% of the funds expended by American universities to support research. Other units of government provided an additional 7.6%, for a total of 67%.

taken up by countless individuals and groups who once found themselves effectively

disenfranchised by the forces of modernism. He further believes that these new players,

long excluded from the games of the rich and powerful, now speak so loudly, so clearly

and in so many different languages that they can no longer be excluded or silenced.

The following chapter discusses and analyzes the ideas of Lyotard outlined

above. Topics receiving special attention include: different methods of knowledge

legitimation; the differences between scientific and narrative knowledge; the current

status of science and scientific knowledge in the technologically and economically

developed nations; and a comparison of modern and postmodern or normal and

revolutionary science. Finally, special attention will be given to the impact that

postmodern knowledge and the process of its becoming has on higher education and the

modern university. Lyotard's The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge

(1993) serves as the primary source of this discussion.

<p align="center">The Essential Lyotard</p>

<p align="center">Legitimation</p>

Lyotard identifies and addresses the relationship between two different types of

knowledge which he classifies as "scientific" and "narrative." Although a large number

of differences distinguish these forms of knowledge, the manner by which they receive

legitimation remains one of the most important, and of greatest concern, to Lyotard.

The process of legitimation deals with the basis for presenting and accepting an

assertion of knowledge, or a knowledge statement, as being true. Any number of

authorities, including custom, tradition, competence, consensus, logic, reason,

bureaucratic rules, ideology or religion can support the truth assertion of a knowledge

statement. Critical to the effectiveness of the process, however, remains the popular

acceptance of the authority on which the legitimation is based. For example, in a

particular community, the elderly may be respected and their statements valued and accepted as true. In this situation, respect and acceptance acts as a function of the faith or belief of the members of the community and of custom or tradition. In this community, popular custom based on the belief that age brings wisdom legitimates the statements of the elderly. Individuals respect the elderly because, in their community, the elderly are treated with respect.

This kind of traditional truth represents a contextual localized truth, not Rorty's absolute, universal or necessary upper case "T"ruth. What serves as true for one group of people in a particular culture may or may not be true for another group of people in the same or a different culture. Although his idea flies in the face of most of Western social, intellectual and religious history, Lyotard believes that all truth is local. The effectiveness of its legitimation determines the truth of a particular statement. Undermine the authority supporting a knowledge statement, and truth suffers reduction to subjective opinion, if not to a falsehood.

Lyotard provides the following definition/discussion in which he relates the process of legitimation to science:

> Take any civil law as an example: it states that a given category of citizens must perform a specific kind of action. Legitimation is the process by which a legislator is authorized to promulgate such a law as a norm. Now take the example of a scientific statement: it is subject to the rule that a statement must fulfill a given set of conditions in order to be accepted as scientific. In this case, legitimation is the process by which a "legislator" dealing with scientific discourse is authorized to prescribe the stated

conditions[16] . . . determining whether a statement is to be included in that discourse

for consideration by the scientific community. (1993, p. 9)

Legitimation determines why we accept some statements as true and reject

others. In other words, people must perceive a knowledge statement as being legitimate

before they accept and act on it. Although many other forms of knowledge, e.g.,

intuitive, aesthetic religious/metaphysical, exist, Lyotard basically restricts his attention

to narrative and scientific knowledge. His choice reflects his interest in science's

declining status in postmodern society, and the competitive relationship that historically

exists between scientifically legitimated knowledge and narrative.

Key Terms: Knowledge and Science

A proper understanding of Lyotard's use of two key terms--learning and science-

-remains essential to the following discussion in tracing the development of Lyotard's

own understanding of reality.

Science. According to Lyotard, science represents a subset of learning

composed of a set of denotative statements. Two additional and unique requirements

distinguish science from other forms of learning and determine the acceptability or truth

of "scientific" knowledge statements. The object of a scientific knowledge statement

must be "available for repeated access" and it must be "accessible in explicit conditions

of observation." After an object has been observed, the language used to present the

statement, i.e., to describe the object, must be "judged relevant by the experts" (Lyotard,

1993, p. 18). The second condition, discussed later in this chapter, has great

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[16] The conditions that Lyotard references are those set forth in what is generally

accepted as the scientific method, that, in general, include "conditions of internal

consistency and experimental verification" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 9).

implications for higher education. It effectively means that only the language of science can accurately describe reality. Lyotard references scientists as the experts who have the power to establish the vocabulary that determines the legitimacy of a scientific statement, i.e., define truth.

As does Rorty, Lyotard views language as more than a system of arbitrary symbols and a transparent form of communication. Language is an arbitrary and opaque vehicle through which human beings define, and thus determine, reality. Although this discussion returns to the stated objective of considering Lyotard's use of select key terms, his understanding of language and its function is more fully considered later in the chapter.

Knowledge. Lyotard distinguishes between learning and knowledge. As science is a subset of learning, Lyotard sees learning as a subset of knowledge. In addition to consisting of a set of denotative statements, knowledge also informs the knower as to how reality should be perceived and tells her/him how to act, how to do things, and, most importantly, how to live. In Lyotard's words:

> Knowledge, then, is a question of competence that goes beyond the simple
> determination and application of the criteria of truth, extending to the
> determination and application of the criterion of efficiency (technical
> qualification), of justice and/happiness (ethical wisdom) . . . etc.
> Understood in this way, knowledge is what makes someone capable of
> forming "good" denotative utterances, but also "good" prescriptive and
> "good evaluative utterances." (Lyotard, 1993, p. 18)

Because of its capacity to inform, combined with its ability to impact and change economic, political and technological conditions, knowledge becomes the equivalent of power. Specifically, Lyotard believes that "knowledge and power are

simply two sides of the same coin" (1993, p. 9).

As characterized by Lyotard, its relationship to "custom" remains an important characteristic of knowledge. His recognition of this perceived association is a critical step in the development of his thought. It also establishes an important link to Rorty, who perceives a similar relationship between custom and knowledge. Lyotard asserts that the common basis for judging a "prescriptive" or "evaluative" statement to be "good," i.e., true and/or better than alternative and competing statements, is conformity to "the relevant criteria . . . accepted in the social circle of the 'knower's' interlocutors" (1993, p.19). Justice, beauty, truth, and efficiency provide examples of such criteria. Lyotard says that an individual believes a knowledge statement to be true because his/her community or culture believes it to be true. Therefore, different individuals may legitimately espouse different truths, depending on what criteria their respective societies apply. Intercultural concurrence about what constitutes truth or beliefs about the shape of reality's contours, from Lyotard's perspective, would appear to be little more than serendipity, while divergence, or intracultural differences, are likely.

The idea that reality is a social or linguistic construct that does not exist outside of language remains critical to Lyotard's understanding of the process of legitimation. He believes that all truth is local, both a reflection and a product of local beliefs. This truism applies to both scientific and non-scientific knowledge. The basis of those beliefs, or how they legitimate knowledge, i.e., what they believe to be true, differentiates types of knowledge and cultures.

The Savage Mind and the Scientific Mind

As with Rorty, Lyotard distinguishes between "developing" and "developed" societies, and focuses his attention on the most developed. Although disparaging the

terms "primitive" and "civilized" when applied to human beings, Lyotard does identify

what he calls "the savage mind" and "scientific thought" or the scientific mind. Two

characteristics separate the savage mind from the scientific mind. First, the savage

mind believes a statement to be true if it has been historically accepted as true, e.g.,

death is liberating, suffering ennobles or politicians are dishonest. Such a mind accepts

these truths without doubt or question. It feels no need for confirmation or

investigation.

Second, the savage mind accepts and internalizes an entire body of beliefs

without qualification or distinction. Religious zealots or political ideologues who

totally accept all tenets of a doctrine or ideology as articles of faith exemplify people

who demonstrate this characteristic. The individual who accepts the authority of

science and the "scientific method" and attempts to apply it in all situations, while

marginalizing all other kinds of information and forms of inquiry, provides another

example. In other words, a "savage mind" accepts and believes all teachings without

question or reservation.

By contrast, the "scientific mind" questions perceptions and teachings, and,

based on "specific innovations, debates, and inquiries," selectively determines what it

accepts as true and rejects as false. A scientific mind would not make or accept the

sweeping generalization that all politicians are corrupt nor would it presume to make a

qualitative statement about death. A scientist could only make denotative statements

about death, such as "all living things die."

What Lyotard describes as the "scientific mind" resembles Bertrand Russell's

"scientific temper" and John Dewey's "scientific attitude," as distinguished from what

Russell called "scientific technique." In consideration of both the virtues and dangers of

science, Russell describes the scientific temper as "cautious, tentative, and piecemeal."

He goes on to say that the "[scientific temper] does not imagine that it knows the whole truth, or even that its best knowledge is wholly true. It knows that every doctrine needs emendation sooner or later and that the necessary emendation requires freedom of investigation and freedom of distinction" (Russell, pp. 245-6). Russell, Dewey and Lyotard view scientific temper as concerned primarily with the process of science; thus, they view continuous reassessment and contextual adaptation positively. In contrast, the trio looks with disfavor on scientific technique, which Russell characterizes as being "full of a sense of limitless power, of arrogant certainty, and of pleasure in manipulation of even human material" (Russell, p. 246) and James Garrison describes as having nearly achieved the status of a religion. While discussing Dewey's and Russell's attitudes toward science, Emily Robertson supports this assessment when she characterizes "scientific technique" as the attitude associated with social engineering. She points out that "The use of the products of science (technology and knowledge) by dogmatic authorities in government, industry, and schools denies the development and spread of scientific temper [or the scientific mind]" (Robertson, p. 350). Robinson reflects Russell's views about the two faces of science:

> The practical experts who employ scientific technique, and still more the government and large firms who employ the practical experts, acquire a quite different temperament from that of men of science--a temper [confusing choice of terms] full of a sense of limitless power, of arrogant certainty, and of pleasure in manipulation of even human material. This is the very reverse of the scientific temper, but it cannot be denied that science has helped promote it. (Russell, pp. 245-46)

In applying Lyotard's terminology to Russell's narrative, "scientific technique" becomes "savage mind."

Although Lyotard's evolving permutations of science may be loosely clustered and distinguished from traditional narratives and the burgeoning alternative non-scientific perspectives, the postmodern era may be characterized by a lack of fixed and easily identifiable boundaries. Overlap and integration are much more prominent than compartmentalization and segregation. Lyotard's savage and scientific minds may appear to be quite different, in part because of the break down of traditional boundaries. However, they also share a number of characteristics. They both use the same process when deciding which truths they choose to believe. In other words, the scientific and the savage mind both utilize a "truth" criteria in ascertaining what is true and believed, and what is false and rejected. For members of both groups, their respective cultures or communities determine and teach the criteria. Lyotard argues that merely the specifics of their respective truth criteria differentiates the savage mind from the scientific mind. He contends that, in the final analysis, both the savage and the scientific mind rely on narrative to legitimate their knowledge, and thus, to define reality.

<u>The Relationship Between Narrative and Truth</u>

Lyotard identifies narrative as the traditionally preferred method of legitimizing knowledge that modern science presumes to challenge and replace. Lyotard argues that, although powerful in its ability to win the near-blind allegiance of scientists, including most researchers and many teachers, science failed to achieve a comparable degree of influence among the general population. Scientists tried hard to displace the story teller, the poet, the priest, and the politician, but they failed. Trotsky and wild orchids still possess more allure for most than data collection and hypothesis testing.

Lyotard references anthropological research to support his contention that narrative, in any of its varied forms, e.g., spoken or written, printed or electronic, achieves more influence than science in determining what we and our cultures and

communities believe to be true. He argues that narrative is the primary influence in determining how we perceive reality and what constitutes appropriate behavior. He writes that "there is one point on which all of the investigators agree . . . The preeminence of narrative form in the formulation of traditional knowledge . . . Narration is the quintessential form of customary knowledge" (1993, p. 19). The cultural traditions of the Cashinahua Indians of South America are cited and discussed at length as an example of how narrative knowledge functions within a culture and how it differs from scientific knowledge.

Knowledge and Language

Lyotard's notion of knowledge is intimately involved with his understanding of the structure and function of language. Very simply, he believes that language or conversation requires three components: a "sender," a person who makes or "utters" a statement; an "addressee," a person who hears or, more appropriately, receives a sender's statement (a statement need not be spoken); and a "referent," the object of the sender's statement. Once the three necessary components of sender, addressee and referent are in place, a statement may itself assume three different forms. It may be denotative, performative or prescriptive.

Lyotard's taxonomy of language has intrinsic interest and value; however, its effective illustration of the connection that Lyotard sees between language and reality serves as its particular relevance to this dissertation. Not only does Lyotard think that language colors and shapes the contours of reality, he believes that reality cannot exist outside of language. While Lyotard differentiates between the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic domains of language, his primary concern remains the pragmatic, specifically the actual effect or impact that language has on the sender, the addressee and the referent.

The form that an utterance or statement assumes determines, and is determined by, the relationship of its constituent parts--the sender, the addressee and the referent. For example, as a true-false utterance a denotative statement positions its sender as a knower, i.e., the sender knows the truth about the referent that s/he describes. Once a denotative statement has been made, the addressee must decide if s/he agrees that the sender's statement provides a true and accurate representation of the referent. However, before an addressee can properly evaluate and respond to a denotative statement, the sender must properly frame the statement. According to Lyotard, a denotative statement must correctly identify its referent, and it must be stated in such a way that the addressee may judge it true or false. In other words, the referent must be "handled in a way unique to the denotative"--it must be correctly identified and "expressed by the statement that refers to it" (1993, p. 9). Denotative statements represent the primary form of communication of idealized modern science. They define or delineate the rules of the language game played by scientists, or by people who presume to be scientists.

The performative acts as the second variety of statement considered by Lyotard. While the sender of a denotative statement simply identifies and makes a true/false assertion about a referent, the sender of a performative statement actually alters the condition of the referent by addressing or including it in a statement. In Lyotard's words, the effect of the statement on the referent "coincides with its enunciation." Lyotard provides the example of a Rector declaring that his/her university "is open." In this instance, the university is open because its Rector declares it so, and it becomes open the moment the Rector declared it so. The state of the university, the referent, is actually altered by the Rector's declaration/performative statement.

The prescriptive serves as the third and final type of statement. According to Lyotard, two unique characteristics distinguish a prescriptive statement. First, the sender of the statement occupies a position of authority. Second, that sender expects the addressee to comply with the sender's request. A prescriptive statement may take the form of a command, order, recommendation, instruction, request, plea or prayer. In Lyotard's words, it "entails concomitant changes in the posts of addressee and referent" (1993, p. 10).

Lyotard offers the following sentence as an illustration of the prescriptive: "Give money to the university." Such a statement may be contained in a letter sent by the Director of a university's foundation to its alumni. The letter's composition and posting reflect two assumptions by its sender. First, s/he has the authority to send the letter and make the request, and second, that a percentage of the letter's addressees, the alumni, will comply with his/her request and send money, i.e. recognize the sender's (the Director's) authority. In direct response to the Director's prescriptive statement, both the addressees who positively respond to the request and the referent, their money, undergo change. The responding alumnus is transformed from graduate to revenue source.

Language Games

Lyotard credits Wittgenstein for inspiring many of his ideas about language and the "effects of different modes of discourse." According to Lyotard, declarative, performative and prescriptive utterances exemplify different types of discourse identified by Wittgenstein as "language games." Again crediting Wittgenstein, Lyotard asserts that, as an arbitrary human construct, language represents a game; it is not a transparent and necessary reflection of an objective and fixed reality. Accordingly, "each of the various categories of utterance [denotative, performative and prescriptive]

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can be defined in terms of rules specifying their properties and the uses to which they can be put" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 10). Lyotard illustrates this point by comparing the game of language to the game of chess. In both cases, a clearly specified and detailed set of rules identify the properties of each of the pieces and what moves they may make. In a language game, the pieces are the sender, the addressee and the referent. The moves are the proper statements of the sender and the appropriate response of the addressee and the referent. A proper statement is one constructed in accordance with the unique characteristics, or rules, of the appropriate category of utterance. For example, a prescriptive statement or utterance must follow these rules: 1) "the sender of the statement is in a position of authority," and 2) "there is the expectation that the addressee will comply with his/her request." Lyotard believes that in a language game, as in a board game, violation of, or variance from, the rules results in a forfeiture of the game. The following statement reflects both the nature and the power of Lyotard's language game:

> The knowledge transmitted by these narrations is in no way limited to the function of enunciation; it determines in a single stroke what one must say in order to be heard, what one must listen to in order to speak, and what role one must play . . . to be the object of a narrative. (1993, p. 21)

In Lyotard's language game rules do not represent the absolute. Potential participants remain free to invent any game they wish and fabricate any rules they mutually agree to accept and adhered to. However, once the rules have been set and the game begins, they must be adhered to. Order, truth and reality are produced by playing a language game by its rules. For example, nothing, in Lyotard's view, necessarily determines the appropriateness or inappropriateness of gender bias or the gender neutrality of a language. The consent and usage of the members of a particular

community or culture determines the absence and/or presence and the form of gender bias in its language. In other words, in any given context or community, all that is required to validate a truth or legitimate vision of reality is that its respective members willingly agree on and use the same arbitrary set of language rules when formulating their descriptions. Specifically, the language in Samaria may be more androcentric than the language encountered in Stillwater. This does not mean that the language in Samaria ranks good or bad, or better or worse in comparison to the language of Stillwater. Nor does it mean that the language in either place could not change if the senders, addressees and the appropriate referent of those languages decide to modify their respective vocabularies, i.e., change their rules. Again referencing the Cashinahua, Lyotard asserts that

> a narrative tradition is also the tradition of the criteria defining a three fold competence--"know-how," [knowing how to do what is appropriate] "knowing how to speak," and "knowing how to hear" [*savoir-faire, savoir-dire, savoir-entendre*]--through which the community's relationship to itself and its environment is played out. What is transmitted through these narratives is the set of pragmatic rules that constitute social bonds. (1993, p. 21)

Lyotard believes in narrative as the primary method used by a culture or community to legitimate itself and define reality for its members. The circular nature of this process remains critical to Lyotard's understanding and to an understanding of Lyotard. This traditional form of legitimation requires no external form of validation. A culture's current dominant narrative determines what its members believe--what they know, what they say and what they hear. Narrative provides the criteria for distinguishing truth from falsehood, right from wrong, good from bad, appropriateness

from inappropriateness, and reality from illusion. And, according to Lyotard, because narratives "are themselves a part of . . . [their] . . . culture, they are legitimated by the simple fact that they do what they do" (1993, p. 23). Again, what the members of a culture believe to be true, remains true because their culture believes it true.

Religious beliefs illustrate this form of legitimation by narrative. Based on its reading and interpretation of traditional Christian text, a church believes, and, through its clergy, teaches its members, that homosexuality is a sin. The church further teaches that all members of the community of believers remain obligated to drive sinners from their midst. An individual reported to be a homosexual is ostracized by the members of the congregation and his/her property confiscated and given to the church. The church's members feel justified in their actions, because their church and their membership in that church authorizes those actions. The dynamic of this relationship, one based on issuing, accepting and acting on a set of narrative legitimated pragmatic rules, provides the bond that transforms a disassociated group of people into a cohesive and functioning community. This community becomes capable of destroying a human being on the basis of her/his alleged sexual preference.

Lyotard believes that this aspect of narrative-based knowledge, this method of legitimation and its associated behavior, has been the objective of scientific criticism since the Enlightenment. He asserts that scientists not only question the validity of narrative knowledge statements, they dismiss them as being unworthy of serious inquiry, i.e., unfit subjects for "argumentation or proof." Lyotard writes that the scientist in effect dismisses narrative or traditional knowledge, classifying it as "belonging to a different mentality: savage, primitive, underdeveloped, backward, alienated, composed of opinion, customs, authority, prejudice, ignorance, ideology." Continuing to characterize the views and opinions of scientists, Lyotard contends that

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they believe that "Narratives are fables, myths, legends fit only for women and children" (1993, p. 27). Lyotard argues that this clash of language games, this conflict of legitimation, fuels a unique form of cultural imperialism that acts as a necessary concomitant of Western civilization (1993, p. 27).

Modern science not only rejects traditional or narrative knowledge, it purports to offer an alternative version of truth that more closely corresponds to, or better represents, reality. Science bases this claim on the power of the method it uses to authenticate its knowledge--its version of the truth. Adopting the terminology of Rorty and Lyotard then, scientists, as senders, argue and attempt to convince their addressees that their final vocabulary is more preferable to the referent(s) than the final vocabulary of the traditionalist or non-scientist. However, in its attempt to avoid the perceived problem of self-legitimation associated with narrative knowledge statements, science sacrifices narrative's ability to forge social and community bonds--the ability to make prescriptive statements.

Modern Research and Teaching

Modern Research

In his discussion of science, Lyotard identifies what he considers the "classical concepts" or the "pragmatics" of traditional modern science. In so doing, he also attempts to distinguish between what he calls the "research game" and the "teaching game." He begins by stating that all scientific statements carry with them a set of tensions, which he collectively refers to as the "pragmatic posts" (1993, p. 23), that affects the relationship and actions of the sender, addressee and the referent. The following summarizes the pragmatics of modern science that relate to research:

1) The sender must speak the truth about the referent. By this Lyotard means that the sender should prove what s/he says and also "refute" all oppositional or

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contradictory statements.

2) The addressee remains free to accept or reject the sender's statement. This implies that the addressee also acts as a potential sender, because any statement of affirmation or denial will be subject to the same double requirement of "proof and refutation" as the sender's statement. According to Lyotard, the addressee should be the sender's equal, i.e., a "scientific scholar." The status of the addressee can be determined only after his/her statement has been subjected to the same scrutiny as the sender's original statement.

3) The referent in the speaker's statement must be represented as "it actually is." Thus, a valid scientific statement will provide an accurate representation of an external reality. However, Lyotard contends that, because "what is" can only be known through statements about things that neither the sender or the addressee can intimately know (Lyotard provides Copernicus' statement about the path of the planets being circular as an example), scientific statements remain problematical-- "What I say is true because I prove that it is--but what proof is there that my proof is true?" (1993, pp. 23-24).

Lyotard contends that science deals with this problem by establishing and following two rules. The first rule, which he describes as "dialectical or even rhetorical in the forensic sense," classifies a referent as something open to proof that can be used as evidence in an inquiry or debate. Lyotard asserts that because of this rule, a scientist would not say, "I can prove something, because reality is the way I say it is." A scientist, however, could say that, "as long as I can produce proof, we may all think that reality is the way I say it is." The second rule, which Lyotard characterizes as metaphysical, states that a single referent cannot produce contradictory or inconsistent proof, i.e., something

cannot both "be and not be" at the same time. In a possibly playful or sarcastic aside, Lyotard references Descartes, adding that, "'God' is not deceptive" (1993a, p. 24).

Lyotard contends that these rules, created by modern science to verify their statements, allow people who accept the basic assumptions of science and the viability of the scientific method, to function as partners. That is, they allow sender and addressee(s) to engage in inquiry and debate and achieve a degree of consensus. Lyotard adds that, from the perspective of modern science, "Not every consensus is a sign of truth; but it is presumed that the truth of a statement necessarily draws a consensus."

The discussion above summarizes Lyotard's understanding of the primary pragmatics of modern scientific research. These ideas remain important to the overall topic of this discussion, in part, because Lyotard believes and asserts that research is an "evident" and "necessary" complement to teaching (1993, p. 24).

Modern Teaching

Lyotard bases his assertion regarding research as a complement to teaching on the belief that peer debate establishes the truth of a scientist's statements as well as the competence of the scientist. In other words, Lyotard asserts that a scientist needs an addressee of comparable status to verify her/his statement. Once the addressee has received and verified the sender's statement, that addressee then becomes a sender of the verified statement. Thus, the addressee establishes the original sender's competence and enhances the sender's reputation. Lyotard argues that only through such a process can scientific knowledge be verified: "The truth of the statement and the competence of its sender are thus subject to the collective approval of a group of persons who are competent on an equal basis. Equals are needed and must be created" (1993, p. 24). Teaching serves as the scientist's preferred method of creation or cloning.

In Lyotard's view, this process, which he describes as "didactic" as opposed to "dialectic," is essential to the continuation or "reproduction" of science and also provides the basis and justification for modern education. As conceived by Lyotard, the teacher or professor assumes the role of the sender, and the student becomes the addressee. Modern education begins with a two-part assumption: the teacher knows more than the student knows; and the student wishes to know or learn what the teacher knows. Granting the first assumption provides the basis for a second two-part assumption: the student can learn what the professor knows and become a professor, i.e., achieve the same level of expertise as the teacher. Both of these assumptions depend on an even more fundamental assumption. A basic article of modern educational and scientific faith is that "the exchange of arguments" and the "pragmatics of research" have produced a body of knowledge consisting of knowledge statements that can be "transmitted through teaching as they stand, in the guise of indisputable truths."

Lyotard summarizes his understanding of modern scientific education:

> In other words, you teach what you know: such is the expert. But as the
> student (the addressee of the didactic process) improves his skills, the
> expert confides to his student what he does not know but is trying to learn
> (at least if the expert is also involved in research). In this way, the student
> is introduced to the dialectic of research, or the game of producing
> scientific knowledge. (1993, p. 25)

The Struggle for the Hearts and Minds of the People: Science vs Narrative

Although science has played a major role in defining Western culture and shaping the structure, mission and culture of the modern university, according to Lyotard, its victory remains incomplete. As described by Lyotard, for the last three

hundred years the West has witnessed the advocates of modern science and their supporters attempting to discredit traditional narrative knowledge and impose their version of reality not only on their cultures, but on all the other cultures throughout the rest of the world. Until the seventeenth century, narrative was the primary source of knowledge. Science, however, emerged from the Enlightenment to confront and to challenge the legitimacy of traditional narrative knowledge, which it saw as the product of a "totalizing" philosophical tradition that valorized conformity and consensus. On a more visceral level, many of those who would enshrine science characterize narrative-legitimated knowledge statements as the products of a more primitive, even a savage, mentality. According to Lyotard, narrative knowledge, as compared to scientific, "does not give priority to the question of its own legitimation" but it does certify "itself in the pragmatics of its own transmission without having recourse to argumentation and proof" (1993, p. 27).

Science posed a formidable alternative to traditional narrative knowledge. Science initially relied on argumentation based on the application of a method of discovery and verification available to anyone with an "open mind." Science promised a clear and unfettered view of reality, without reliance on spirits, soothsayers, holy men, shamans, revelation, superstition, custom, myth or tradition. Scientists allege that access to truth is not restricted to the politically, economically or spiritually privileged.

Science's alternative, however, offered no moral, ethical, spiritual or aesthetic guidance. A parent grieving over the death of a child could not turn to the scientist for consolation. Science could tell a parent *how* a child died, but the scientist could not explain *why* the child died. Little solace may be found in an expert opinion or a clinician's report. Although the promises and accomplishment of science remain impressive, Lyotard argues that they are not enough.

The scientific community soon realized that the questions that mobilize and/or tear cultures apart have little to do with the *how* or *what* of science. In the language of Lyotard, more people privilege the practical value of a narrative prescriptive statement than the cognitive value of a scientific denotative statement. Science proved successful in describing and, to a lesser extent, controlling and predicting physical phenomena. As a result, it proved useful to people of power, specifically capitalists and politicians. Lyotard argues, however, that science failed to win the support of the majority of the population. In effect, Lyotard claims that science appeals to the mind, while narrative appeals to the heart.

Science's initial inability to win wide-spread popular support caused what Lyotard describes as a "crisis of legitimation." He argues that, in an attempt to increase the acceptance of science and, thus, their own support and power, scientists turned to narrative in an attempt to legitimate science.

Narrative and science are both language games with their own distinctive rules and moves, and they both rely on different criteria for determining truth and/or the legitimacy of their respective knowledge statements. Thus, they can not legitimate each other. Narrative reality is incommensurate with scientific reality, because, in the words of Rorty, different final vocabularies describe them. Lyotard holds that, while the scientist questions and then rejects narrative knowledge, the non-scientist does not reject science and scientific knowledge. Rather, the non-scientist views science and scientific knowledge as a subset of narrative knowledge, or "as a variant in the family of narrative cultures" (1993, p. 27). This explains why Lyotard believes that narrative culture "is accompanied by a certain tolerance," (1993, p. 27) not shared by modern science, or by cultures that primarily draw their truth from, and base their reality on, science.

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Bloland and Usher and Edwards also make this point. They note that, although "scientific and narrative knowledge have equal validity" (Usher and Edwards, p. 159), modern science, by necessity, privileges scientific knowledge over all other forms of knowledge. This creates a hierarchy that marginalizes the knowledge of every community other than its own. As will be discussed, Lyotard expresses hope that postmodern science will flatten the knowledge hierarchy, thus providing a more tolerant environment than its modern predecessor.

The privileging of scientific knowledge by scientists renders all the more ironic its attempt to resolve its legitimacy crisis by invoking the authority of narrative. Lyotard recognizes this irony when he writes:

> Scientific knowledge cannot know and make known that it is true knowledge without resorting to the other, narrative, kind of knowledge, which from its point of view is no knowledge at all. Without such recourse it would be in the position of presupposing its own validity and would be stooping to what it condemns: begging the question, preceding on prejudice.

He then asks a question worthy of a Rorty ironist: "But does it [science] not fall into the same trap by using narrative as its authority?" (1993, p. 29).

Lyotard provides the following example as "crude proof" of modern science's reliance on non-scientific, or narrative, authority to legitimate itself and the knowledge that it produces:

> What do scientists do when they appear on television or are interviewed in the newspaper after making a "discovery"? They recount an epic of knowledge that is in fact wholly epic. They play by the rules of the narrative game; its influence remains considerable not only on the users of

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the media, but also on the scientist's sentiments. This fact is neither trivial nor accessory: it concerns the relationship of scientific knowledge to "popular" knowledge, or what is left of it. The state spends large amounts of money to enable science to pass itself off as an epic: the State's own credibility is based on that epic, which it uses to obtain the public consent its decision makers need.

It is not inconceivable that the recourse to narrative is inevitable at least to the extent that the language game of science desires its statements to be true but does not have the resources to legitimate truth on its own. (Lyotard, 1993, pp. 27-28)

Scientists, through dialogue, deliberation and consensus, play the very same form of language game that they long condemned as vulgar, if not barbaric. They produce and legitimate denotative knowledge statements in the same manner as non-scientists produce and legitimate the prescriptive value statements of society. Lyotard believes that within this irony rests the embryo of the beast that will ultimately destroy the credibility of modern science.

The Narrative of Emancipation

According to Lyotard, modern science bases its authority on two narratives. The first, the narrative of emancipation, associated with the French Revolution, is primarily political. It draws inspiration from Enlightenment ideas about liberating humanity from oppressive political, economic and material constraints. Specifically, the adoption of the narrative of emancipation meant that modern science would provide the knowledge necessary to ultimately achieve absolute freedom for the "people," who are the source of the ultimate legitimacy of the State. Lyotard writes that as science was forced to seek legitimation through a new authority, narrative, "It is natural . . . to solicit the name of

a hero." This hero who scientists called on to serve as their champion must have "the right to decide for society" and its "prescriptions" must be accepted as norms by those they obligate (1993, p. 30). Lyotard identifies science's newly adopted champion as "the people," adding that "the [new] sign of [scientific] legitimacy is the people's consensus, and their mode of creating norms is deliberation" (1993, p. 30). Along with this new sociopolitical method of legitimating scientific knowledge statements came the ideas of progress, the accumulative nature of knowledge and the universality of "humanity."

Science's adoption of this particular form of narrative produced a number of important results. First, in addition to making denotative statements that deal with questions of truth and falsehood, scientists, or senders of scientific knowledge statements, expanded their area of competence to prescriptive utterances that deal with questions of right and wrong. In other words, scientific knowledge statements now have "pretensions of justice" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 31). Second, senders of scientific statements, operating under the auspices or authority of the people and supported by the political power of the State, began recognizing and rewarding the just while identifying and sanctioning the unjust. In the words of Lyotard, "the operators of scientific knowledge . . . [became] actively involved in destroying the traditional knowledge of the people, identified from that point forward as minorities or potential separatist movements destined only to spread obstructionism" (1993, p. 30). Lyotard argues that the merging of science with the metanarrative of emancipation created an environment in which modernist societies could justify using political power to silence dissenters. Dissenters became anyone who differed from senders of scientific knowledge statements, scientists, or their political supporters. Finally, according to Lyotard, the status of the State became "intimately intertwined with that of scientific knowledge"

(1993, p. 31). This wedding of science and politics necessarily resulted from the reconceptualization of science and scientific knowledge. Its practitioners and proponents conceive of science as a proprietary language, i.e., its statements have truth-value to the exclusion of statements framed in any other vocabulary. In addition, scientific knowledge statements now facilitate the emancipation of the universal subject, "the people." Thus, the State must protect the privileged status of science and insure that all other language games and their players remain marginalized. Also, because the deliberations and decisions that produce scientific knowledge mainly take place within, and are dependent on, institutions directly or indirectly supported by the state, e.g., research institutes and universities, the State becomes essential to both the successful functioning of science and the emancipation of humanity (1993, p. 31).

The Narrative of Emancipation and Education. Usher and Edwards (1994) discuss the impact that the adoption of the narrative of emancipation has for education's place and function in modern Western society. They claim that the adoption of the narrative empowered the State and legitimated its active participation in education, while prioritizing primary education and de-emphasizing higher education. Within this context, a primary function of elementary and secondary education is "to introduce all the population to the *legitimacy* of scientific knowledge, thereby giving embodiment to the emancipatory thrust of this grand narrative" (Usher and Edwards, 1994, p. 161). The process remains roughly equivalent to, and serves the same general purpose as, Rorty's socialization, although the objective differs.

Lyotard cites measures dealing with higher education adopted by Napoleon as one of the original embodiments of the "narrative of emancipation" in public policy dealing with higher education. Based on these measures, the function of higher education is the training of skilled government officials as functionaries of the state,

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who, in the public interest, manage the affairs of the state. These "managers of civil society" also serve as the "intermediaries in perpetuating the legitimacy of the grand narrative." In other words, one of the primary functions of modernist higher education became the production of a trained cadre of administrative and professional personnel with the skills necessary "for the stability of the state." These individuals develop and implement the public policy that insures the general public's continued acceptance of the legitimacy of science and scientific information. Usher and Edwards argue that modernist educational policies "only 'make sense' on the basis of the presupposition that humanity is the hero of liberty and that it is progress toward liberty which the state must work towards by supporting the institutions that produce scientific knowledge" (p. 161). The narrative of emancipation provides justification for the establishment of public scientific institutes. According to Lyotard, the State exercises authority of the narrative "every time it assumes direct control over the training of the 'people,' under the name of the 'nation,' in order to point them down the path to progress" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 32).

The Metanarrative of Speculative Unity

The second legitimating narrative adopted by modern science has a variety of names, but will be referenced here as the narrative or metanarrative of spiritual unity or simply as the narrative of the Spirit. Lyotard traces the origin of the second "narrative of legitimation," associated with Hegel and German idealism, to Prussia, between 1807 and 1810, and to Wilhelm von Humboldt's establishment of the University of Berlin. Lyotard argues that the popular interpretation of von Humboldt's intent and the significance of his University, often summed-up in the phrase "science for its own sake," represents an oversimplification. In Lyotard's vision, the University of Berlin actually represents the product of a compromise that stemmed from a debate between

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two camps advocating conflicting views. One group associated with Johann Fichte and the other with the views of Friedreich Schleiermacher. According to Lyotard, the "conflict" arose between modern science, "a language game made of denotations answerable only to the criterion of truth," and traditional narrative, "a language game governing ethical, social and political practice that necessarily involves decisions and obligations" (1993, p. 32). As mentioned above, the first game has as its objective truth, while the second concerns itself with justice which lies outside the purview of science. As described by Lyotard, von Humboldt's compromise, and the University that it produced, attempt to support both language games, i.e., to concurrently pursue both truth and justice--science and narrative. Lyotard provides the following descriptions of von Humboldt's vision for the University of Berlin, which many countries, including the United States, adopted as a model for their respective higher education systems:

> Humboldt therefore invokes a Spirit (what Fichte called Life), animated by three ambitions, or better, by a single, threefold aspiration: "that of deriving everything from an original principle" (corresponding to scientific activity), "that of relating everything to an ideal" (governing ethical and social practice), and "that of unifying this principle and this ideal in a single Ideal" (ensuring that the scientific search for true causes always coincides with the pursuit of just ends in moral and political life). (1993. p. 33)

Lyotard points out the fundamental difference between the two narratives of legitimation adopted by modern science. "The people" form the subject of knowledge of the narrative of emancipation. This narrative, identified as "state-political," embeds itself in the State. The "speculative spirit," or the "Spirit" forms the subject of the narrative of speculative unity. This narrative, identified as philosophical as opposed to

sociopolitical, imbeds itself in what Lyotard calls "a System," as opposed to the State (Lyotard, 1993, p. 33). In an attempt to define or explain "speculative spirit" and its functions, Lyotard quotes Schleiermacher describing his vision of the purpose of the modern university. Schleiermacher wrote that the function of the university is to "lay open the whole body of learning and expound both the principle and the foundation of all knowledge." He adds that "there is no creative scientific capacity without the speculative spirit" (Schleiermacher quoted by Lyotard, in Lyotard, 1993, p. 33). The speculative spirit separates and distinguishes higher learning from other forms of learning and/or training. In Lyotard's words, "Schools are functional: the University is speculative, that is to say, philosophical" (1993, p. 33). The Germans felt that primary schools and scientific laboratories and institutes had fragmented knowledge and science. Therefore, the unification of knowledge becomes the job of the university, through reliance on philosophy and speculation. According to Lyotard, the adoption of a metanarrative that "links the sciences together as moments in the becoming of the spirit" would accomplish this unification.

Lyotard references Hegel's Encyclopedia of Philosophy (1817/1959) as the best known and possibly final articulation of the impulse to totalization and the idea of the System that was originally presented by Fichte and von Schelling. Simplifying to the extreme, Hegel envisions knowledge as a principle component in the self-conscious mind's gradual evolution through history out of the unselfconsciousness of matter. In effect, Hegel envisions human history as movement toward the realization of the Idea, a totality where all knowledge is unified. The Hegelian dialectic process of thesis, antithesis and synthesis facilitated this movement.

"The People" vs. "The Spirit"

Lyotard points out that the metanarrative of speculative unity suggests a

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significantly different relationship between science, scientists and scientific knowledge and the State than does the narrative of emancipation. He writes that

> the humanist principle that humanity raises up in dignity and freedom through knowledge is left by the way side . . . [from the German] perspective, knowledge first finds legitimacy within itself, and it is knowledge that is entitled to say what the State and what society are. (1993, p. 34)

This narrative not only favors higher education over elementary, secondary and professional/technical education, it has had a profound impact on the modern university. Of particular interest and importance to this discussion is the privileging of scientific methodology and research, and the promotion of the idea or principle of academic freedom. The idealized German university represents a safe haven in which academics, motivated by a desire to realize the totality of knowledge, and guided by the movement toward speculative unity, remain free to act and speak as they please. Although the German professor received permission to criticize the State, he was expected to refrain from overt political action.

The process of legitimation used by the two narratives also differs significantly. Lyotard writes that "A noteworthy result of the speculative apparatus is that all of the discourses of learning about every possible referent are taken up not from the point of view of their immediate truth-value, but in terms of the value they acquire by virtue of occupying a certain place in the itinerary of Spirit or Life" (1993, p. 35). Lyotard's observation relates to the ideas that knowledge is cumulative, and that knowledge acts as its own justification, i.e., every bit of legitimate knowledge contributes to the ultimate awareness/revelation/actualization of the Spirit. In other words, a Hegelian would argue that the knowledge produced through research and shared through teaching

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provides the required justification to legitimate the existence and support of "the University." Unlike invoking the authority of the people, i.e., emancipation, the legitimacy of research and teaching authorized by the Spirit is not determined by the "truth-value" of the knowledge statements they produce. While the State remains a primary beneficiary of the narrative of emancipation, according to Lyotard, the University acts as the "exclusive institution" of the narrative of the Spirit (1993, p. 35).

<u>Modernist Metanarratives: The Loss of Credulity</u>

Usher and Edwards believe that Lyotard's suggestion that "the postmodern moment results in and from 'incredulity toward metanarratives' . . . may be the single most important idea to be taken from his work and deployed in the discussion of education" (Usher and Edwards, p. 165). Although the narratives adopted by modern science differ fundamentally in a number of ways, they both contribute to the legitimation of scientific knowledge, and they also share a number of other similarities. Two of these similarities have particular relevance to this discussion. First, science's narratives of legitimation changed the focus of Western epistemology and the meaning of learning, teaching and research. Earlier narratives described truth, the object of knowledge, as something "out there" to be discovered or rediscovered. For example, a Platonist envisions education as a process of remembering forms of original truth that humans had known prior to their births, but had subsequently forgotten. Both of the narratives of modern science are, however, teleological. They envision humanity as involved in a natural process, following an itinerary that necessarily leads them toward a final goal, such as emancipation or absolute knowledge. Both narratives are metanarratives, which, in the words of Connor (1996), means that they are

> narratives which subordinate, organize, and account for other narratives; so that every other local narrative, whether it be the narrative of a discovery in

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science, or the narrative of an individual's growth and education, is given

meaning by the way it echoes and conforms [to] the grand narrative of the

emancipation of humanity or the achievement of pure self-conscious Spirit.

(p. 30)

According to Lyotard, the second similarity shared by science's appropriated

narratives is that they both legitimate acts of unparalleled terror in the name of humanity

and knowledge, e.g., Stalinism or Nazism. In Lyotard's view, "confusing different

language games," i.e., seeking legitimation through narrative while concurrently

denying its legitimacy, has contributed to modernism's failure to fulfill its promise of

enlightenment and freedom, while significantly contributing to its unintended

production of terror and cruelty. Lyotard provides what could be viewed as an epitaph

of modernism:

In the course of the past fifty years, each grand narrative of emancipation--

regardless of the genre it privileges--has, as it were, had its principle

invalidated. All that is real is rational, all that is rational is real:

"Auschwitz" refutes the speculative doctrine. At least this crime, which is

real, is irrational. All that is proletarian is communist, all that is

communist is proletarian: "Berlin 1953," "Budapest 1956,"

"Czechoslovakia 1968," "Poland 1980" . . . Refute the doctrine of

historical materialism: the workers rise up against the Party. All that is

democratic is by the people for the people, and vice versa: "May 1968"

refutes the doctrine of parliamentary liberalism. Everyday society brings

the representative institution to a halt. Everything that promotes the free

flow of supply and demand is good for general prosperity, and vice versa:

"the crisis of 1911 and 1920" refute the doctrine of economic liberalism,

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and "the crisis of 1974-79" refutes the post-Keynesian modification of that

doctrine. (Lyotard 1993a, pp. 28-29)

The crises that Lyotard describes and the cynicism that his description reflects serve as

major causes of the popular loss of faith in modernism and modern science and the

metanarratives that undergird them. Of Lyotard's assessment of modernism, Usher and

Edwards write, "embedded within a complex philosophical argument is a devastating

critique of the effects of the modern project in its many guises" (Usher and Edwards, p.

167).

Lyotard believes that three additional factors contributed to the decline of

modernism and the loss of credibility of its metanarratives. They include the rapid

development and ubiquity of technology, the "reinvigoration of liberal capitalism," and

a growing consumerism--a pervasive societal preoccupation with the consumption of

goods and services. In addition to these external factors, major flaws or contradictions

inherent in its legitimating metanarratives also drive the widespread loss of faith in

science. Lyotard contends that the metanarrative of speculative unity includes a

skepticism toward science that continually casts doubt on the knowledge statements that

it intends to legitimate, as it fragments the knowledge that it strives to unify (1993, p.

39).

According to Lyotard, the impact of science's second crisis of legitimation,

caused by its metanarratives' loss of credulity, has a transformative effect on Western

higher education, including its universities, and their curriculum and faculties. A

change occurs when rigid and clearly defined boundaries separating traditional

disciplines breakdown, and dominant scientific language games no longer hold as

superior to other non-scientific games. This results in an overlapping of disciplines, a

merging of vocabularies, a flattening of the "speculative hierarchy of learning" and the

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superior to other non-scientific games. This results in an overlapping of disciplines, a

merging of vocabularies, a flattening of the "speculative hierarchy of learning" and the

language game. As has been previously discussed, Lyotard also believes that, although each language game follows a different set of rules, no basis exists for privileging one language game over any other. The self-privileging science-dominated hierarchy of knowledge is again flattened, as "the game of science is . . . put on par with others" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 40).

Lyotard reports that the first signs of the "'crisis' of scientific knowledge" can be seen as early as the late-nineteenth century. Discovery of this crisis, which results in the repudiation of modern science's legitimating metanarratives, and began in earnest at the end of World War II and has been progressing at an accelerating rate since the late 1950s, provides the basis for what Lyotard describes as his "working hypothesis." He postulates "that the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (1993, p. 3). Lyotard identifies what he believes to be the major cause of knowledge's altered status in the postmodern age. He writes,

> The decline of narrative can be seen as an effect of the blossoming of
>
> techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has
>
> shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means; it can also be seen as
>
> an effect of the reemployment of advanced liberal capitalism after its
>
> retreat under the protection of Keynesianism during the period 1930-1960,
>
> a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the
>
> individual enjoyment of goods and services. (1993, pp. 37-38)

As might be assumed, a loss of privilege and a general decrease in the regulatory and organizing power of its paradigms accompanies the popular loss of faith in modern science's legitimating metanarratives. Lyotard argues that as this process continues, scientists begin questioning their own assumptions and their entire branch of

knowledge, which begins to fragment into a "cloud of specialization." Each of the emerging new specialities and sub-specialities of science develop their own final vocabularies as they evolve into unique language-games played by individualized and incompatible rules.

The death of the universal, unifying, grand narrative caused a proliferation of local fragmenting, "petite" narratives and the creation of an equally wide range of new language games. In the late-twentieth century, so many new and previously silenced voices speak out in so many different languages that its is impossible for any one person, be s/he researcher and/or teacher, organization or system to learn all the different vocabularies and all the different rules to all the different games. The transition from the universal to the local, from the grand to the petite, from the one to the many represents, for Lyotard, the metamorphosis from the modern to the postmodern.

Performativity and Science's Second "Crisis of Legitimacy"

The progressive loss of faith in metanarratives did not remove the need for legitimation. If scientific information is generally held to be illegitimate, how can the sender of scientific statements command the attention of addressees? Without an addressee, there can be no debate. Without debate, science loses the ability to replicate itself. Without replication, science ceases to be. On a more practical level, if science and scientific knowledge cannot be legitimated, and sciences loses its public audience, how can scientists continue to command public and private resources to support their research and teaching? Finally, Lyotard believes that, because the authority of the modern State has inalterably tied itself to the legitimacy science, if the legitimacy of science comes under suspicion, the authority of the State is threatened and its power diminished.

Lyotard believes that science solved its legitimacy problem by adopting a new language game which supplants the idea of progress, and the pursuit of truth, as its ultimate goal: "Rather than a denotative language game of truth and falsehood, or a prescriptive language game of justice and injustice, there emerges the technical game of performative efficiency and inefficiency." Lyotard labels science's new game "performativity," which he describes as simply "the best possible input/output equation" (1993, p. 46). The reader should be mindful that the forces that ultimately lead to a decline of modernism by undercutting faith in its legitimating metanarratives-- technology, liberal capitalism and consumerism--also form the focuses for "postindustrial society" and "postmodern culture." Lyotard's ideas about technology reinforce this view, and further illuminate his understanding of "performativity." He argues that

> Technical devices originated as prosthetic aids for the human organs or as physiological systems whose function it is to receive data or condition the context. They follow a principle, and it is the principle of optimal performance: maximizing output (the information or modifications obtained) and minimizing input (the energy expanded in the process). Technology is therefore a game pertaining not to the true, the just, or the beautiful, etc., but to efficiency: a technological "move" is "good" when it does better and/or expends less energy than another. (1993, p. 44)

Lyotard argues that throughout most of human history, no connection between technology and knowledge existed. This condition changed, however, with the advent of science and its initial requirement that knowledge be based on proof and not societal practice or revelation. This new requirement for proof, in Lyotard's view, provided the

basis for the ascendency of technology and established its role in the production of both modern and postmodern knowledge.

Lyotard points out that observation serves as the basis of scientific proof involving perception of phenomena by human sense organs. He adds that "Senses are deceptive, and their range and powers of discrimination are limited" (1993, p. 44). Lyotard contends that scientists turned to technology in an attempt to compensate for these human limitations, and technology successfully produced "devices that optimized the performance of the human body for the purpose of producing proof" (1993, p. 45). Unfortunately for scientists, technology and the devices that it produces, e.g., computers, microscopes, telescopes and the Internet, cost money. The more advanced modern science becomes, the more expensive its required technology requires becomes. Proof of this observation can be seen in the university's insatiable hunger for faster and more powerful computers and state-of-the-art software, and the rate at which these machines and applications become obsolete.

Lyotard argues that the wedding of science--research and teaching--and technology has established a necessary connection between wealth and the creators of knowledge. With uncharacteristic succinctness he writes, "No money, no proof--and that means no verification of statements and no truth" (1993, p. 45). Lyotard adds that, as industrialization and modernism continue to evolve, the truism that there can be no technology without wealth and no wealth without technology is elevated to a guiding principle. Accordingly, "It is at this precise moment that science becomes a force of production . . . a moment in the circulation of capital" (1993, p. 45). The driving force behind this entire evolutionary process which makes research and teaching dependent on technology and, thus, money, has little to do with knowledge, but a lot to do with profit. Lyotard, argues that "The 'organic' connection between technology and

profit preceded its union with science," and that "Technology became important to

contemporary knowledge only through the mediation of a generalized spirit of

performativity" (1993, p. 45).

Truth as a Saleable Commodity

The lure of increasing profits added a third player to the performativity game.

The capitalist joined the scientist and technology. According to Lyotard, capitalism

solved the scientists' problem of funding their increasingly expensive research and in

the process significantly commercialized the endeavor. Research departments

established by private corporations made available the necessary resources to support

applied research, the development of technology having direct commercial application.

This undertaking had as its objective the prevision of quick turn-around, i.e., a rapid

return on the capitalist's investment. Taking a more long-term perspective, business

also supported basic research primarily by creating private and/or public research

foundations and through grants to research universities.

Governments in the liberal capitalist states, particularly during the time that

Lyotard describes as the Keynesian period, basically from 1930 through 1960, followed

the lead of, and closely cooperated with, the private for-profit sector in providing

financial support for both applied and basic scientific research. Lyotard argues that

accompanying the incursion of "higher capitalism" and the state into higher education

through focused spending was a major change in institutional or community culture. He

contends that hierarchy, centralized decision making, teamwork, calculation of

individual and collective returns, the development of saleable programs and market

research characterize these changes (1993, p. 45). Science and education and their

principal supporters, the State and the corporation, have effectively forsaken the pursuit

of truth and justice. They have abandoned idealism and humanism, and replaced them

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with Lyotard's performativity and the commercialization of higher education. The

impact of this adaptation to postmodernism, or this postmodern adaptation to

postindustrial or advanced modernism, is the privileging of efficiency in the pursuit of

profit and power and the marginalization of both traditional modernist education and the

traditional modernist researcher and teacher. Lyotard writes that "in the discourse of

today's financial backers of research, the only credible goal is power. Scientists,

technicians and instruments are purchased not to find truth, but to augment power"

(1993, p. 46).

The Computer

This process, the reliance on performativity, i.e., the privileging of efficiency

over both justice and truth, and the interrelationship among technology, wealth and

power (both public and private) and knowledge, has resulted in a new form of

legitimation that Lyotard calls legitimation by power:

> Power is not only good performativity, but also effective verification and
>
> good verdicts. It legitimates science and the law on the basis of their
>
> efficiency, and legitimates this efficiency on the basis of science and law.
>
> It is self-legitimating, in the same way a system organized around
>
> performance maximization seems to be. Now it is precisely this kind of
>
> context control that a generalized computerization of society may bring.
>
> The performativity of an utterance, be it denotative or prescriptive,
>
> increases proportionally to the amount of information about its referent one
>
> has at one's disposal. Thus the growth of power, and its self-
>
> legitimation, are now taking the route of data storage and accessibility, and
>
> the operativity of information. (1993, p. 47)

According to Lyotard this "logic of power growth" governs the allocation of both

private and public support of research activities, i.e., who gets the research grants. Ironically, this situation reverses the relationship between science and technology. Technology was first introduced as an aid or tool to assist science; science justified technology. However, as performativity and economic development become the primary concern of research and the guiding principles of higher education, technology, because of its ability to improve efficiency, and thus increase profits and power, has become the justification for science--the reason why decision makers choose to provide political and financial support for research. The technology criteria becomes the standard against which "research sectors," including universities, should be judged. Lyotard writes that those entities--colleges and universities--

> are unable to argue that they contribute even indirectly to the optimization
> of the system's performance are abandoned by the flow of capital and
> doomed to senescence. The criterion of performance is explicitly invoked
> by the authorities to justify their refusal to subsidize certain research
> centers. (1993, p. 47)

Lyotard identifies two major outcomes of the adoption of performativity for purposes of legitimation. The first relates to the role of the State, the second to the function of knowledge in postmodern culture. The State continues to be a major supporter of science and a prime beneficiary of its privileging. However, as a result of rapidly advancing technology, e.g., the proliferation of the Internet and the availability of affordable personal computers, the State's ability to control information production and dissemination, and thus impact the contours of popular reality, diminishes. Lyotard believes that the information base has grown too large, too diverse and too accessible to be effectively controlled or even monitored. This view resembles one expressed by Vattimo in The Transparent Society (1992). The breakdown of both epistemological

and social unity further weakens the position of the State. Too many new language games are being played for even the State to learn all the rules. This makes the prolonged silencing of dissidents a practical impossibility. Finally, Lyotard believes a new set of players, particularly the new capitalist and multinational corporations, effectively challenges the power of the State.

In Lyotard's rapidly evolving postmodern culture, these new and transformed power brokers may play completely outside of the arena of State control. All of these changes result in a defusion of power and a resultant weakening of the State's power and its relationship to, and influence on, higher education. Lyotard writes that

> the mercantilization of knowledge is bound to affect the privilege the
>
> nation-states have enjoyed, and still enjoy, with respect to the production
>
> and distribution of learning. The notion that learning falls within the
>
> purview of the State, as the brain or mind of society, will become more and
>
> more outdated with the increasing strength of the opposing principle,
>
> according to which society exists and progresses only if the messages
>
> circulating within it are rich in information and easy to decode. The
>
> ideology of communicative "transparency," which goes hand in hand with
>
> the commercialization of knowledge, will begin to perceive the State as a
>
> factor of opacity and "noise." It is from this point of view that the problem
>
> of the relationship between economic and State powers threatens to arise
>
> with a new urgency. (1993, p.5)

Lyotard later adds that "investment decisions" have "passed beyond the control of the nation-state," which means that potentially the State will be simply one more information user among many (1993, p. 5).

According to Lyotard, performativity and the forces that have led to its adoption, particularly rapidly advancing technology and the impact and influence of capitalist interests on campus, have also had a profound and transformative effect on knowledge. As has been noted, Lyotard assumes that knowledge cannot remain unchanged in a changing environment. In the evolving postmodern environment that Lyotard describes, knowledge ceases to be an end in itself, and becomes "a product to be sold" and "consumed in order to be valorized in new production." Lyotard cynically adds that the goal of knowledge production and its consumption has become "exchange," and the goal of exchange is profit. Accordingly, Lyotard believes that the twin forces of capitalism and technology, particularly in the area of computers, have already had and will continue to have a transformative impact on the principal functions of knowledge and higher education, i.e., "research and the transmission of acquired learning" (1993, p. 5). Lyotard asserts that, "it is common knowledge that the miniaturization and commercialization of machines is already changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, and made available and exploited" (1993, p. 5). He envisions the long term impact of computers on human life being at least as transformative as the revolutions in transportation and the media.

Lyotard and Postmodern Education

If Lyotard is correct, the implications for higher education are profound. He predicts that anything in "the constituted body of knowledge" that cannot be translated into "quantities of information" will be abandoned and that "the direction of research will be dictated by the possibility of its eventual results being translatable into computer language" (1993, p. 5). Technology and the influences of economic competition will not only determine what constitutes knowledge but also how it is transmitted. Lyotard identifies "the demoralization of researchers and teachers" (1993, p. 7) as one of the

major cumulative effects of the "computerization of society" and the on-going

transformation of the modern university and modern knowledge. He believes that these

changes combine with the wide-spread "incredulity toward metanarratives," to threaten

the long-term continued existence of traditional higher education and the modern

university. Bloland reinforces this point, arguing the importance to higher education of

metanarratives and their standing. They provide the foundation for the modern

university and college, specifically as they relate to technology, the position of science,

and fundamental assumptions about progress, knowledge and socialization (Bloland,

1995, p. 8).

In Chapter 12 of The Postmodern Condition, "Education and Its Legitimation

Through Performativity," Lyotard presents one of his most controversial and widely

debated ideas within the academic community. Specifically, he argues that the

increasing vocationalization and market orientation of higher education combined with

advancing technology will lead to the "Death of the Professor." Consistent with the

thrust of those aspects of his argument previously discussed, Lyotard sees the traditional

Western university as an institution based on modernist precepts such as objective

representational knowledge, social progress and "emancipationist humanism." He also

envisions it basically functioning to maintain and perpetuate a social, economic and

political system that advantages the "liberal elite" or, in the words of Vattimo, that

continues to "privilege the privileged." However, in Lyotard's view, conditions are

rapidly changing. He believes that the traditional functions of Western higher

education, i.e., transmitting an established body of knowledge, the traditional canon,

and training the mind, all dependent on the continued acceptance of the prevailing

modernist metanarratives, have been abandoned. Although the traditional university

continues to train and reproduce the "professional intelligentsia" and the "technical

intelligentsia," the vast majority of students, particularly those in disciplines in the arts and human sciences, are preparing for unemployment. Conversely, according to Lyotard, the evolving function of postmodern education is to support and increase the "performativity" of society. As it translates into a pedagogy, universities and colleges begin providing students only the necessary knowledge and skills to support and enhance society's operational efficiency. Lyotard's vision appears to already have reached a degree of fruition. Phoenix University, discussed in Chapter One, provides an example of an institution that fulfills many, if not all, of the criteria of the postmodern university as described by Lyotard.

Lyotard also believes that higher education will begin to play an ever-increasing role in "job retraining and continuing education," because "knowledge will no longer be transmitted *en bloc*, once and for all to young people before they enter into the work force: rather they will be served 'a la carte' to adults who are either already working or expect to be" (1993, p. 48). Thus, for a variety of reasons, not the least of which is the diminution of Euro-American economic dominance and the resulting increase in economic competition from the rest of the world, the "university franchise" on the transmission of knowledge has been relegated to a "bygone era." In Lyotard's words, "The moment knowledge ceases to be an end in itself--the realization of the Idea of the emancipation of men--its transmission is no longer the exclusive responsibility of scholars and students" (1993, p. 50).

This transformative process combines with advancing technologies to render the traditional person-to-person relationship between student and professor and the traditional methods of instruction ineffective and unnecessary. In effect, the function performed by the library and the professor in the modern university will be performed by computers and data banks in the postmodern university. In what could be interpreted

as a wry comment, Lyotard observes, "Pedagogy would not necessarily suffer. The student would still have to be taught something: not content, but how to use the terminals" (1993, p. 50). Lyotard adds that education must not be seen simply as the "reproduction of skills" or limited to the "transmission of knowledge." It must include the production of new knowledge necessary to achieve a competitive advantage in a postmodern environment in which there are no secrets and all students have easy access to all available knowledge. New knowledge, and thus the best performativity, according to Lyotard, will come not from obtaining new information, but rather from arranging existing information in new ways. This holds true because the objective of higher education has become the efficient transmission of an organized body of established information that can be mechanically accessed by all properly trained students, after it has been translated into a computer language(s) and stored in "memory banks."

Thus, those who possess "imagination," a power or ability that may be enhanced by providing students "training in all the procedures that can increase one's ability to connect the fields jealously guarded from one another by the traditional organization of knowledge" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 52), gain an advantage. As one would expect from the preceding statement, Lyotard looks with favor upon interdisciplinary studies; however, his perception differs from that of advocates of the liberal arts. In Lyotard's postmodern university, "The relation of knowledge is not articulated in terms of the realization of the life of the Spirit or the emancipation of humanity, but in terms of the users of complex conceptual and material machinery and those who benefit from its performance capabilities" (1993, p. 52). While postmodern students are denied "recourse to metalanguage or metanarrative in which to formulate the final goal" (1993, p. 52), they are encouraged to use their imaginations to "brainstorm." This process will lead to the

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conceptualization or configuration of new relationships of knowledge that will improve society's performance and productivity (Lyotard 1993, p. 52).

The broad sweeping implications of Lyotard's ideas for higher education, particularly those concerning the fate of academics, are as obvious as the varied and often hostile reactions that they elicit from members of the Academy. Lyotard concludes his discussion of the postmodern university with this less-than-sympathetic eulogy:

> the process of delegitimation and the predominance of the performance criterion are sounding the knell of the age of the Professor: a professor is no more competent than memory bank networks in transmitting established knowledge, no more competent than interdisciplinary teams in imagining new moves or new games. (1993, p. 53)

Paralogy

Although Lyotard approves of the transformation from the modern to the postmodern and looks with favor on many of the changes accruing in higher education that have been discussed above, he does not approve of performativity as the criteria for judging the legitimacy of knowledge or as the basis for its production. One of the most important, but also difficult and confusing, aspects of Lyotard's thought deals with his description of two conflicting phenomena that he sees emerging from the destabilization of knowledge: the deterioration of the grand or metanarrative and the emergence and proliferation of autonomous petite or micro narratives. The first, which involves narrative's inability to legitimatize knowledge; the loss of authority of ideas like justice and goodness to regulate social action and legitimate science--teaching and research; the devaluation of knowledge and the resulting emergence of performativity as the legitimating authority in "normal" science, has already been considered. The second

deals with "paralogy" which characterizes "revolutionary" science, and which Lyotard recommends as an alternative to performativity. Lyotard's discussion of paralogy has particular significance to this discussion because of its relationship to his views on higher education.

Steven Connor provides the following summary description of the impact that the devaluation of traditional modernist knowledge and the adoption of performativity has on higher education. He writes, "The university or institution of learning cannot in these circumstances be concerned with transmitting knowledge in itself, but must be tied ever more narrowly to the principle of performativity--so that the question asked by teacher, student and government must now no longer be 'Is it true?' but 'What use is it?' and 'How much is it worth?'" (Connor, pp. 32-33). Although performativity provides justification for continued public and private support for higher education, Lyotard finds it unacceptable and seeks an alternative.

In addition to its many other transformative effects, performativity and its mobilizing forces, new liberal capitalism and technology, require a unity and homogeneity that fosters an intolerance of difference and dissention closely associated with metanarratives. Lyotard believes that consensus and its resultant oppression and silencing, what he describes as "terror," although the products of "scientific technique," are not the goal of science, or "scientific temper." Lyotard contends that the goal of postmodern science, the objective of the scientific temper, is paralogy. Like Mao's and Jefferson's belief that all governments eventually become oppressive and must be refocused by periodic revolution, and Schumpeter's parallel conviction that all economies eventually stagnate and require the therapeutic purging of periodic depressions, Lyotard believes that "normal" performative science contains a flaw that limits its influence by contributing to its own ongoing disintegration. This flaw, which

represents the embodiment of the conflict that accompanies the declining status of narrative, is paralogy.

Lyotard's use of paralogy reflects both the complexity and the confusing nature of his thought. He envisions paralogy as something similar to a self-correcting mechanism that controls or limits normal science, but he concurrently describes as a critical part of revolutionary or postmodern science. Lyotard contends that the loss of faith in metanarratives, particularly the "dialectic of the Spirit" and the "emancipation of humanity," and the emergence of the little narrative (petit récit) as "the quintessential form of imaginative invention, most particularly in science" (1993, p. 60), and the unacceptableness of performativity makes necessary the recourse to paralogy. The final reason provided by Lyotard for turning to paralogy is the inadequacy of the principle of consensus as a criterion for evaluating knowledge.[17] In the following passage Lyotard attempts to summarize his views:

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[17]Lyotard provides the following reasons for his rejection of consensus:

> In the first, consensus is an agreement between men, defined as knowing intellects and free wills, and is obtained through dialogue. This is the form elaborated by Habermas, but his conception is based on the validity of the narrative of emancipation. In the second, consensus is a component of the system, which manipulates it in order to maintain and improve performance. It is the object of administrative procedures . . . In this case, its only validity is as an instrument to be used toward achieving the real goal, which is what legitimates the system--power.

> The problem is therefore to determine whether it is possible to have a form of legitimation based solely on paralogy. (1993, pp. 60-61)

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Returning to the description of scientific pragmatics . . . it is dissention that must be emphasized. Consensus is a horizon that is never reached. Research that takes place under the aegis of a paradigm tends to stabilize . . . But what is striking is that someone always comes along to disturb the order of "reason." It is necessary to posit the existence of a power that destabilizes the capacity for explanation, manifested in the promulgation of new norms for understanding or, if one prefers, in a proposal to establish new rules circumscribing a new field of research for the language of science . . . . It is not without rules (There are classes of catastrophe), but it is always locally determined. Applied to scientific discussions and placed in a temporal framework, this property implies that "discoveries" are unpredictable. In terms of the idea of transparency, it is a factor that generates blind spots and defers consensus. (Lyotard, 1993, p. 61)

Fredric Jameson (1993) describes "Lyotard's ultimate vision and knowledge" not as a search for consensus, but as a quest for "instabilities," that he labels the "practice of paralogism." Jameson points out that, contrary to traditional science and the Western intellectual tradition, Lyotard's idealized objective is not to replicate and thus reinforce, or prove, conventional knowledge statements produced by research and transmitted by teaching, but rather to subvert that entire process. Jameson writes that the objective of revolutionary science, and the primary function of research and teaching, is "to undermine from within the very framework in which the previous 'normal science' had been conducted" (p. xix). J.M. Fritzman (1990) provides a rather parsimonious definition of "Lyotardian paralogy," which he describes as "the constant search for new concepts that introduces descensus into consensus" (p. 371).

In summary, Lyotard rejects metanarratives of all forms, including the narrative of emancipation used by Habermas and others to justify their quest for consensus. He also finds performativity, which has emerged as the primary criteria for evaluating scientific knowledge statements, i.e., the products of research and the subject/object of teaching, in the vacuum created by narrative's loss of legitimating authority, unacceptable. In addition, Lyotard believes that both normal science and performativity, which urge that education should only attempt to teach the knowledge and skills necessary to maintain and improve the operational efficiency of society, along with metanarratives, should be rejected because of their inevitable impulse toward consensus, i.e., intolerance of deviation from the universalized temporal legitimating or evaluative criteria--the criteria privileged by those who possess sufficient power to control and shape information.

To avoid the terror that is a necessary byproduct of consensus, Lyotard privileges difference and advocates paralogy. Ironically, paralogy, although it can and should be cultivated, is also a byproduct of the complex of forces that necessitates its utilization to legitimate knowledge. Specifically, the proliferation of multiple and diverse voices long silenced by the power of the metanarrative means that those who wield traditional power can no longer rule with unchallenged authority. Society's compulsion to compel compliance combined with the tendency toward fragmentation means that "someone always comes along to disturb the order of 'reason'" (1993, p. 61). Lyotard calls the emergence of the rebel who rises up to challenge the stagnation and repressiveness of the status quo, the person who refuses to play the game by the rules established by the privileged and the powerful, "striking." Lyotard's hope that the postmodern future will be better, less silent and less prone to terror than the modern past, rests on the shoulders of this "striking" postmodern revolutionary that Rorty views

with such trepidation. Fritzman provides the following explanation of paralogy's

implications for education:

> Lyotard's discussion of "Postmodern Science as the Search for Instability"
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> [Lyotard, 1993, pp. 53-60] and "Legitimation by Paralogy" [Lyotard,
>
> 1993, pp. 60-67] have as their primary purpose to show that postmodern
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> education and science are legitimated neither by . . . [the] criterion of
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> performance nor by Habermas' search for universal consensus . . .
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> Rather Lyotard believes that postmodern education and science are
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> legitimated by paralogy, by the constant introduction of dissensus into
>
> consensus. That is, Lyotard urges that postmodern education and science
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> flourish, instead of stagnating, through the search for new ideas and
>
> conceptions which disrupt and destabilize previously existing consensuses.
>
> The goal of postmodern education and science is the discovery and
>
> invention of these new ideas and concepts. (Fritzman, 1990, p. 372)

For Lyotard, postmodern knowledge and education, unlike their modern counterparts,

are not simply tools of the powerful and privileged. Instead, postmodern knowledge

and education, as conceived by Lyotard, "refines our sensitivities to differences and

reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's

homology, but the inventor's paralogy" (Lyotard, 1993, p. xxv).

Conclusion

A Final Caveat

I would like to begin the conclusion of this chapter by borrowing the following

passage from Usher and Edwards which appropriately ends their discussion of

postmodern education and Lyotard:

> We have come a long way from the discussion of education, but we feel it

is important to examine some of the "complexities" of Lyotard's writings, in order to avoid some of the simplistic appropriations of his work that have taken place. We are left with many questions and uncertainties, but as a postmodern writer, we would expect this from Lyotard, as he attempts to disrupt the order of our own narratives and reading of narratives. At one level, this suggests that Lyotard provides a varied set of arguments and positions which cannot be reconciled. However, this assumes the legitimacy of reconciliation--totalization--as a form of reading. To "make sense" of Lyotard demands that we avoid totalization and thus the argument that there are inconsistencies in his position and instead focus on particular narratives. As such, a happy ending . . . is not a rounded conclusion, but rather the continuation of a questioning and a sense of the fragments of understanding provided by his [Lyotard] analysis. (p. 171)

Lyotard and the Sectional Mosaic

In his description of Westward expansion, Frederick Jackson Turner, the legendary American historian, envisioned the frontier as a cutting edge, literally a moving and identifiable line, that separated the West from the rest of the nation. In effect, Turner saw the frontier as a dynamic boundary existing in both time and space that represented the point of interface between two separate and definable states or cultures, i.e., the West and the non-West, the settled and the unsettled, the pre-modern and the modern. But the frontier represented more than that; it was also a point of becoming--the point at which the unsettled wilderness became part of the nation, the wilderness transformed into civilization. In Turner's vision, as the frontier swept westward across the North American continent, it left in its wake a mosaic of different

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and unique cultures or subcultures, a network of local communities that collectively make up the ever-evolving culture of the United States.

Lyotard envisions no such frontier, no social, cultural, institutional or chronological line separating the postmodern from the modern. For Lyotard, as for most writers considering the postmodern, there is not even a clear-cut definition or understanding of what it is to be postmodern. Is postmodernism a historical era or epic, or is it a cultural model, a process, a perspective or a mind set? Authors even debate whether the postmodern can be separated or differentiated from the modern. Is postmodernism simply the current end point of a dynamic historical continuum, and thus the most advanced form of modernism and/or capitalism?

Despite the many differences separating Lyotard and Turner, both men do share a common vision, although in different contexts. They both envision a mosaic. Lyotard sees a significant overlap and an ongoing interplay between the modern and the postmodern. He believes that both modern and postmodern influences (forces) can and do exist in the same place at the same time. If one were so inclined, these competing influences could be envisioned as struggling for dominance, because, unless logic and reason are totally forsaken, an entity--an individual, an institution or a culture--cannot believe and not believe at the same time. That is, of course, unless the entity is one of Rorty's liberal ironists.

The contemporary American university provides numerous examples of the modern and the postmodern concurrently existing and exerting opposing influence in the same venue. Misunderstanding and sometimes even hostility often result when the modern and the postmodern converge. This convergence commonly occurs at the points of interface of faculty and administration and of faculty and students. The administration, being much more susceptible to external political and financial pressure

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than faculty, has more completely accepted the legitimacy of performativity and the virtues or necessity of forging a partnership between business and higher education. There are few better illustrations of postmodernism's encroachment onto the University campus, and its conflict with traditional modernist values, than assessment. One of the better examples of Lyotard's performativity, assessment's prime objective, is increasing accountability in higher education, i.e., making the educational process more efficient by quantifying the "performance" of traditional university faculty, both the teachers and the researchers, and their students. Ironically, many members of the faculty, particularly in the humanities and social sciences, have been more influenced by postmodernism and paralogy than by the politician's and the administrator's call for accountability and consensus.

The overlapping of the modern and the postmodern is possibly nowhere more obvious than in the relationship between faculty and students. Although an obvious generalization, the assertion that much of the faculty in the contemporary university emerged from the modernist tradition, and speak a variation of a modernist language, i.e., describe reality with a modernist final vocabulary, is defendable. In other words, faculty were taught, and continue to believe in, a modernist metanarrative. Conversely, much of the traditional student body, raised in a postmodern environment, have not internalized modernist values and beliefs. They privilege neither humanism nor knowledge. They find attractive neither ideologues nor scholars. They do represent, however, consumers seeking saleable skills, employment and possessions. If Lyotard is correct, America's universities are hosting the compounded absurdity of Milton trying to watch MTV and Beethoven attempting to listen to gangsta rap.

CHAPTER FOUR

AMERICAN HOPE/FRENCH CYNICISM

O my soul, do not aspire to

Immortal life, but exhaust the limits of the possible.

Pindar, Pythian iii

Introduction

Rorty and Lyotard share many important beliefs, but they also differ greatly. As illustrated by the discussion in the previous two chapters, both men generally accept the basic tenets of postmodernism as outlined by Henry Giroux.[18] In essence, both Rorty

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[18] The following is an outline of the basic themes of postmodernism presented by Giroux:

1. Master narratives, also known as grand or metanarratives, and traditions of knowledge grounded in first principles are spurned.

2. Philosophical principles of canonicity and the notion of the sacred are suspect.

3. Epistemic certainty and the fixed boundaries of academic knowledge are challenged by a "war of totality" and a disavowal of all-encompassing, single, world-views.

4. Rigid distinctions between high and low culture are rejected by the

and Lyotard see the same postmodern world but respond to it in quite different ways.

Although both men look through a similar lens, they see a different reality. Specifically, their views about the mission, structure, function and future of higher education stand at opposites ends of the evolving postmodern universe. In effect, as A. T. Nuyen, Senior Lecturer in Philosophy at the University of Queensland, Australia (1992) points out, Lyotard's and Rorty's epistemologies are similar, but their pedagogies radically differ. Nuyen correctly posits that both men philosophically share a basically similar postmodern perspective, but they hold widely different views about education. Something far more fundamental, however, than their differing views about "the art of teaching" serves to separate them.

Their respective visions of the postmodern university, although of great interest and importance to this discussion, reflect a deeper and more fundamental intellectual schism. In effect, their differing views about the function and future of higher education represent a symptom, not a cause. To fully understand and evaluate Lyotard's and Rorty's views about the university and its faculty, one must necessarily understand why

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insistence that the products of the so-called mass culture, popular culture, and folk art forms are proper objects of study.

5. The Enlightenment correspondence between history and progress and the modernist faith in rationality, science, and freedom are objects of deep-rooted skepticism.

6. A call for pluralized and fluid narrative space replaces the fixed and unified identity of the humanist.

7. Though far from complete, history is spurned as a unilinear process that moves the West toward a final realization of freedom. (1994, p.1)

two such skilled, informed and thoughtful people derive radically different conclusions from basically the same assumption. Therefore, this chapter considers their respective views about higher education in the context of their beliefs and ideas about epistemology, culture and politics. Specifically, the cause of Rorty's and Lyotard's differing conclusions, and the existential dimension of their choices, will be investigated. This investigation includes a consideration of the life and thoughts of Albert Camus, as they relate to the beliefs and ideas of Rorty and Lyotard, and the academy's response to those beliefs and ideas.

Similarities

In order to establish a foundation and context for the consideration of Lyotard's and Rorty's conflicting views, why their differences evolved and how those differences manifest themselves in their ideas about higher education, their shared beliefs and common ideas will first be considered. Because this discussion has as its primary objective the consideration of higher education in a postmodern environment, attention will more sharply focus on those ideas of Rorty and Lyotard, both concurrent and disparate, that provide the foundation or basis for their ideas and beliefs about the form and function of the postmodern academe.

Based on information and discussion presented in Chapters Two and Three, areas of agreement between Lyotard and Rorty that hold the greatest significance for this discussion include rejection of representational knowledge, metanarratives, universal and absolute or upper case "T"ruth, along with most of the values and/or ideas that were born of the Enlightenment, particularly rationalism and the inevitability of human progress. Along with their shared rejection of modernist beliefs, they also embrace a number of similar ideas. Both men espouse a belief in reality as a social construct and in truth as nonexistent outside of language. They also believe that

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"terror" or "cruelty" is, or has historically been, a bi-product of traditional modernism, particularly modernism's embrace of metanarratives. As a result of these beliefs, both men arrive at the conclusion that no legitimate authority exists outside the individual, or possibly his/her community, that authorizes privileging any one individual, group, belief, statement or action over any other.

Closely related to Lyotard's and Rorty's perceived connection between modernism's metanarratives, proselytizing and resultant cruelty and terror, is their desire to optimize personal or individual freedom for all members of their respective communities. Because of their rejection of legitimate objective-universal authority or criteria or reality, and their respective desires to minimize terror and cruelty while maximizing individual personal freedom, both men privilege difference--they strive to replace grand or metanarratives with *petit récit*, or small local narratives. Finally, both men remain pragmatists. They both privilege rules of action evaluated by the outcomes the actions produce, based on an individually or locally established criteria, over universalized theory, doctrine or ideology.

If we, i.e., their readers, choose to grant them the authority, Lyotard and Rorty will strip us of most of our beliefs. They remove all of the aids that humanity has developed throughout its recorded history to cushion the loneliness and pain, the angst and nausea, that then becomes a necessary and undeniable part of human existence. If we then choose them as guides, up to this point in our journey, we are left alone staring into the all-too-familiar and well-documented abyss. Both men also believe that there exists no final solution nor escape from this existential dilemma. Rorty writes that there are "no descriptions of how things are from a God's-eye point of view, no skyhooks provided by some contemporary or yet-to be developed science" (Rorty, 1989a, p 13). Only a collection of isolated individuals exists. Lyotard and Rorty believe and tell us

that nothing waits "out there" to be discovered that will miraculously give our lives purpose. From this perspective, there is existence, but existence *sans* essence.

These beliefs represent much of the common intellectual and philosophical foundation, i.e., assumptions, shared by Lyotard and Rorty. Both men not only send this very powerful message, they also encourage us to follow them one step further and discontinue all quests for "skyhooks," no matter their form. They base this admonition not only on the belief that all such endeavors represent a futile and pointless waste of time and energy, but also on the conviction that such efforts actually worsen the human condition. These quests divert attention from concrete action potentially capable of producing tangible results--a tangible improvement in the quality of human life.

So What?

At this point some may reasonablely ask, "So what?" Assuming that belief is a function of will, and granting that upper case Truth, i.e., transparent representational knowledge of a knowable external reality, remains illusionary, might not the "false" bliss provided by a delusional "hope for heaven" be better than a life that knows only desolation, suffering and pain? If no "T"ruth or "M"eaning exists, is the trade-off not justified? Such questions may justify and explain humankind's strong and persistent privileging of both religion and science.

However, based on a critical reading of both Rorty and Lyotard, an alternative response might be, "Possibly, but the cost of heaven's bliss has historically been very high." Lyotard and Rorty believe that quests for "T"ruth and "M"eaning, i.e., "Gods" and "skyhooks," impede concrete and potentially fruitful action. More specifically, both men hold that whenever a belief system claims any one "Truth" as ultimate, as most accurately reflecting or representing an external reality, that claim results in hierarchy. The hierarchy, in turn, provides the basis for decision making and

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prescriptive statements, and the criteria for evaluative judgements. An unfortunate characteristic of hierarchies, from the perspective of both Lyotard and Rorty, is that, along with a top, they necessarily have a bottom. In most instances, the tops tends to be small and far removed from their broad bases.

In effect, Lyotard and Rorty believe that cultures use Truth to rationalize and legitimate the privileging of a powerful few while marginalizing and silencing the balance of the respective society. Once revealed, Truth may be used to define and distinguish right from wrong and good from bad, and it dictates acceptable behavior and speech. The individual, group, idea, belief, faith, ideology, narrative, literature, image, shapes, form, color, texture, sound, etc., that embrace, espouse and or reflect the Truth currently privileged by their community, are themselves privileged. Conversely, the individual . . . etc. who does not capture and reflect the prevailing Truth suffers marginalization and disenfranchisement.

Rorty and Lyotard both believe that reality and truth exist within, and are thus the products of, the language that defines them. The critical question may appear to be: who defines reality? However, both men believe that "who" controls the process of defining remains less important than the process itself. Although they may be self serving, all definitions, no matter their author, are arbitrary and subjective. This is so according to Rorty and Lyotard, because truth does not reflect reality. Truth is whatever those individuals with sufficient power[19] or influence say it is.

Both men suggest an environment in which terror receives no encouragement and in which cruelty is minimized, an environment in which each individual has the

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[19] Power for neither Rorty nor Lyotard necessarily implies force, i.e., force is not a necessary characteristic or condition of power.

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freedom and ability to develop his/her own definition of truth and vision of reality. Terror and cruelty can take many different forms, ranging from the unconscious interaction between individuals, e.g., husband and wife, teacher and student or next-door neighbors, to the planned and sophisticated manipulation of a marketing or political campaign, to the systematic horror of the Holocaust. On these things Rorty and Lyotard agree.

Because Chapters Two and Three consider the foundation and substance of the two men's philosophical views at some length, other than the attention that they have already received, their shared beliefs and their common "postmodern" foundation will not receive major consideration in the balance of this chapter. Attention instead focuses on major areas of difference in their beliefs, assessments and prescriptions, what Fritzman (1990), a member of the Department of Philosophy at Purdue University, describes as "Lyotard's Paralogy and Rorty's Pluralism" and their "Pedagogical Implications."

Differences

As mentioned in this chapter's "Introduction," a most intriguing question arises from a study of Lyotard and Rorty: how can two men with relatively similar views arrive at such radically different conclusions? Any attempt to isolate and quantify the degree of congruity between Rorty's and Lyotard's intellectual, philosophical and political beliefs would likely result in the foolish conclusion that they agree about much more than they differ. Although defendable, this conclusion is misleading. As the preceding discussion and the two previous chapters demonstrate, Rorty and Lyotard certainly do share a great many views and beliefs. While their major areas of disagreement may appear comparatively small, they prove critical in terms of their final vocabularies and the realities that they describe and create. Within the context of this

discussion, their differences assume a greater level of importance than their agreements. This proves so because their differences determine the objectives, form and function of the university that they respectively visualize and describe as best suited to meet the needs and demands of an evolving postmodern future. Because their antagonistic views on education primarily emerge from their different political and philosophical perspectives, to be adequately understood and meaningfully discussed, Rorty's and Lyotard's universities must be situated in their respective political and philosophical contexts.

Optimism vs. Pessimism

On the most fundamental level, optimism ultimately separates Rorty from Lyotard. Lyotard succumbs. Rorty resists. Each man adopts and manifests radically different political postures. Rorty as a reformer labors to incrementally improve the quality of human existence.

In effect, Rorty trusts and wishes to empower and strengthen liberal bourgeois democratic institutions, such as the university, in an attempt to create a "pragmatist utopia" (1991, p. 213). In his latest book, Achieving Our Nation (1998), Rorty not only admonishes his readers to take pride in being Americans, he discusses the failure of the post-Vietnam "left" in the United States and how it might be reformed and revitalized. In that effort, he presents Whitman and Dewey as quintessential American heroes and discusses and endorses their "thoroughly secularized" visions of America. Rorty

provides the following description of that America, a "pragmatic democracy," a country which prides

> itself as one in which governments and social institutions exist only for
> the purpose of making a new sort of individual possible, one who will

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take nothing as authoritative save free consensus between as diverse a

variety of citizens as can possibly be produced. Such a country cannot

contain castes or classes, because the kind of self-respect which is

needed for free participation in democratic deliberation is incompatible

with such social divisions. (1998, p. 30)

Referencing Dewey, Rorty adds, "the only point of society is to construct subjects

capable of more novel, ever richer, forms of human happiness" (1998, p. 31). True to

his repudiation of metanarratives and representational Truth, and denying the possibility

of any universally grounded justification, he adds, "All that can be said in its [the

America of Whitman's and Dewey's dreams, a "classless and casteless society"]

defense is that it would produce less unnecessary suffering than any other, and that it is

the best means to a certain end: the creation of a greater diversity of individuals--larger,

fuller, more imaginative and daring individuals" (1998, p. 30). As previously discussed,

Rorty believes that the institutions and practices of the rich North Atlantic democracies

represent the best real life hope for his, and Dewey's and Whitman's, idealized

"pragmatist utopia" to ever reach fruition. Rorty's use of the term "postmodern

bourgeois liberalism," and his defense of these democracies and their ways (Rorty,

1985, p. 216), represent a game that surely holds little interest for Lyotard.

Although Rorty lavishes praise on America and its promise of "liberty and

justice for all" his hope is tempered and historically grounded. The following important

caveat permeates his text: "America is not a morally pure country. No country ever has

been or ever will be . . . In democratic countries you get things done by

compromising your principles in order to form alliances with groups about whom you

have grave doubts" (1998, p. 52). Thus, despite his hope, his words are not those of the

starry-eyed dreamer. He reflects the moderation of someone who both loves, and has

faith in, the overriding goodness of his country, but who remains painfully aware of its many failures and shortcomings.

Rorty's tempered faith in America, and his hope that its promise will one day be realized, is reminiscent of Camus' feelings for France. In response to the accusation that he did not love his country, Camus, the resistance fighter and champion of Algerian rights, wrote,

> I should like to be able to love my country and still love justice . . .
> When I think of your words today [1943], I feel a choking sensation.
> No, I didn't love my country, if pointing out what is unjust in what we
> love amounts to not loving, if insisting that what we love should measure
> up to the finest image we have of her amounts to not loving . . . I love
> my country too much to be a nationalist. (1988, pp. 4-5)

The parallel between the foregoing words of Camus and the following words by Rorty are striking. Rorty writes:

> The sort of pride Whitman and Dewey urge Americans to feel is
> compatible with remembering that we expanded our boundaries by
> massacring the tribes which blocked our way, that we broke the word we
> had pledged in the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, and that we caused the
> death of a million Vietnamese out of sheer macho arrogance.
>
> But, one might protest, is there then *nothing* incompatible with
> American national pride? I think the Dewey-Whitman answer is that
> there are many things that should chasten and temper such pride, but that
> nothing a nation has done should make it impossible for a constitutional
> democracy to regain self-respect. (1998, p. 32)

By contrast, when Lyotard envisions France or any other country, in fact, almost any institution, he sees no cause for hope. He envisions no potential instrument for creating tolerance, diversity and freedom, or a new sort of self-respecting individual who experiences ever richer and more novel forms of human happiness. Rather, when Lyotard sees governments and social institutions, he sees a threat to individual freedom and a potential source of terror.

As earlier referenced, in Lyotard's vision of society there exists a necessary connection between the State and the university, whose primary function is the production and dissemination of legitimated knowledge through research and teaching. He writes that "knowledge and power are simply two sides of the same question: who decides what knowledge is, and who knows what needs to be decided? In the computer age, the question of knowledge is now more than ever a question of government" (1994, p. 9).

Lyotard defines terror as "the efficiency gained by eliminating or threatening to eliminate, a player from the language game one shares with him." He goes on to say that the speaker is silenced or consents and silences him/herself, "not because he has been refuted, but because his ability to participate has been threatened . . . The decision makers' arrogance . . . consists in the exercise of terror. It says: 'Adapt your aspirations to our ends--or else'" (1994, pp. 63-4). Specifically applying this definition to the university, Lyotard adds, "when the institution of knowledge functions in this manner, it is acting like an ordinary power center whose behavior is governed by a principle of homeostasis" (1994, p.63). In other words, Lyotard argues that any organization, institution, population or group not in a constant state of revolution is a potential source of terror--a threat to individual freedom. His belief that administrative systems can only function by reducing complexity, a move required to maintain their

"power capacity" (1994, p. 61), causes Lyotard to reject consensus as a "horizon that is never reached" and to instead embrace paralogy. Lyotard asks a question that lies at the heart of his inquiry: "Is legitimacy to be found in consensus obtained through discussion as Jürgan Habermas thinks?" He immediately provides the following answer to his obviously rhetorical question:

> Such consensus does violence to the heterogeneity of language games. And invention is always born of dissension. Postmodern knowledge is not simply a tool of the authorities; it refines our sensitivity to differences and reinforces our ability to tolerate the incommensurable. Its principle is not the expert's homology, but the inventor's paralogy. (1994., p. xxv)

Lyotard also believes that size is not a significant variable; a small college, a large university, "a Puritan community like Salem or the French nation--such an arrangement is highly likely to give rise to a politics of terror" (1993, pp. 55-56).

Lyotard's introduction of paralogy reflects the depth of his distrust of the liberal bourgeois democratic political, social and economic institutions privileged by Rorty. Lyotard's fear of institutional terrorism and attendant rejection of consensus provides the basis of many of the charges of neo-conservatism frequently leveled at him. Ironically, this issue, which Fritzman describes as "Lyotard's paralogy[20] and Rorty's Pluralism" goes far to describe, though not necessarily explain, their "parting of the way."

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[20] Fritzman describes "Lyotardian paralogy" as "the constant search for new ideas and concepts that introduce dissensus into consensus" (Fritzman, 1990, p. 371).

Lyotard's concern that consensus will result in terror and/or the suppression of individual freedom causes his rejection of its legitimacy. He embraces without qualification "dissensus." Ironically, Lyotard then confronts the possibility of having created a new metanarrative dealing with the rejection of metanarratives and the embrasure of paralogy. This potential paradox/dilemma causes Lyotard's repudiation of all consensus and rules except for the most ephemeral of *petit récit* bounded by both time and space. Commenting on "Habermas' argument" and the beliefs that underlie his research,[21] Lyotard writes:

> It seems neither possible, nor even prudent, to follow Habermas in
> orienting our treatment of the problem of legitimation in the direction of
> a search for universal consensus. The cause is good, but the argument is
> not. Consensus has become an outmoded and suspect value. But justice
> as a value is neither outmoded nor suspect. We must arrive at an idea
> and practice of justice that is not linked to that of consensus. (1994, pp.
> 65- 66)

Lyotard envisions an alternative that is achieved by what he calls waging a full scale "war on totality" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 16) waged between the forces of modernism and postmodernism. As in all wars, most of the combatants in Lyotard's war have little understanding of why they fight or, more importantly, the true cost of victory. This remains partly true because Lyotard's objective is not the maintenance or improvement

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[21]In essence, Lyotard references Habermas' beliefs that "humanity as a collective (universal) subject seeks its common emancipation through the regularization of the 'moves' permitted in all language games and that the legitimacy of any statement resides in its contributing to that emancipation" (Lyotard, 1984, p. 66)

of an existing way of life or the creation of a new order. Rather, he urges that we join

him and the forces of Continental postmodernism in a "quest for paralogy," i.e., "the

search for dissent" (1994, p. 66). Thus, a direct indication of the success of Lyotard's

war effort is the amount of ambiguity that exists and that can be tolerated "within the

system." He writes that "We should be happy that the tendency toward the temporary

contract [the *petit récit*] is ambiguous: it is not totally subordinated to the goals of the

system" (1994, p. 66).

Consensus vs. Dissensus

Although Rorty shares Lyotard's views about the local and temporal nature of

truth, he rejects the virtues of ambiguity, denies the necessary association between

institutions and terror, and endorses both consensus and democracy as important to the

achievement of personal freedom and an open and inclusive society. In a discussion of

the correspondence theory of truth, Rorty expresses these beliefs when he writes:

> Objectivity is a matter of intersubjective consensus among human
>
> beings, not of accurate representation of something nonhuman. Insofar
>
> as human beings do not share the same needs, they may disagree about
>
> what is objectively the case. But the resolution of such disagreement
>
> cannot be an appeal to the way reality, apart from need, really is. The
>
> resolution can only be political: one must use democratic institutions and
>
> procedures to conciliate these various needs, and thereby widen the range
>
> of consensus about how things are.
>
> Those who find this line of philosophical thought horrifying do
>
> not agree with Dewey and Foucault that the subject is a social construct,
>
> and that discursive practices go all the way down. (1998, p. 35)

Rorty not only disagrees with those who believe that truth is representational, but also with those who, like Lyotard, believe that it may not be achieved through consensus.

True to his embrace of pragmatism and his commitment to persuasion, Rorty seeks to identify common ground shared by all leftists. In the article, "Habermas and Lyotard on Postmodernity" (1984), Rorty attempts "to split the difference between Lyotard and Habermas,"--the difference between paralogy and consensus (p. 42). The article is of specific interest and relevance to this discussion, because it captures both Rorty's kinship and differences with Lyotard, specifically within the context of higher education. Rorty initially expresses solidarity with Lyotard when he describes his "Dewyan" attempts to substitute concrete concerns with the daily problems of one's community for traditional religion, which he claims "embodies Lyotard's postmodernist 'incredulity toward metanarratives'." Following this comment, however, Rorty immediately adds a caveat that reflects both his own expressed beliefs and his reservations and concerns about Lyotard's assumption "that the intellectual has a mission to be avant-garde, to escape the rules, practices and institutions which have been transmitted to him in favor of something which will make possible 'authentic criticism'." The foregoing statement may be seen as Rorty's definition or description of Lyotard's paralogy. From admonition, Rorty quickly moves to criticism or even condemnation. He writes:

> Lyotard unfortunately retains one of the left's silliest ideas--that escaping from such institutions [e.g., higher education,] is automatically a good thing, because it insures that one will not be "used" by the evil forces which have "co-opted" these institutions. Leftism of this sort necessarily devalues consensus and communication, for insofar as the intellectual

remains able to talk to people outside the avant-garde he "compromises" himself. (1984, p. 42)

In the tradition of the reformist liberal, Rorty wishes to distance himself from Lyotard's avant-garde intellectuals and align himself with "the people." After repudiating its conceptual viability and rejecting the assertion that any movement toward paralogy exists in contemporary scientific theory, Rorty affirms a general loss of faith, including his own, in what he calls "large" metanarratives. He, however, asserts that he sees no reason why intellectuals should "lose faith" in the "narrative of history as the story of freedom," once the Marxist and/or Hegelian philosophical trappings are removed. He goes so far as giving a qualified endorsement to the use of grand narratives, as long as they are not universalized or mystified but do concretely contribute to advancing human liberty. Rorty writes:

It is one thing to say that Western society has been getting better and freer since the French Revolution and another to claim the kind of insight into the cause of social change which Hegel and Marx claimed. I see nothing wrong with grand narratives of increasing liberty, as long as they are narratives about successive pieces of good luck rather than about the workings of larger nonhuman forces. (1990, p. 43)

No better demonstration of Rorty's reformist liberalism exists than his suggestion that the segment of American politics/culture which he identifies as the "cultural left," which includes those individuals who share Lyotard's "revolutionary" views, revitalize and transform itself by opening relations with the remnants of the "old left." This group includes people who share Rorty's reformist views, particularly labor unions (1998, p. 91). Rorty's suggestion that Walter Reuther serve as one of the heroes used in socializing the nation's youth, or his dedication of <u>Achieving Our Nation</u> (1998) to a

Phillip Randolph, Jr., is no coincidence. Rorty's and Lyotard's understanding of the role and function of the intellectual, the academic and the artist stand in stark contrast.

Lyotard's Postmodern Aesthetic of the Sublime: The Exquisite Nature of Pain

Lyotard's privileging of ambiguity closely relates to his understanding of the sublime and the function of the writer and artist in a postmodern environment. Consistent with his desire for ambiguity and instability, Lyotard describes the postmodern as that which "invokes the unpresentable in presentation itself, that which refuses the consolation of correct forms, refuses the consensus of taste permitting common experience of nostalgia for the impossible and inquires into new presentations--not to take pleasure in them, but to better produce the feelings that there is something unpresentable" (1993, p. 15). Within this context, the text produced by the postmodern writer "is not in principle governed by preestablished rules," therefore neither postmodern text nor its postmodern author can or should be "judged according to a determinant judgement, by the application of given categories" (1993, p. 25). Simplified to the extreme, Lyotard says that, because the postmodern writer does not play the modern game, the text she produces should not be evaluated by modern standards. From Lyotard's perspective, to attempt such a task is equivalent to expecting baseball players to play by the rules of football. This is so, because the modernist rules and categories are what the postmodern author and his/her text attempt to investigate (1993, p. 15). Lyotard believes that modernist rules have no value when attempting to critique a postmodern text, because the postmodern artist/writer works without rules in an attempt, not to "provide reality," but to invent allusions to what is conceivable but not presentable" (1993, p. 15)--the sublime.

The postmodern artist/writer makes no attempt, nor should one be expected, to lead us to the "reconciliation between language games" (1993, p. 15). Lyotard believes

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language games and the people who play them are "separated by an abyss . . . that only a transcendental illusion can hope to totalize . . . into a real unity" (1993, pp. 15-16). He then identifies the price of such illusion as "terror," and argues that humankind has paid dearly throughout the nineteenth and twentieth century for its "nostalgia for the all and the one, for a reconciliation of the concept and the sensibility, for a transparent and communicational experience." He goes on to warn that "Beneath the general demand for relaxation and appeasement, we hear the murmuring of the desire to reinstate terror" (1993, p. 16). To resist this desire, which is a product of consensus, nostalgia for the security that accompanies the embrace of the metanarrative, is to internalize the sublime--that which forbids any presentation of the absolute.[22]

The sublime is one major area that separates Lyotard from Rorty and modernism. According to Lyotard the postmodern artist and writer pursues or has a vision of the sublime--that which can be envisioned but never actualized. This vision, is a purely personal one, causes both pleasure and pain for Lyotard. Pleasure in that he has a vision of the magnificent, an awareness of rapture, a sense of the exquisite, an image of that beyond the merely beautiful. Pain because he lives with the constant

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[22]After describing the sublime as that which "occurs when the imagination in fact fails to present any object that could accord with a concept," Lyotard provides the passage, "Thou shalt not make Thee graven images" as the most sublime in the Bible, "in that it forbids any presentation of the absolute." He goes on to describe sublime painting adding, "there is little we need to add to these remarks: as painting, it will evidently 'present' something, but negatively. It will therefore avoid figuration or representation it will be blank . . . it will make one see only by prohibiting one from seeing; it will give pleasure only by giving pain" (1993, p. 11).

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awareness that he will never grasp the magnificent, never capture the beautiful, never know rapture. Driven by a passion that can never be realized, Lyotard strives to capture that which remains always beyond his reach. Because what he seeks is purely personal and beyond the known, he must go beyond the conventional, he must investigate all rules, and, in the process, forge his own. All restraints on the individual's pursuit of the sublime must be resisted and/or eliminated. Therefore, because modern universities attempt to impose rules and restraints on their students, they should be eliminated. Consensus by necessity thwarts individual freedom and, thus, creativity, invention and the possibility of self-actualization.

Because what Lyotardian postmodernist seek can be neither seen nor actualized, their vision, their narrative, their art is always negative. In this context, the postmodern writer attempts to give the reader a sense of what s/he feels, a sense of the sublime, by presenting what it is not. Using painting as an example, Lyotard writes "it will of course 'present' something though negatively; it will therefore avoid figuration and representation. It will be 'white' like one of Malevitch's squares; it will enable us to see only by making it impossible to see; it will please only by causing pain" (1994, p.78).

According to Lyotard, expression should never and can never be representational. It can not capture or strive to capture or represent truth or beauty or justice or freedom or love or any of the multitude of things that might make life more sufferable. Because their objective is the sublime, and their preferred genre/medium the negative, Lyotardian writers or artists or professors attempts to share feelings and awareness by doing all that can be done, presenting the opposite of what they conceive and wish to communicate--presenting what it is not. Lyotard's postmodernist embraces the ambiguous that Rorty strives to alleviate. Considering the importance of history and context, an importance that both Lyotard and Rorty stress, had this narrative been

written thirty years earlier, it might identify ambiguity as the absurd.

For Lyotard, order and convention represent the soul mates of terror. They negate individual freedom and thwart creativity. Because postmodernists must go beyond or outside of modernist rules, neither they nor their work can be judged by modernist standards or bourgeois convention. Thus, the individual that Lyotard creates, the postmodern revolutionary, represents the quintessential elitist that Rorty described earlier, a person who exists as law unto themselves. Lyotard's postmodernist one-ups even the Cabots and the Lodges who at least deigned to speak to God. With one grand gesture, all who disagree, all those who do not choose to embrace negativity and pain, are dismissed as bourgeois terrorists. This remains the objective and result of paralogy, to constantly challenge and forever pose new alternatives to the historic, temporal and localized consensus that Rorty strives to build.

Rorty's Response

Rorty characterizes as "silly" Lyotard's assertion that association with institutions is "bad" and that it should be avoided, because it places individuals at risk of "being 'used' by the evil forces which have 'co-opted' these institutions" (Rorty, 1984, p. 42). Rorty partly attributes wrong-headed or "silly" ideas to Lyotard's vision of the sublime. He specifically identifies as fallacy Lyotard's belief that the intellectual has a mission to be avant-garde, which involves "escaping" all practices, rules and institutions which have been "transmitted to him." Once free from the threat or reality of institutional terror, the individual should replace acceptance of, and compliance with, institutionally imposed and consensually predicated rules with paralogy. If followed to fruition, this practice results in what Lyotard refers to as "authentic criticism."

From Rorty's perspective, Lyotard's position poses a critical hazard, because it "necessarily devalues consensus and communication" (1984, p. 42). It also limits an

individual's ability to talk to anyone outside the avant-garde, because to do so

compromises paralogy--challenging/escaping institutional rules and practices.

Rorty argues that Lyotard belittles and dismisses the arts as a vehicle to facilitate

the exploration of "a living historical situation and to bridge the gap between cognitive,

ethical and political discourse" as merely an "aesthetic of the beautiful" (1984, p. 42).

This criticism holds particular significance for Rorty. As discussed in Chapter Two, the

process of individuation, the primary function and responsibility of Rorty's idealized

postmodern university, is book-driven, that is, driven by an arts-based curriculum. His

actions reflect his commitment to such a curriculum; he recently left a position in

humanities at the University of Virginia to assume a Professorship in comparative

literature at Stanford.

Neither exalting nor rejecting the sublime, Rorty validates its pursuit, but in the

same context and with the same restriction that he places on the pursuit of his beloved

wild orchids (see Chapter Two). He writes:

> One should see the quest for the sublime, the attempt (Lyotard's words)
>
> to "present the fact that the unpresentable exists" as one of the prettier
>
> unforced blue flowers of bourgeois culture. But this quest is widely
>
> irrelevant to the attempt at communicative consensus which is the vital
>
> force which drives that culture. More generally, one should see the
>
> intellectual *qua* intellectual as having a special, idiosyncratic, need--a
>
> need to use words which are not part of anybody's language game, any
>
> social institution. But one should not see the intellectual as serving a
>
> *social* purpose when he fulfills this need. Social purposes are served . .
>
> . by finding beautiful ways of harmonizing interests, rather than sublime
>
> ways of detaching oneself for others' interests. (1984, p. 42)

Although adopting more measured language, Rorty finds hypocritical and self-serving the assertion that a pursuit of personal passions will produce anything other than personal gratification. He writes:

> The attempt of leftist intellectuals to pretend that the avant-garde is serving the wretched of the earth by fighting free of the merely beautiful is a helpless attempt to make the special needs of the intellectual and social needs of his community coincide. (1984, pp. 42-43)

Reflecting his contention that private irony and public hope can not be held in a single vision, Rorty concludes his comments on Lyotard's vision of the sublime with the admonition that all efforts to reconcile the personal needs of the intellectual with social needs, i.e., "serving the wretched of the earth," is

> an attempt to go back to the Romantic period, when the urge to think the unthinkable, to grasp the unconditioned, to sail strange seas of thought alone, was mingled with enthusiasm for the French Revolution. These two equally laudable motives should be distinguished. (1984, p. 43)

Reflecting on the arts and how they relate to humanity and improving the quality of human life, Rorty writes, "Persons have dignity not as an interior luminescence, but because they share in . . . contrast-effects." In this context "contrast-effect" means that an individual, institution, community, etc. is not judged positively because of any intrinsic value, qualities or characteristics they might possess, but rather by comparing them to other worse individuals, institutions, communities, etc., as appropriate (1985b, p. 218). For example, Rorty does not contend that liberal bourgeois democracy is intrinsically good, he simply asserts that it is better than fascism, for example. He further argues that liberal bourgeois democracy should be abandoned when or if something better comes along, e.g., a pragmatic utopia. As earlier

discussed, Rorty suggests using as criteria for determining comparative value the ability

to improve the quality of human life which relates to the volume of human suffering.

Rorty adds a "corollary" to his statement about "contrast-effect." He states, "the

moral justification of the institutions and practices of one's group . . . is mostly a

matter of historical narratives (including scenarios about what is likely to happen in

certain future contingencies), rather than philosophical metanarratives" (1985b, p. 218).

He concludes this line of thought with the following statement:

> The principle backup for historiography is not philosophy but the arts,
>
> which serve to develop and modify a group's self-image by, for example,
>
> apotheosizing its heroes, diabolizing its enemies, mounting dialogues
>
> among its members, and refocusing its attention. (Rorty, 1985b, p. 218)

Postmodernism and Higher Education

The Academy's Response

The implications of postmodernism for higher education and for scholars of

higher education, particularly Lyotard's joyous proclamation of the demise of the

modern university and its liberal professors, have stimulated a great outpouring of

academic prose. The majority of articles and books read in preparation for this

presentation reflect a general consensus that postmodernism provides an analytical

framework that significantly contributes to the conceptualization and understanding of

knowledge, higher education, society, and their interrelationships. Directly addressing

this point, Nuyen writes that "we cannot properly understand the crisis in education

until we understand the postmodern condition" (1995, p. 41). Nuyen's use of the term

"the postmodern condition" obviously refers to Lyotard's book of the same name which

he identifies earlier in his paragraph. In further support of Lyotard's contention that the

"main cause" of the "crisis" currently afflicting education has to do with the "nature of

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education itself," Nuyen invokes the authority of Hannah Arendt. Quoting Arendt, Nuyen writes, "The problem of education in the modern world lies in the fact that by its very nature it cannot forgo either authority or tradition, and yet must proceed in a world that is neither structured by authority or held together by tradition" (Nuyen, 1995, p. 41).

The imprint and influence of ideas formulated by both Rorty and Lyotard can be seen in the work of many academics writing about postmodernism and higher education. The two men tend to exercise a polarizing influence on those who write about them. For example, Fritzman presents a detailed, though technical, comparison of the work of Rorty and Lyotard. He demonstrates a marked preference for Lyotard and his paralogy which, in his view, overcomes Rorty's pluralism or consensus (Fritzman, 1990, p. 371).

In addition to Lyotard and Rorty, Habermas also draws a surprising amount of attention. Nuyen identifies Lyotard, Rorty, and Habermas as "the key players in the postmodernist discourse" (1992, p. 25). Although Lyotard provides the focus for Nuyen's article, and Nuyen makes no further reference to Habermas, a number of other authors do jointly treat critical theory and postmodernism. Roland Barnett at the Center for Higher Education Studies, the University of London, also attempts to reconcile the differences between critical theory and postmodernism, which he refers to as "two major contemporary intellectual perspectives." He writes, "on the surface, they appear to be telling very different stories but . . . they can be read as dovetailing each other. Together, they offer a powerful and perhaps compelling analysis of our age" (1993, p. 45). The attempt to extract usable concepts from both critical theory and postmodernism remains consistent with postmodernism's rejection of metanarratives and orthodox adherence to any ideology. Postmodernism also recommends an eclectic

approach in the use of demystified ideologies and methodologies. Manifest in the writings of Rorty, this attitude assumes an importance due to its absence in Lyotard's writings. In point of fact, Lyotard expresses such hostility toward Habermas and opposition against any accommodation with critical theory, that Fredric Jameson characterizes Lyotard's magnum opus, The Postmodern Condition, as "a thinly veiled polemic against Jürgen Habermas' concept of a 'legitimation crisis' and vision of a 'noise free,' transparent, fully communicational society" (1984, p. vii).

Rorty and Lyotard: Two Differing Views of Postmodern Higher Education

Once we move beyond the consensual repudiation of modernism, the need to reform the elitist universities and colleges that it produces, and the Habermas-Lyotard fracas, the academic literature appears to bifurcate. Acknowledging a vulgar (in its over-simplification) generalization, and that a countless number of permutations may be identified, this discussion divides writers who address postmodernism and higher education into two major camps.

The first camp, whose members tend to align with positions associated with Rorty, supports a dynamic interdisciplinary liberal arts curriculum in a continual state of development and redefinition. Needs and practices of the members of the local community, with the objective of maximum inclusion and accessability, determine the criterion for inclusion in the curriculum. The perceived static and exclusionary traditional Eurocentric cannon suffers repudiation, while multiculturalism, women's studies and similar efforts to empower the traditionally disenfranchised enjoy emphasis. This does not imply a repudiation of Western knowledge and literature, nor does it suggest that such knowledge and literature not be included in a curriculum. Rather, the first camp objects to a privileging of things Western over other literatures and knowledge; it ceases to be the sole criteria by which all others are evaluated. In the

environment that the members of this camp envision, not only do Professors operate within, they also play a major role in the creation of, a new egalitarian university which, in turn, plays a major role in the creation of a freer and more open society.

The second camp, whose members tend to align with positions associated with Lyotard, also repudiates the traditional Eurocentric cannon. However, this camp would replace it not with liberal arts, but with a technology-based curriculum that focuses on communication and the use of computer technology and electronic data bases. This curriculum primarily functions to provide students with the necessary skills and abilities to utilize the technologies that will allow them to manipulate information, create new information, compete in competitive domestic and international markets, and contribute to the overall productivity of their respective societies. Describing the objectives or product of an educational system based on Lyotardian ideas, Fritzman writes that students "would see . . . that there are incommensurate beliefs concerning the meaning of 'citizen' and 'subversive' . . . that . . . the meaning and worth of learning and teaching are open to question . . . that all criteria are existentially contingent." Concluding, he adds that "there can be no question of a method here; there is no formula that would prescribe how this is done" (1990, p. 379). In the environment created by members of this camp, the future of professors/teachers remains in grave doubt. If they manage to survive, their role will be demystified, and they will be defrocked.

Carol Nicholson, a member of the Department of Philosophy at Rider College, rejects Lyotard's contention that the Professor is dead and expresses a preference for Rorty, because he "avoids the epistemological fallacy[23] and . . . emphasizes the

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[23] In "Lyotard and Rorty on the Role of the Professor," Nuyen defines

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importance of educating students into a sense of community" (Nicholson, 1989, p. 200).

However, reflecting the "hopelessly vague" nature of postmodernism, Nicholson also

criticizes Rorty because, among other things, he does not more directly address issues of

racial, sexual, political and economic inequality. She makes the interesting observation

that "most feminists do not identify themselves as postmodernists, but the two

movements share important common concerns and cannot afford to ignore each other"

(1989, p. 202).

Linda Ray Pratt provides another example of a postmodern academic who

strongly endorses a liberal arts curriculum. Pratt, a professor of English at the

University of Nebraska and past president of the AAUP, describes a growing chasm

between the university and the society which supports it concerning the value of a

liberal arts curriculum: "Within the faculty there is a strong contention, though there are

intense disagreements about the choice of books and the appropriate balance between

research and teaching. But in the public at large, there is a growing consensus for a

different kind of education, one that is skill-based and performance tested" (1994, p.

48).

As indicated earlier, Fritzman (1990) represents views characteristic of the

second camp. He argues that Lyotard strives to demonstrate that postmodern education

and science can be legitimated only by paralogy, and not by consensus as suggested by

both Habermas and Rorty. Fritzman's privileging of paralogy over consensus results

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"epistemological fallacy" as a widely used term that describes the belief or assertion that

a necessary "link" exists between epistemology and pedagogy. Nuyen adds that he

wishes "neither to defend nor to reject the 'epistemological fallacy'" (Nuyen, 1995, p.

43).

from a preference for Lyotard's views on rules and their inappropriate use in the adjudication of certain types of differences or disputes that arise between participants in the same language games.

According to Fritzman, Rorty asserts that individuals with inconsistent or contradictory views settle their disagreements by "obtaining consensus on rules of procedure" that determine permissible new "moves" within their chosen game (p. 374). In other words, when the mutual acceptability of a move, or the desirability of the results that it produces, cause dispute, the participants should attempt to resolve their differences by agreeing to collectively adopt new "procedural rules." These new rules authorize new moves that will hopefully produce new and mutually acceptable results. Fritzman contends that although the process outlined by Rorty may adjudicate disputes, it also contains the potential to suppress creativity or "imagination" and create "terror" (p. 376).

Fritzman also rejects Rorty's contention that the chief function of primary and secondary schools should be "socialization." He bases his rejection on the belief that "Rorty's position presupposes that specifying the nature of social [sic] is problematic" and the assertion that "he [Rorty] sees no difficulty in determining which traditions should be communicated by primary and secondary education" (p. 378). Fritzman argues that Rorty's ideas "presuppose a prior determination of what society is now and what it is to become in the future" (p. 379). This belief or presupposition, according to Fritzman, implies the existence of a criteria against which people and ideas must be judged. The effect of this action perpetuates the status quo and excludes unprivileged and unrepresented people and ideas (p. 380).

As an alternative, Fritzman embraces Lyotard's paralogy, which he compares to Kuhn's revolutionary science (p. 375). He expresses support for Lyotard when, in

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direct contradiction of Rorty, he asserts that not all differences can be adjudicated by mutually agreed upon procedural rules. He further argues that to attempt to do so, "necessarily wrongs at least one of the parties" holding incommensurate views (p. 376). As envisioned by Lyotard and described by Fritzman, the alternative to adjudication by consensually obtained procedural rules becomes paralogy, or the direct confrontation and challenge of the status quo, through "the search for . . . new ideas and concepts which upset previously existing solidarities" (p. 373). In this context, Fritzman extols the "imaginative individual . . . who discerns in a situation the possibility of a winning move that violates the existing rules of the game" (p. 374).

Fritzman serves as an example of a resident of Lyotard's camp, but he also illustrates the difficulty of making and justifying a decision when paralogy is the only guide. He concludes his criticism of Rorty and endorsement of Lyotard with the following observation:

> It may be observed that Lyotard's paralogy is dangerous, since it allows imaginative moves which directly contest the procedural rules that claim to regulate and adjudicate conflicts. If it is claimed that there are always established criteria available to regulate and adjudicate conflicts, that such procedural rules always should be employed, and that these rules can only be contested by appealing to other criteria established in advance, then Lyotardian paralogy is dangerous. There are, however, no arguments to support such assertions which do not presuppose the conclusions they are intended to demonstrate. Paralogy can be suppressed only through what Lyotard refers to as terror . . . It may be that paralogy is dangerous, but terror has its dangers as well. (p. 380)

<u>A Heated Debate</u>

Due in part to its complex and controversial nature, as the preceding quotation indicates, postmodernism continues to provide ample fodder for academic publications. One emerging area of consensus is that the contemporary Western university remains a fundamentally "modern" institution that hosts a sometimes-heated debate between the dominant modernists and various proponents of postmodernism. The very purpose and future of the university remains at stake in this debate. Although the supporters and opponents of postmodernism generally agree that postmodern thought has much to say about higher education, and although many members of the academy listen, scholars of higher education appear to turn a deaf ear. Bloland makes this very point when he writes:

> Postmodern perspectives, terms, and assumptions have penetrated the core of American culture over the past thirty years. Postmodernism's primary significance is its power to account for and reflect vast changes in our society, cultures, polity, and economy as we move from a production to a consumption society, shift from national to local and international politics . . . In anthropology and other social sciences, postmodernism has had transformational effects, but currently many scholars who have been influenced by it distance themselves from the term, asserting that it identifies others, but not them. In literary studies, scholars continue to employ postmodern conceptualization extensively, while they assume that those who use the words also know the theory. No such assumption can be made in higher education studies concerning familiarity with the modern/postmodern theory. Despite its significance in the past three decades the modern/postmodern debate has had

relatively little direct impact on the study of higher education. (1995)

For reasons cited by Bloland, this study strives to increase the awareness and sensitivity

of those who study higher education to postmodernism through the study and analysis

of two of its more important and influential representatives.

Rorty's Assessment of the Origin of His Differences with Lyotard

That Rorty and Lyotard fundamentally agree about a significant number of

issues may be stated with a reasonable degree of certainty. Their differences, however,

assume far greater significance, particularly if the subject of discussion is their

respective denotative and prescriptive statements about higher education. As previously

discussed, their views about the mission of higher education and its postmodern future

remain diametrically opposed.

Lyotard believes that the day of the university and its faculty has passed. He

further sees this passing as a cause for some rejoicing. Because its stock and trade is the

creation and dissemination of knowledge, and because its skilled faculty manipulates

the rules of an array of language games, the university has become one of society's

more efficient/effective perpetrators of terror. From a Lyotardian perspective, the

offense of the university and its faculty could be seen as even more egregious than most

societal perpetrators of forced consensus--terror--because of the innocence, naivete,

trust and vulnerability of its victims/students. Lyotard, therefore, effectively

recommends the elimination and replacement of the modern liberal university with

computers, data banks and technicians.

Alternatively, Rorty believes higher education, or more appropriately higher

edification, represents one of the most important functions performed by liberal

bourgeois institutions. He further believes the university will be the major engine

driving any future "pragmatic utopia." Although he recognizes the computer as an

important tool, unlike Lyotard he does not see it as an instrument of revolution or as a force that will transform society generally or higher education specifically. Addressing this issue, he writes, "I doubt that computers are going to make as big a difference to life or to education as Lyotard thinks they are" (Rorty, 1990, p. 43).

Because of his privileging of liberal higher education and rejection of the notion that technology will render it irrelevant, Rorty recommends strengthening and expanding the function of the university by diversifying and humanizing the curriculum, and liberating the faculty. These actions will allow academe to assume, or, more appropriately, reassume, a position of moral and political leadership in the society.

A consideration of Rorty's and Lyotard's differences and similarities brings us full circle. As Lyotard would no doubt approve, we find ourselves in a state of ambiguity, i.e., with more questions than answers. The most interesting issue emerging from this inquiry, however, is not the specifics of either man's vision of the postmodern university, but rather why they arrived at such disparate views. On the surface, the question seems so vexing that one may be tempted to turn to Lao Tzu and seek refuge and solace in the Tao, but that is not the game we, or Rorty or Lyotard, play. If our game is to have meaning, it must be played by the rules of the bourgeois intellectuals and academics of the wealthy nations of the North Atlantic, not by those of the aesthetics and sages of ancient China.

Apparently this same question vexed Rorty. He chose to conclude <u>Objectivity, Reality and Truth</u>, (1989) the first of a two-volume collection of his philosophical papers, with an essay titled "Cosmopolitanism without emancipation: a response to Jean-François Lyotard." According to the essay, unrecorded comments that Lyotard made during a symposium at Johns Hopkins University in which both men participated precipitated Rorty's "response." In the essay, originally published in French in <u>Critique</u>

(1985), Rorty not only addresses areas in which he both agrees and disagrees with Lyotard, he also speculates about the causes of those differences.

<u>National Character: Could It be That Simple?</u>

One of Lyotard's more interesting assertions is that contemporary American philosophers have more in common with German philosophers than either do with the French. He bases this contention on the assumption that Americans and Germans share the opinion of contemporary French thought as "neo-rationalist." Lyotard cites Habermas as an example of a German who holds this belief.

Rorty responds to Lyotard's contention by asserting an affinity for Habermas' "consensus theory of history,"[24] and characterizes some of his own writing as "lessons in progressivism" (Rorty, 1991, p. 220). He then claims that Lyotard "misstates" the position of both "Habermasians and pragmatists," Rorty's substitute for the more euphemistic "Germans and Americans," because he does not understand their uses of the terms "rational" and "irrational." According to Rorty, "Habermasians and pragmatists," or Germans and Americans, have a "noncritical conception of rationality," and are therefore "not inclined to diagnose 'irrationalism.'" In other words, since both German Habermasian and American pragmatists believe that "'rational' merely means 'persuasive,' 'irrational' can only mean invoking force. The likelihood that either would accuse Lyotard, contemporary French thinkers or anyone else of irrationality is very slim" (Rorty, 1991, p. 220). The idea of persuasion, particularly as an alternative to force or terror, remains critical to Rorty's thought. Persuasion remains the preferred

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[24] For a detailed discussion of Rorty's attempt to "split the difference" between Lyotard's postmodern insights and Habermas' progressivism, see the article "Habermas and Lyotard On Postmodernity" (Rorty, 1984).

method for achieving consensus in bourgeois liberal democracies and the only method

in a Rortian pragmatic utopia.

Although Rorty denies that the French "resort to the lash and knot," he does

state that both Germans and Americans worry about the prevalence of "antiutopianism"

and criticism of "liberal democracy" in contemporary French thought. He cites France

"as the source of the most original philosophical thought currently being produced" (a

sentiment with which I agree), but Rorty contends that French cynicism results at least

partly from a tendency to over generalize--to derive universal significance from a

unique occurrence or even a series of unique occurrences. Refuting "parliamentary

liberalism" because of "May 1968," or allowing Auschwitz to kill the utopian dream,

provide examples of the French turn of mind that Rorty describes. Rorty expresses

puzzlement at Lyotard's inclination to "take particular historical events as

demonstrating the 'bankruptcy of long-term efforts at social reform' " (1991, p. 220).

He attributes this willingness, which he contends separates contemporary French

thinkers from their American, German and British counterparts, to the French

intellectual community's long time commitment and continuing attempts to salvage

something from Marxism. Expanding on this point, Rorty observes that the primary

difference that he sees between the contemporary French postmodernists and Dewey "is

the presence or lack of social hope which they display." He then describes the language

of Lyotard and Foucault as being "infected with what seems to me a repellent Parisian

world-weariness and hopelessness, as well as with leftover Marxist cynicism about

gradual nonrevolutionary reform" (Rorty, 1990, p. 44).

Rorty argues that, although the intellectual community in America also

entertained a rather serious infatuation with Marxism, disillusionment occurred much

earlier in the United States than in France. Because the French invested much more

intellectual capital in Marxism than did intellectuals in either the United States or West Germany, Rorty believes that the French retain the Marxist tendency "to interpret very specific political, economic, and technological developments as indicators of decisive shifts in the course of history" (1991, p. 220). Alternatively, the Americans and Germans take what Rorty calls "the Dewey-Habermas line." This "line" involves the tendency or "willingness" to interpret the same developments or events that the French would interpret as major historical water sheds as "just more of the same old vicissitudes." Rorty further contends that, unlike the French, the Americans also "persist in using notions like 'persuasion rather than force' and 'consensus' to state one's political views" (1991, p. 220). Rorty cites Lyotard's sweeping proclamations about the revolutionary and transformative effects that "new information technology processing" will have on society in general, and specifically on higher education, as an example of the "strange" tendency to discover "world-historical significance" in very specific developments.

In Rorty's view, the French's impetuous tendency to overgeneralize and draw premature and unsubstantiated conclusions contrasts with what he calls "the standard Anglo-Saxon assumption." He, in effect, argues that "Anglo-Saxons," people who develop their final vocabularies in predominately English speaking nations, take a longer historical perspective than the French. For example, an American would wait "a century or so after an event" has occurred before attempting to determine whether it will be a "decisive turning point" of "world-historical significance" or "just more of the same." He cites the development of the microchip as a specific example (1991, p. 221). Although Rorty allows for the possibility that Lyotard might be right (or wrong) about the long term effect of computers and computer-driven technology on society and higher education, he believes that Lyotard spoke impetuously when he proclaimed the

passing of the liberal university and the death of its professors. Very specific on this point, Rorty writes, "I doubt that we can grasp how our own epic is going to look from the point of view of future historians. So I doubt that it is possible to have the kind of perspective vision of the next epic which Lyotard offers" (Rorty, 1990, p. 44).

Rorty extends his analysis to include Lyotard's and the French preference for "new languages" and "revolutionary politics" as opposed to his and other American's alternative preference for "new arguments" and "reformist politics." He reasons basically that the differences between himself and Lyotard, i.e., Americans and the French, result from their being socialized into different cultures with unique and specifically identifiable respective traits, attitudes and beliefs. Although the individual French and Americans have "individuated" and developed unique final vocabularies, the root languages are still respectively French and American English. In other words, Lyotard thinks like a Frenchman and Rorty thinks like an American, because they were each socialized into their respective cultures. Lyotard describes reality as a Frenchman, because he was taught and uses a French vocabulary, while Rorty describes reality as an American because he was taught and uses American English.

The preceding statement obviously oversimplifies and generalizes, doing an injustice to both Lyotard and Rorty, although it does logically flow from Rorty's comments and assumptions. The point hopefully made, however, is that, although I agree with most of what Rorty says, I find significant problems with his attempts to explain his differences with Lyotard. Two major difficulties immediately surface. The first relates to Rorty's accusation that the French have an unfortunate tendency to overgeneralize, specifically, their tendency to extrapolate major trends from isolated events or development, *sans* any historical perspective. If Lyotard and the French generalize "inappropriately," how can Rorty allow himself that luxury? To talk in terms

of French thought, even the thought of French intellectuals, as though all people in France or even all French thought as one, is surely a generalization as grand as any uttered by Lyotard or any of his French colleagues.

Although France is more homogeneous than America, the French, like the Americans, speak in a wide range of voices. Extending Rorty's metaphors, France, like the United States, represents a mosaic rather than a monolith. Within the context of both Rorty's and Lyotard's discussions, the people they engage in conversation, members of their respective intellectual communities, represent a minuscule but privileged fraction of the populations of their respective countries. Although elements of insight and wisdom exist in Rorty's assessment of the cause of his differences with Lyotard, his argument does not convince. Neither national character nor the belated effects of Marxism-turned-sour separate Rorty and Lyotard. Rather, they stand separated by the simple act of choice. Both men look into the same abyss, but only one chooses to resist.

Albert Camus and the French Resistance

Preface

I argue that Rorty incorrectly attributes his differences with Lyotard to national character. I alternatively suggest that their differences lie in the existential choices that each man makes. Such choice is more fundamental, more visceral, than anything as abstract and impersonal as "French" or "American" or "German thought." Although personal and subjective, Lyotard's and Rorty's choices remain important to this inquiry, because they ultimately determine the content of their denotive and prescriptive statements about higher education. If Rorty's argument prevails, traditional Western higher education will be strengthened, expanded and made even more liberal.

Conversely, if Lyotard's arguments convince, the liberal university and its faculty pass into extinction, rendered irrelevant by technology.

In support of my argument, I present and compare the ideas and actions of Albert Camus to those of Lyotard and Rorty. Camus offers an interesting comparison, because he chooses as does Rorty, even though he shares Lyotard's intellectual and cultural heritage. Hopefully, a consideration of Camus will elucidate questions arising from the study of Lyotard and Rorty.

Postmodern Existentialism?

Not every French intellectual who lived through the Nazi scourge, witnessed the horror of Auschwitz, or felt duped by Marxism's cruel betrayal of its own promises was "infected with . . . a repellent Parisian world-weariness and hopelessness" (Rorty, 1990, p. 44). Nor does every French intellectual and artist became so angst ridden and filled with despair after confronting some of the more absurd aspects of human existence that they become cynical, nihilistic revolutionaries forsaking all aspects of humanism and obscenely embracing denial, destruction and ambiguity.

No one in the twentieth century, with the possible exception of Jean-Paul Sartre, is more closely identified with or better represents France, the absurd, and the angst that attends the honest acceptance of human isolation and finitude, than Albert Camus. Nor is anyone more closely identified with, or better represents, France, human dignity, the will to resist and the spirit of "Liberté! Equalité! Fraternité!" This man, recognized as one of France's foremost novelists, playwrights, essayists, journalists and philosophers, deserves equal recognition and reverence for his life-long political activism and struggle against terror, cruelty and human suffering.

In addition to the intrinsic merits, artistry, insight and courage of his work, Camus remains of interest to our current discussion as both a Nobel Prize winning

intellectual, artist and social activist, and as Lyotard's contemporary countryman. Both

men received academic training as philosophers, became disillusioned ex-Marxists who

had been members of the Communist party in the earlier phases of their careers, and

were roughly the same age. Camus, who died in 1960, is eleven years older than

Lyotard, born in 1924.

Born, raised and educated in French occupied Algeria,[25] Camus became an early

champion of both Berber and Arab rights. He first gained notoriety in the late 1930s as

a reporter with the Alger-Republican for a series of stories he wrote documenting, and

bringing attention to, the poverty, inhumane living conditions, ethnic discrimination and

mistreatment faced by Kabylie Muslims. This series of Kabylie articles, reprinted in an

abridged form in Actuelles III[26] (1958), so effectively aroused the consciousness and

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[25]Camus' unabashed love of Algeria is expressed with bitter tenderness in the

essay "Summer in Algiers," (1936), published in The Myth of Sisyphus (1942/1955, pp.

104-113).

[26] Actuelles III is a three-volume collection of essays published in France in 1950,

1953, and 1958 respectively. O'Brian provides the following description of this body of

work:

> They deal with the perennially current issues that periodically tore him
>
> [Camus] from his creative writing to speak out, as he said, "in the service
>
> to truth and the service of freedom": war resistance in a Europe dominated
>
> by prisons, executions, and exile; the tragedies of Algeria and of Hungary;
>
> the horror of the death penalty; and the writer's commitment. (1969/1988,
>
> p. vii)

In 1959, the year before his death, Camus personally edited the three volumes of

inflamed the passions of all parties, including the Algerians, the French-Algerians and the French, that it contributed to the outbreak of the Algerian War. Partially motivated by government pressure stimulated by his pro-Arab reporting, Camus left Algiers for Paris in 1940. One month later, the German army invaded France.

Camus returned to North Africa where he remained for less than a year before he went back to France. There he joined, and then became a leader of, the French Resistance. During his less-than-year-long stay in Algeria, he married, obtained a teaching position in Oran and wrote the drafts of some of his most famous works, including The Stranger (1942/1989), The Myth of Sisyphus (1942/1955) and The Plague (1948). In 1943 Camus became editor of Combat, a major Resistance newspaper. He retained that position until 1947, two years after the end of the war. During this period of time when he witnessed the horror of Nazi occupation and lived with the constant threat of death, Camus chose to embrace human life as sacred, despite the ever-present reminders of the inexplicable nature of life and the absurdity of human existence. Camus lived with the reality of torture, suffering and humiliation. His knowledge was real, not abstract, theoretical, vicarious or voyeuristic.

Camus' choice and rationale to believe that "human life was sacred," and to engage in concrete social action to improve its quality, is far more reminiscent of Rorty than Lyotard. He repudiates true believers, those convinced that they are privy, and control the access, to the Truth and reality. He disclaimed their hackneyed assertions that he is pessimistic, because he affirms the absurd nature of human existence and

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Actuelles and selected twenty-three essays that he considered "most worthy of preservation" to be published in a single English language edition. The title of that work is Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (1960/1988).

repudiates the possibility of grounding for his beliefs or actions in universals:

> By what right moreover, could a Christian or a Marxist accuse me . . .
> of pessimism? I was not the one to invent the misery of the human being
> or the terrifying formula of divine malediction . . . or the damnation of
> unbaptized children. I was not the one who said that man was incapable
> of saving himself by his own means . . . And for the famous Marxists
> optimism! No one has carried distrust of man further, and ultimately the
> economic fatalities of this universe seem more terrible than divine
> whims. (Camus, 1988, pp. 72-73)

Camus reinforces this point, while stressing his commitment to, and faith in, other human beings. Although the term "metanarrative" was not in fashion when Camus pinned his narrative, the following passage clearly demonstrates his affirmation of individual humans within the context of repudiating the humanist metanarrative or metanarrative of emancipation:

> Christians and communists will tell me that their optimism is based on a
> longer range, that it is superior to all the rest, and that God or history . .
> . is the satisfying end-product of their dialectic . . . If Christianity is
> pessimistic as to man, it is optimistic as to human destiny. Well, I can
> say that, pessimistic as to human destiny, I am optimistic as to man. And
> not in the name of humanism that has always seemed to me to fall short,
> but in the name of an ignorance that tries to negate nothing. (Camus,
> 1988, p. 73)

Camus, like Rorty, strives to forge a union or solidarity with other individual human beings in the hope of achieving some relief from the loneliness, isolation and pain that, for both men, necessarily attends human existence. Reflecting on the discussion and

consideration of the meaning of "pessimism" and "optimism," Camus writes that the words need to be clearly defined. He then adds that until we do so, "we must pay attention to what unites us rather than to what separates us" (1988, p. 73). Both Camus and Rorty practice a form of subjective humanism authorized and legitimated only by the desire, choice and actions of the individual. Their position is reminiscent of the one developed by Sartre in "The Humanism of Existentialism." The structure of Sartre's argument remains critical to this discussion. His articulation of a subjective humanistic ethic descriptive of the position assumed by both Rorty and Camus is important. The essence of that ethic as it related to Rorty and Camus is effectively captured in the following quotation from Sartre's famous and often-referenced essay:

> Existentialism's first move is to make every man aware of what he is and to make the full responsibility of his existence rest on him. And when we say that a man is responsible for himself, we do not only mean that he is responsible for himself, we do not mean that he is responsible for his own individuality, but that he is responsible for all men. (Sartre, 1965, p. 36)

Sartre's humanism is consistent with Rorty's vision of the dual educational functions of socialization and individuation--individualism wed to a heightened sense of social responsibility.

Thus, we see that both Camus and Rorty abhor human suffering, repudiate metanarratives and the existence of a knowable fixed external reality that can serve as a criteria for legitimating knowledge or action, and spurn all forms of Western teleology. In effect, both men concur with Sartre's comment that "Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself (Sartre, 1965, p. 36) . . . 'There is no reality except in action' . . . Man is nothing else than his pain; he exists only to the extent that he fulfills himself; he

is therefore nothing else than the ensemble of his acts, nothing else than his life" (Sartre, 1965, p. 47).

Finally, neither Rorty nor Camus find individuation inconsistent with humanism or the struggle for solidarity with other human beings, nor are they troubled by, or feel the need to justify, their feelings. Their embrace of humanity and revulsion at human suffering is not a question of reason or logic. It represents a choice. Their feelings and the actions those feelings support require neither philosophical justification nor external validation. Both men find human suffering intolerable, and, although they know that it will never be eliminated, they choose to do whatever they can to make things better, when and where ever they have the opportunity. Anticipating the words of Rorty, Camus writes:

> We are faced with evil. And, as for me, I feel rather as Augustine did before becoming a Christian when he said: "I tried to find the source of evil and I got nowhere." But it is also true that I, and a few others know what must be done, if not to reduce evil, at least not to add to it. Perhaps we cannot prevent this world from being a world in which children are tortured. But we can reduce the number of tortured children. And if you don't help us, who else in the world can help us do this? (Camus, 1988, p. 73)

"Letters to a German Friend" and Lyotard

The Camus scholar and translator, Justin O'Brien writes:

> It was as much for the positive stand that Albert Camus took on the issues of the day as for his creative writing . . . that he was awarded the Nobel Prize [in literature] in 1957 . . . Because, in everything he wrote, he spoke to us of our problems and in our language, without raising his voice or indulging in oratory .

. . By overcoming the immature nihilism and despair that he saw as poisoning
our century, he emerged as the staunch defender of our positive moral values
and of "those silent men who, throughout the world, endure the life that has been
made for them." (1988, p. v)

The "Introduction" to <u>Resistance, Rebellion and Death</u> (1960/1988) contains the above

passage. In that appropriately titled volume, Camus includes four letters that he wrote

to a German friend between July 1943 and August 1944. The last two letters he never

sent, but published as open letters in <u>Combat</u>, the underground Resistance newspaper

that Camus edited.

Although Camus and the man to whom he wrote were like-minded childhood

friends, i.e., they played the same games, as they approached adulthood they began to

follow a radically different set of rules. The young German chose Fascism, casting his

lot with the Nazis. The young Frenchman chose "Liberté! Equalité! Fraternité!" casting

his lot with the Resistance. In the letters, Camus attempts to express his love of France

and explain why he and his comrades are willing to die. Unlike many of us who speak

of courage and grand passions, Camus' words were courageous and passionate, not

hollow academic rhetoric. In the vernacular, Camus not only "talked the talk" he also

"walked the walk."

Camus acknowledges that the choices that both he and his friend made--to die

for the Resistance or to kill for Hitler--reflect different responses to the absurd. Because

neither could choose, like the alcoholic, the religious fanatic, the materialist or the

ideologue, to turn a blind eye and pursue a life of oblivious contentment, they both

chose to act. The Nazi, lacking the power of delusion or the strength to resist, chose to

embrace the absurd, elevating it to the status of a religion. Alternatively, Camus, like

his most famous hero, Sisyphus, chose to struggle, to resist the seductive allure of the absurd:

> You never believed in the meaning of this world, and you therefore
> deduced the idea that everything was equivalent and the good and evil
> could be defined according to one's wishes. You supposed that in the
> absence of any human or divine code the only values were those of the
> animal world--in other words, violence and cunning. Hence you
> concluded that man was negligible and that his soul could be killed, that
> in the maddest of histories the only pursuit for the individual was the
> adventure of power and his only morality, the realism of conquest. And,
> to tell the truth, I, believing I thought as you did, saw no valid argument
> to answer you except a fierce love of justice which, after all, seemed to
> me as unreasonable as the most sudden passion. (Camus, 1988, p. 27)

Camus then asks and answers the seminal question. How could two people, such as his German friend and himself, or Rorty and Lyotard, share such similar assumptions about their worlds; how they could speak the same language and follow the same rules, but arrive at such radically different conclusions? Camus asks, "Where lay the difference?" He then provides the following answer, an answer that one can easily imagine flowing from Rorty's pen:

> Simply that you [Camus' German friend] readily accept the injustice of
> our condition to the point of being willing to add to it, whereas it seemed
> to me that man must exalt justice in order to fight against eternal
> injustice, create happiness in order to protest against the universe of
> unhappiness. Because you turned your despair into intoxication, because
> you freed yourself from it by making a principle of it, you were willing

to destroy man's works and to fight him in order to add to his basic

misery. Meanwhile, refusing to accept that despair and that tortured

world, I merely wanted to rediscover their solidarity in order to wage war

against their revolting fate. (Camus, 1988, pp. 27-28)

To push the analogy between Camus and his German friend and Rorty and

Lyotard too far would, of course, render it absurd. Lyotard built no death camps, nor

does he condone genocide, militarism or Fascism in any of its many permutations. In

fact, as discussed, one of his avowed objectives is resist institutional repression and

State sponsored terror. The significance and value of the comparison, however, should

not be totally lost.

Both men, while accepting the "absence of any human or divine code," embrace,

although different, equally radical forms of individualism. Lyotard's embrace and

pursuit of personal freedom and his concern about its actual or potential loss is so great

that he is willing to not only reject, but actively oppose collective human effort. He

remains willing to endure the pain and loneliness of isolated human existence, rather

than risk the possibility of terror that he believes accompanies attempts to achieve

human solidarity. This fear, or absence of hope, he manifests in his privileging of

paralogy over consensus; his desire to destroy rather than reform the modern university,

and his willingness to replace professors with computer technicians and programers.

Although Lyotard's concerns and observations, along with many of his ideas, merit

serious considerations, his ultimate solution, like that of Camus' German friend, must

ultimately be rejected.

Lyotard's Epitaph

Many aspects of Lyotard's writing demonstrate great insight, bordering on the

prophetic. Of particular and timely relevance is his discussion in his description and

analysis of the impact that performativity and technology have on the modern liberal university. At the same time, his caution about the importance of historical perspective acknowledged, Rorty does appear to underestimate the impact that computers have on the society at large and on higher education. These points, as valid and relevant as they may be, beg the issue. The central question that this chapter attempted to address was how two people with such similar ontological, epistemological and metaphysical views as Rorty and Lyotard could draw such radically different conclusions about politics and the future of Western higher education. The fact that I have great admiration for the intellectual prowess and creativity of both men; that I find significant aspects of both men's work meritorious and worthy of study; or that I prefer Rorty's consensus, hope and reform to Lyotard's paralogy, cynicism/pessimism and revolution, does not beg the question "why?"

Rorty offered one unsatisfactory suggestion--national character. The French are more cynical and more prone to negativism and destruction than Americans. But the examples of Camus and, to a lesser extent, Sartre, examples of two quintessential French intellectuals and artists educated and socialized into the same culture, experiencing many of the same disillusioning experiences as Lyotard, but arriving at conclusions much closer to those described by Rorty, demonstrate the inappropriateness of his explanation.

The answer, however, may be partially discovered in the writings of Rorty. He warns his readers against "the dangers of over-philosophization" (Rorty, 1989, p. 41), which needlessly separates them "from the people whom they are trying to help" (1989, p. 44), but also precludes or at least greatly limits, the possibility of concrete actions that will incrementally but tangibly affect the quality of human life, i.e., decrease human suffering. Rorty and Lyotard, and Camus and Sartre, all tell us not to look for reasons

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or answers "out there," because they do not exist. Only human action exists. We can choose to struggle in the hope of giving our lives meaning--creating essence where there is only existence--as Rorty, Camus and Sartre suggest. We can choose to walk the tight rope between individuation and socialization, to balance our passion for wild orchids with our passion for Trotsky. Or, like Lyotard and Camus' German friend, we can throw up our hands in an orgy of self-indulgent despair.

Despite his condemnation of Nazism and his repeated use of Auschwitz as the ultimate manifestation and defining event of modernism, Lyotard has more in common with Camus' German friend than he would like to admit. The following quotation is taken from the concluding section of Camus' last letter. As it served as an epitaph and final farewell to his German friend, let it serve as this chapter's final comment on Lyotard:

> Our strength lies in thinking as you do about the essence of the world, in
> rejecting no aspect of the drama that is ours. But at the same time we
> have saved the idea of man at the end of this disaster of the intelligence,
> and that idea gives us the underlying courage to believe in a rebirth. To
> be sure, the accusation we make against the world is not mitigated by
> this. We paid so dear for this new knowledge that our condition
> continues to seem desperate to us. Hundreds of thousands of men
> assassinated at dawn, the terrible walls of prisons, the soil of Europe
> reeking with millions of corpses of its sons--it took all that to pay for the
> acquisition of two or three slight distinctions which may have no other
> value than to help some among us to die nobly. Yes, that is heart-
> breaking. But we have to prove that we do not deserve so much
> injustice. This is the task we have set ourselves . . . I know that

heaven, which was indifferent to your horrible victories, will be equally

indifferent to your just defeat. Even now I expect nothing from heaven.

But we shall at least have helped save man from the solitude to which

you wanted to relegate him. Because you scorned such faith in mankind,

you are the men who, by thousands, are going to die solitary. Now, I can

say farewell to you. (Camus, 1988, pp. 31-32)

Conclusion

The decision a person makes after staring into the abyss and wrestling with the

absurd will go a long way to determine whether they prefer Rorty's or Lyotard's vision

of the postmodern university. Rorty's vision continues to value human beings, without

any reason other than that human suffering repels him. He wishes to improve life first

for his family and friends, then for the members of his personal community, then for all

Americans and finally for all human beings. He remains fully aware of his vision's

impossibility. Human suffering will never be eliminated. Children will continue to die.

Financial exploitation, and all forms of prejudice and discrimination, will continue.

People will continue to be denied jobs, promotions, dignity and their lives because of

their race, gender, religion or decisions that their or someone else's ancestor made ages

ago. Not everyone will be allowed to attend college or experience individuation and

know the experience of speaking for themselves in their own language. Failures will

surely be more common than successes, but what serves as an alternative? Suicide?

Resignation? Or to embrace the absurd as Camus' German friend and Lyotard did?

Rorty chooses to resist and struggle, to do what he can for as long as he can

while always striving to do more. He does not care about legitimization, or agency or

postmodernism. He chooses to resist the absurd by proposing pragmatic concrete

suggestions whose significance lies in their utterance, not in their actualization. This

choice results in a strengthened and inclusive university with an expanded liberal

curriculum and an empowered and liberated faculty.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSION

Summary

<u>Background and Introduction</u>

This inquiry resulted from dual interests in higher education and postmodernism. In my preliminary research, I discovered a wealth of material specifically dealing with either higher education or postmodernism. A review of that literature substantiated a number of long-held suspicions. I learned that a set of conditions commonly associated with postmodernism now challenges the historically dominant modernist beliefs, values, conventions, traditions and institutions of the United States and of the other wealthy and technologically advanced North Atlantic nations. My concerns about the deteriorating condition of American higher education were also confirmed.

As I continued to read, I became increasingly convinced that postmodernism is a rapidly evolving condition that not only alters the contours of American social, cultural and political reality, but also poses a serious threat to the future of American universities and the viability of liberal higher education. Attempts to limit the focus of my research to the relationship between postmodernism and higher education, however, revealed a comparative dearth of relevant scholarly literature. In fact, scholars specializing in the study of higher education produced a relatively small measure of the research and publications that I discovered. Ironically, philosophers and, to a lesser extent, literary scholars who were also interested in the real and potential impact of postmodernism on higher education produced much of the literature that I found most interesting and relevant to my inquiry.

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As I became more familiar with an expanding body of literature, the works of Lyotard and Rorty began to stand out because of their insights, creativity and depth. For these reasons, and because of their standing as postmodern philosophers, their wide-spread influence within the academic and arts communities, and because they specifically address higher education issues, I decided to focus on their writings as the primary sources used in this inquiry. To supplement, expand on and help explain the work of these two men, I consulted the original works of other twentieth-century philosophers, such as Russell and Camus, and the publications of various academics in a variety of fields. I employed as my primary criteria for initially considering pieces of scholarly literature authors' joint treatment of higher education and postmodernism, essentially disregarding their areas of academic specialization.

As the subject of my research became more focused and I continued to consult an increasing variety of different sources, a relatively clear picture emerged of a rapidly evolving postmodern environment. In this environment, the intellectual foundation, popular support and political backing of the contemporary university are being seriously challenged, undermined and threatened, jeopardizing the future of liberal higher education in the United States. Some of the postmodern conditions emerging in the general society that pose the most serious threats to American higher education, include: 1) a growing dependence on and privileging of technology, particularly in the area of electronic information processing; 2) the wide-spread popular loss of faith in modernist metanarratives and values that traditionally validate or legitimate Western knowledge; 3) the burgeoning of rampant consumerism; 4) the emergence of international "liberal" capitalism and the attendant development and influence of multinational corporations; 5) the diminished status and declining power of the state; and 6) the progressive

disintegration of social hegemony and social/cultural hierarchies, and the emergence of countless long-silenced groups and individuals.

The combined effects of these general conditions on American higher education are profound and transformative. Some of their more obvious and significant manifestations include: 1) the growing prevalence and popularity of the corporate model; 2) the privileging of vocationalism combined with the marginalization of the liberal arts; 3) the adoption of "performativity" as the criteria for evaluating the merit and determining the funding of various university components and activities; 4) a growing dependence on and utilization of technology as an alternative to traditional methods of instruction; 5) increasing dependence on private funding combined with decreasing levels of public funding; and 6) the emergence of non-traditional alternatives to traditional universities and colleges, for example, highly commercial and client-centered for-profit institutions like the University of Phoenix and corporate training institutions like Motorola University.

This picture of a rapidly evolving American society and its unstable and beleaguered higher education system provides the context for the discussion and analysis of Lyotard's and Rorty's respective "postmodern" views about epistemology, politics and, most importantly, higher education. In the most general sense, both men may be considered postmodernists, because they repudiate the basic tenets of modernism. Within the context of this narrative, these tenets include: the inevitability of progress; the perfectibility of human kind; the rational nature of being; the existence of a fixed knowable reality and the closely related ideas of representational knowledge and fixed and absolute external Truth. In addition to repudiating the foregoing ideas, Lyotard and Rorty also agree about the potential danger and historical damage done by grand or metanarratives. Both men argue that there is no evidence of the existence of a

design or discernable pattern in nature, or any final causes, or physical or metaphysical processes of being that direct, shape or lend any purpose or inherent meaning to human existence.

More assertively, both men believe that truth, reality and meaning exist as human or social constructs. Finally, they both emphasize the power and influence of language to shape human life and perceptions. In fact they both agree that truth does not exist outside of language. This idea has specific relevance for higher education, because it directly relates to the idea that the person, institution or system that controls language controls reality/truth. The corollary that an individual's, a community's and a society's reality, including the things that are held to be true and untrue, can be altered by changing their language/final vocabulary remains equally relevant. Rorty specifically reflects this idea in his belief about the importance and function of the literary critic, in his recommendation that the novel serve as the foundation for higher education/edification, and in his admiration for George Orwell's anti-utopian novel, 1984.

Although Rorty and Lyotard agree about many things, because they are driven by different passions, they follow divergent paths in pursuit of different realities. The ideas of Lyotard and Rorty mentioned above represent some of their more important shared beliefs, and serve as their shared basic operating assumptions. Both men write as ironists who repudiate the idea of Truth. Therefore, arriving at different conclusions from essentially the same basic set of assumptions should pose a problem for neither Lyotard or Rorty. The issue ceases to be the truth or even the validity of the conclusion, but rather the acceptability of their assumptions. In other words, neither Lyotard's nor Rorty's conclusions will speak to a reader/a student who disagrees with, or finds unacceptable, their assumptions, for any reason. Lyotard's and Rorty's arguments

appear moot to the person who believes that, in the language of Sartre, essence precedes existence. Their conclusions become irrelevant or nonsensical for anyone who believes in a rational and knowable external reality that exists independently of human existence, perception or description, and that knowledge, Truth, and language ideally function as its transparent representation or reflection.

Thus, if someone rejects Lyotard's and Rorty's assumptions and their arguments, other than on the basis of coincidence, serendipity or the absurd, they cannot consistently accept their conclusions. However, if one finds Lyotard's and Rorty's basic and conceptual assumptions acceptable, their respective arguments and conclusions merit further consideration. These arguments and conclusions articulate two of higher education's more credible and widely discussed possible responses to the postmodern condition and to the perils that it presents.

<u>Lyotard</u>

As discussed, Lyotard functions from a perspective of suspicion and distrust. He deeply distrusts all organizations, institutions and systems, including universities and colleges. He equally suspects human consensus and all attempts to achieve it. These two conditions combine to create a state of apprehension and fear that causes him to believe that a historical and contemporary byproduct of participation in an organization such as a university is "terror." Lyotard's definition of terror relates directly to his ideas about language. In effect, the university strives to prevent its students from speaking in any language other than that legitimated by those individuals or interests who control the university. Using Lyotard's terminology, students find themselves forced to accept the language game of their professors, which is probably the language game of the university and of the most privileged and controlling members of the dominant culture-- the people who support and control the university. If they refuse to accept such

language games, the students are not allowed to play. In other words, they are silenced. A Lyotardian would probably assume that the majority of those silenced are ultimately forced out of the university, or they experience limited success if they remain. Once silenced, students who remain in the university may be allowed to speak only after they have adopted, and begin playing by, the official rules of the university's preferred language game, the rules taught by their professors. Students learn to speak the institutionally validated language. Viewed through Lyotard's lens, the university operates as an instrument of social control that not only obliterates personal freedom, but also stifles individuality and creativity. Creativity suffers, because it deviates from the norm, i.e., the consensually derived truth. Therefore, in addition to perpetrating "terror" on its students, modernist higher education also precludes the possibility of change, and thus of social equality. Lyotard sees and describes the modern university as a fundamentally anti-democratic institution that must be neutralized. Only then may all enjoy the opportunity for individual freedom. Only then may creativity flourish.

Because Lyotard believes that the language a person speaks defines and thus determines their reality, he also believes that by teaching their students to speak the language of the university--to achieve consensus with the institution--faculty facilitate their students' internalizing their, i.e., the university's, vision of reality. For Lyotard this process is education in a modern university. For Lyotard this process represents an infliction of terror.

Lyotard does not directly address the issue of members of the faculty speaking and/or teaching their students to speak a language other than the university's consensual approved language. One may safely assume then, that because the faculty have completed the educational process their students undergo, they have long ago learned to speak the language of the university. This does not mean that all universities speak the

same language or that any individual university will always speak the same language. The languages of choice may change any time a consensus is reached to adopt a new set of rules. Of significance is not what language is spoken but the process of terror by which students, and ultimately the faculty, find themselves compelled to adopt and utilize the currently privileged set of rules. The faculty's degrees, their academic rank, and their employment status may all be viewed as indicators of their qualifications to teach their students to speak the language and see the reality of the society's most privileged.

For many of the reasons alluded to above, Lyotard believes that the era of the modern university has passed, or is rapidly passing, and that the death knoll has rung for its faculty. He specifically cites the causes of this decline of modern higher education and the death of its faculty. The primary reasons that he cites are, 1) a resurgence of liberal capitalism; 2) the loss of legitimating power of metanarratives, particularly the metanarrative of liberation and of the spirit; 3) the burgeoning of rampant consumerism; 4) technological advances, particularly computer and related electronic information processing technology, and 5) the adoption and growing predominance of the performativity criteria (Lyotard, 1994, p. 47).

Because of the nature and influences of the postmodern culture, specifically burgeoning consumerism, the prevalence of vocationalism and the privileging of performativity, students learn to value only those things that contribute to their employability and, thus, their ability to acquire material goods and creature comforts. As a result, both society and the majority of students devalue the liberal and fine arts. Students interested only in obtaining the skills, knowledge and certifications necessary to obtain a job consequently have little or no interest in Rorty's edification. In Lyotard's view, students assuming this attitude are justified, because he believes that,

with the exception of the children of the elite, studying the liberal arts prepares students only for unemployment.

Lyotard introduces the idea of paralogy as a way to prevent institutions, e.g., the university, from directly terrorizing its members, e.g., students, and indirectly terrorizing the entire society. As discussed, paralogy involves the perpetual challenging of all forms of institutionalized authority and rules and the resistance of any form of consensus. Lyotard argues that a primary objective and by-product of this resultant state of near constant anarchy produced by paralogy is the maximization of both political and individual freedom and creativity. Because the powerful and privileged use organizations and institutions to not only impose their will, but also their versions of reality, on the powerless and marginalized, the only way to achieve freedom and give voice to the silenced, while stimulating creativity, is to escape the power of the privileged. In the case of students, this is accomplished by escaping, i.e., destroying the traditional university.

Advancements in computer technology provide the perfect vehicle to achieve Lyotard's grand escape from the terror of the liberal university. What students desire and what society wants them to have is information. Because performativity represents the criteria used to evaluate the performance/effectiveness of higher education, the society and the student body view negatively traditional faculty-based instruction. In other words, in Lyotard's view, the shifting criteria used to evaluate higher education causes it to be an outdated, inefficient and ineffective system for delivery of the type of privileged information that will increase student and societal productivity. From the perspective of those who validate performativity, the modern university fails to meet the needs or expectations of contemporary postmodern society and should be replaced. Although Lyotard, and those who share his views, repudiate performativity as simply

another consensus-demanding instrument of terror, they fully agree that the day of the modern university and its liberal faculty has passed. Although for different reasons, they further agree that computers provide the best available alternative.

Lyotard's primary concern is not efficiency but the transparency and accessability of information made available to students by computers. Lyotard's vision for postmodern higher education involves the elimination of the traditional modern university, its faculty, and anything approaching what is generally perceived as a curriculum. In their stead he envisions computer laboratories with multiple terminals that access huge data bases which effectively contain the sum of human knowledge. The primary functions of a postmodern university as envisioned by Lyotard involve basically logistics and maintenance operating under an extremely limited administration. The university includes: 1) facilities maintenance; 2) hardware and software acquisition and support; 3) data base acquisition and/or developing and maintenance; and 4) minimal student training in the use of hardware and software applications. Other than limited space for administrators, training and maintenance staff, offices and work areas, requirements include space to actually house the student terminals and necessary network hardware. There would be no traditional faculty, simply trainers to lead workshops or individual tutors that instruct students in electronic access to, and manipulation of, information. In the most extreme case, all instruction could be completed by on-line tutorials. The cost of maintaining such a university would obviously be a fraction of that required to operate a traditional university. But from a Lyortardian perspective, the advantage exists in the relative transparency of the information accessed by the students, particularly when compared to the information students receive in traditional universities. That information has all been filtered through the faculty and presented in the language of the university. The computerized

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process is much more democratic and relatively free of terror, in Lyotard's view. Students may access and select information of their own choosing. They may then combine and manipulate information in any fashion they choose. This process minimizes terror while maximizing individual/personal freedom, inclusiveness and creativity. Effectively restricted only by their imaginations, students are freed to play whatever language games they choose and to create whatever reality their abilities allow.

Acting on his distrust of organizations, or, more specifically, collective activity, and on his radical rejection of modernism, including anything reminiscent of an academic canon, Lyotard would destroy the modern university, discontinue liberal higher education and absolve education of social responsibility--either socializing students or providing any form of societal leadership. Lyotard's society ceases to be a community. Its members experience no solidarity with other community members. In fact Lyotard views solidarity as a threat to individual freedom and, thus, something to be avoided, and not an object of pursuit. Lyotard's university reflects the community in which it is a member--a collection of free, but isolated, self-actualizing individuals.

Flawed Assumption--Point of Departure

Lyotard significantly contributes to understanding the postmodern condition and its implications for higher education. His description of changes occurring in the wealthy North Atlantic nations, including the United States, are accurate, astute and at times even prophetic. His identification of the metanarrative's loss of power to organize and justify or legitimate cultural beliefs and knowledge, and its subsequent replacement by the principle of performativity, and, finally, the near omnipresence and transformative effects of technology, specifically the computer, reflect great insight and

represent a significant contribution to the understanding of contemporary Western culture.

However, despite his insightfulness and intellectual prowess, his prescriptive statements are based on flawed assumptions that greatly diminish his argument's ability to convince. Although one may also finally choose to disagree with his assertions about the close, if not necessary, relationship that exists among consensus, organizations and terror, they do constitute a viable and potent argument. However, his argument breaks down because of the way he chooses to define education and his excessive reliance on, and faith in, technology's ability to transmit relatively transparent information.

His concern is legitimate. His solution, however, I find unacceptable. Nearly a century ago, people like the American historian Carl Becker established the subjective nature of research and teaching. To even state such an obvious and widely accepted truth borders on the trite. Most people accept as a truism the idea that each human has a unique perspective, or final vocabulary, that is the product of a variety of influences, including values and beliefs transmitted by their community(ies), their families and their professors, that colors their vision and understanding of reality, and determines, to varying degrees, what they believe to be true. How they respond to this "truth," this egoistic impulse or tendency that each of us have to see the world through our eyes and then project that vision on everyone around us, represents one of the major differences between Rorty and Lyotard. The product of this egoistic impulse to impose our version of reality on others is, as discussed, what Lyotard characterizes as terror. In effect, because of the inevitable clash of realities, the disproportionate distribution or allocation of power, and the ability of the powerful, e.g., the university and/or the professor, to impose their vision of reality/their final vocabulary on the less powerful, e.g., the

student, the only way to avoid terror is to escape the sphere of influence of the powerful and to constantly challenge their authority.

Lyotard suggests that technology offers a way to accomplish this most difficult task that he equates to the preservation of human freedom and the avoidance of terror. As discussed, for Lyotard education consists primarily of the transmission and manipulation of information. He argues that, compared to traditional higher education, the computer and the data banks that they access offer a superior alternative. This claim is based on the assertion that computers, data bases, software applications, programers and technicians, in addition to being more efficient and effective, offer a far smaller threat to human freedom and creativity because they offer a way of transmitting information that is free of both professorial censorship and noise.

Even if Lyotard's definition of education, which consists of only "piling information on their heads," is found acceptable, his assumption about computer-generated information must also be accepted, if his vision is to be judged preferable to either the performative or the liberal alternatives that he presumes to replace. No matter who they are, or in what venue they exist, be they author, poet, editor, professor, minister, priest, painter, film maker, scientist, modernist or postmodernist, to communicate, they must use some form of language. The language that they choose, the final vocabulary that they use, no matter what form of expression they utilize, will shape the reality that they perceive and vision that they attempt to communicate. This is an article of epistemological faith for both Rorty and Lyotard.

For reasons which are not explained, Lyotard excludes Bill Gates, Steve Jobs and all the other people who design computers, manage systems, write software applications and compile data bases from this injunction, when he asserts that electronic information is more transparent than information presented non-electronically. As

professors determine the content of their courses, ministers select the topic of their sermons and scientists select and interpret the data produced by their experiments/research, so too is technology and its application the product of subjective human intellects. Human beings design the machines and write the software that determine not only what information we access, but how we access it. Data bases, like books, lectures, and sermons, are created by human beings who must decide, based on their personal final vocabularies, what is included and what is not. To base the status and security of human freedom on the transparency of electronically processed information and the objectivity of the people who create it is surely to hang one's hopes on a postmodern skyhook. Maybe we are "over-philosophizing" and engaging in a fool's errand when we speculate how we can avoid the manipulation of our respective realities, and wasting our time and effort debating the comparative merits and/or transparency of electronic versus non-electronic information. Perhaps we would be better served considering who we would rather have doing the manipulating, a professor like Rorty or a technologist like Bill Gates.

Rorty

In contrast to Lyotard, Rorty functions from a perspective of hope and trust. Acknowledging and working to reform their many faults, he has an overriding faith in the benevolence and goodness of the United States and the American people. Furthermore, he believes that the political, social and economic organizations, institutions and systems of the liberal Western bourgeois democracies, including universities and colleges, offer the best opportunity currently available to improve the quality of human life. This rather broad goal hinges on a reduction of human suffering and the creation of a social and political environment in which the rights and opportunities of each member of the community to self-actualize--define themselves in

a language of their own creation or selection--is recognized and protected. Rorty chooses to trust the members of his concentrically increasing communities. One of his primary objectives is the actualization of an increasing measure of human solidarity, dependent on, and partly the product of, a consensus within the community to which the individual belongs. These conditions combine to create a state of trust and optimism in Rorty that causes him to believe that education, particularly liberal higher education, is one of humankind's most valuable tools in its efforts to reduce human suffering and to improve the overall quality of their lives.

Rorty envisions education as consisting of two distinctly different but interrelated and complementary functions. The primary function assigned to K-12 education he calls "socialization." The primary objective of socialization is making students culturally literate "good" citizens. For Rorty, being a good citizen is roughly the equivalent of being a liberal reformer. Elementary and secondary education helps accomplish this objective by teaching students the language of their dominant culture, which involves internalizing the mythology of liberal bourgeois democracy. The second major objective of K-12 education Rorty associates with cultural literacy. This objectivity involves what Rorty describes as piling information on students' heads. If K-12 educators do their jobs properly, according to Rorty, upon graduating from high school and entering college, students will have unshakeable pride in being Americans, which is not to be confused with an unquestioning nationalism or jingoism. They develop a confidence in bourgeois liberal democratic, i.e., American, social, political and economic institutions, and an adequate knowledge base necessary to allow them to immediately begin university level work. According to Rorty, remediation is not, and should not be allowed to become, a function or responsibility of the university. The

existence of college level remediation courses is a negative reflection of the nation's K-12 educational system.

At the university level, students begin "individuation," which means the facilitation of the their ability to describe reality, which includes describing themselves, in a language of their own choosing or creation. Rorty writes about private irony and public hope, which he associates with his particular passions for Trotsky and wild orchids. He agrees with Lyotard (and William Butler Yeats) that it is not possible to hold both "reality and passion in a single vision." Rorty and Lyotard, however, resolve this dilemma in radically different ways. Lyotard, driven by cynicism, and the belief that organizations and institutions, along with all forms of social consensus, inherently restrict individual freedom, forsakes "Trotsky" in an unbridled pursuit of his version of wild orchids. Rorty, alternatively, turns to irony, and essentially argues that the question (can reality and passion be held in a single vision?) is irrelevant. Because upper case Truth does not exist, the possibility of ever developing universally grounded criteria for decision making does not exist. Thus, the question of a single vision is rendered moot. Attempts to formulate an answer, which Rorty dismisses as "over-philosophizing," constitute a waste of time and effort. Rorty argues that, rather than final answers, only passions and beliefs exist. His passion for liberalism amounts to nothing more than revulsion at human suffering and the belief that the worse thing that human beings can do is cause the suffering of other human beings.

From this point forward, most of what Rorty says he bases on this one major assumption. He provides no other justification, and, in fact, argues that none exists, for his belief other than that he chooses to believe. He argues that any action that diminishes human suffering is acceptable or good, and, conversely, any action that causes or contributes to human suffering is unacceptable. He therefore concludes that

the use of force to impose a particular version of truth or a particular personal passion on another human being remains unacceptable. All that an individual has recourse to is argument and persuasion. All that an individual may attempt is to convince others to accept a particular version of reality, to speak a particular language, to adopt and pursue a particular passion. Because no grounded criterion for decision making exists, all arguments rely on comparison, i.e., that one solution, course of action . . . etc., is better than alternative courses of action. "Good" constitutes the improvement of the quality of human life, i.e., diminishing suffering.

The acceptability of Rorty's entire argument, including all of his ideas about higher education, is reduced to his readers' willingness to make the same choice, to take the same "leap of faith" that he has. Is the desire for solidarity, and the visceral, unintellectual, irrational and personal reaction against human suffering strong enough to support the weight of his argument? Are his pleas convincing enough to persuade us to commit ourselves to democratic political reform and support and work to strengthen liberal higher education? If we find Rorty's feelings about human suffering compelling, the balance of his argument becomes much more convincing. This is so in the same way that a person who believes in God finds it much easier to accept religious teachings. Conversely, if a person does not agree with Rorty that the effort to alleviate human suffering is justification enough to act, most, if not all of his following arguments ring hollow, in much the same way that Church teachings must surely ring hollow to the nonbeliever.

Even if one is sympathetic to Rorty's compassion for others, the reality that he describes cannot be characterized as joyous. Despite his emphasis on community and solidarity with other human beings, Rorty basically remains an individualist, in that his vision of humanity is basically an existential one. He sees the human race as a

collection of isolated individuals, who, in their natural state, are comparable to a herd of animals. Rorty does not make promises; what he does is offer a little hope, a little relief from the loneliness and suffering of human existence. He suggests that we seek solace in solidarity with other human beings--public hope. Meaningful solidarity, however, can only be achieved between authentic individuals, i.e., individuals who have recreated, or redefined, themselves. Individuals who continue to speak and describe reality in a language that was given to them, as opposed to a language that they created for themselves, remain incapable of achieving solidarity, and thus even the hope of achieving any relief from the angst of existential isolation and loneliness remains unavailable. To form meaningful social relationships, the individual must engage in the purely egocentric and subjective act of recreating, i.e., redefining, not only themselves, but reality itself in a final vocabulary of their own creation--private irony.

From a Rortian perspective, although the domains are separate, the relationship between the public and the private are interdependent. An individual cannot successfully pursue personal passion unless s/he has the necessary freedom and resources to do so. According to Rorty, at this time in human history, the Western bourgeois liberal democracies, including the United States, offer the best possibility of providing an individual the necessary preconditions to make possible the pursuit of private passions. Rorty points out the absence of "inherent" good in Western democracies. They simply produce less suffering than the currently available alternatives. Although public organizations, institutions, and systems can exacerbate human suffering, they cannot in themselves create a better reality for the individual. Only the individual can do that for him/herself. Rorty believes that public organizations, institutions, and systems, however, can potentially help create environments that facilitate the individual pursuit of personal passions. In contrast to

Lyotard, who fears and wishes to escape organizations such as universities, Rorty sees them as critical to the creation and maintenance of both personal and social freedom.

Rorty recommends that the higher education community should not allow itself to bog down in over-philosophizing, one of its favorite and most counterproductive activities. Rather, he suggests, the university should focus or refocus on its most important component, students, and its most important functions, "edification" and "individuation." It should then critically assess its environment and make the "reforms" necessary to allow the faculty to carry out those functions. Because of faith in the basic soundness and legitimacy of the contemporary liberal university, Rorty sees no need for sweeping theoretical changes in the structure, function or mission of American higher education. He suggests concrete action that will incrementally but significantly strengthen the university and improve the quality of the education made available to its students.

In a university that reflects Rorty's vision, faculty remain the single most important resource. The relationship that the faculty forges with their students is the single most important activity. In stark contrast to Lyotard, who would effectively replace with the computer not only the faculty, but also all other teaching tools and materials, Rorty envisions a university with computers functioning simply as tools to be used by administrators, faculty and students to support more important work. In Rorty's university, students strive to begin the process of developing a personal language that they will use in the unending struggle to redefine themselves. To help with this most personal and difficult of tasks, professors attempt to expose their students to as many different voices, languages and final vocabularies as possible. The students will hopefully listen and compare the final vocabularies of others to their own. They will select those arguments that they find convincing and reject the rest. Because it provides

the most effective way of exposing students to the greatest number of voices speaking the greatest variety of languages, Rorty suggests that the novel serves as a mainstay of the curriculum.

In addition to exposing and hopefully infecting students with their passion, faculty perform another critical function. They serve as the students' guides. The postmodern professor does not presume to know or transmit Truth to their students. They can, however, identify for their students various visions of reality that, throughout recorded history, intrigue and fascinate humans. The professors are qualified to perform this task, because, through their own study and research, they have been exposed to a far greater number of voices than their students.

Through this slow, ongoing and developmental process students will be inspired to reconstruct themselves and their respective realities. Unlike Lyotard's "university," where the transmission of information remains the primary objective, Rorty's university has as an objective the questioning and reformulating of information "piled" on students' heads in elementary and high school. Rorty hopes that university students will at least begin the process of becoming liberal ironists. The starting point for this development must be literate students, with a working knowledge of the language of their parents and their culture which they hopefully learned before leaving high school.

The transmission of knowledge is not, nor should it be allowed to become, the primary function of the university. Although he privileges edification, Rorty recognizes that the politicians, the policy makers, the general public and a great segment of the student body, at least upon entering the university, do not necessarily share his views. He recognizes that performativity and Lyotard speak more convincingly to many people both within and outside the university than he. Rorty further recognizes that a university that only addresses edification and individuation would surely fail.

Reflecting his penchant for pragmatism, he encourages those who find his arguments convincing to recognize and compensate for the political, social and economic dynamics of their current environment.

Faculty and administration must recognize the necessity to strike a compromise with those who provide and control the resources necessary for the university's survival. Only then can they pursue their passion and encourage their students to follow suit. To come to terms with the forces of performativity and technological idolatry, while protecting and maintaining the independence of the faculty and creating an environment conducive to edification and individuation, will require administrators who are truly postmodern artists.

Unjustified Criticism: Elitism

Rorty has been a favorite object of attack and criticism particularly from what he characterizes as the "new Left."[27] As discussed in Chapter Two, his separation of

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[27]See Rorty's latest book, Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America (1998), for an extended discussion of his understanding of various American leftists' political and cultural perspectives and their relationships. In that book he provides the following definitions and discussion:

> For us Americans, it is important not to let Marxism influence the story we
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> tell about our own left. We should repudiate the Marxists' insinuation that
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> only those who are convinced capitalism must be overthrown can count as
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> leftists, and everybody else is a wimpy liberal, a self-deceiving bourgeois
>
> reformer [endnote #2 *Marxists usually do not want to count Whitman,*
>
> *Dewey, and FDR as men of the Left. But since Dewey despaired of*
>
> *capitalism during the Depression, some of his Marxists admirers regard*

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private and public action led to the lingering and unjustified accusation of conservatism from members of leftist groups. In much the same way, there are those who attempt to unjustly brand his prescription for the relationship and respective functions of common and higher education as "elitist." This charge is unjustified, given the social, political

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him as having crossed the critical bridge in his later years. I cannot see the point of using such despair as a litmus test for authentic leftness (pp. 144-145)]. Many recent histories of the Sixties have, unfortunately, been influenced by Marxism. These histories distinguish the emergent student Left and the so-called Old-left for the "liberals"--a term used to cover both the people who administered the New Deal and those whom Kennedy brought from Harvard to the White House in 1961 . . . I think we should abandon the leftist-versus-liberal distinction, along with the other residues of Marxism that clutter up our vocabulary . . . I think we should drop the term "Old-left" as a name for the Americans who call themselves "Socialists" between 1945 and 1964. I propose the term "reformist Left" to cover all those Americans who, between 1900 and 1964, struggled within the framework of constitutional democracy to protect the weak from the strong . . . I shall use "New Left" to mean people--mostly students--who decided, around 1964, that it was no longer possible to work for social justice within the system . . . My term "reformist Left" is intended to cover most of the people who were feared and hated by the Right, and thereby to smudge the line which the Marxist tried to draw between leftists and liberals. (pp., 42-44)

and economic conditions that currently exist in the United States. These conditions, which have been characterized as "postmodern," shape the environment in which the American university exists, and determine the context in which administrative decisions and actions must be taken. Rorty does not, nor does he presume to, argue from a value neutral perspective. He argues from the publicly declared and clearly articulated perspective of the "reformist Left," a position discussed at length in this narrative. An individual may reject Rorty's political perspective, i.e., the reformist Left, but that does not justify the charge of elitism. An individual may believe that Rorty argues poorly, i.e., unconvincingly, but that does not justify the charge of elitism. An individual may believe that Rorty's position will inadvertently or unintentionally contribute to an elitist environment, but not even that would justify the charge of elitism. He might be labeled unskilled, incompetent or, possibly, non-reflective, but not elitist.

To support such a charge requires the demonstration or belief that Rorty knowingly supports the existence, and/or advocates the creation, of a hierarchy that privileges and extends power and control to a select and axiomatically small group of individuals. In other words, that the effect, if not the intent, of his ideas is to privilege the few at the expense of the many. This would involve either ignoring Rorty's claim to be a Leftist reformer, his repeated repudiation of social, economic or epistemological hierarchies, his vigorous support of pluralistic democracy, his stated desire of making education as inclusionary and comprehensive as possible, his sincerity when he express revulsion at, and the desire to eliminate/reduce, human suffering, or asserting that he is insincere and/or misrepresents his motives, beliefs and intentions.

What Rorty does is assess the situation in which the university finds itself, and, from his Leftist reformer perspective, he offers a number of suggestions about how the modern university can adapt to and survive in the postmodern era without betraying its

liberal or leftist heritage. His observations and comments are rooted in pragmatic realism. They are driven by neither ideological rigidity or elitism. Before leaving the question of elitism in Rorty's vision of American education, I would like to conclude by briefly considering the following four points that will hopefully put the question in proper context and lay it to rest:

Social, political and economic limitations. For a complex variety of social, political, economic and personal reasons, not everyone in contemporary America is able or desires to go to college. This is a denotative, not a performative and prescriptive, statement. The observation and description of a situation does not imply responsibility or validation. Certainly, Rorty would never suggest that any American be forced to attend a university. A position that he does, however, support is that every American who has the ability and desire to attend a university, should also have the opportunity. Unfortunately that situation does not exist at this point in time in the United States, but, hopefully, it will. Rorty hopes that, as universities continue to graduate more and more liberal ironists, the attitudinal and legislative changes necessary to make universal higher education a possibility will progressively become a reality. This is the objective of the reformist left that Rorty advocates, and of the liberal ironist that his university will create--to peacefully, but steadily and enthusiastically work for the kind of reforms that will make it possible for everyone who wishes and has the ability to attend a university. That the goal may never be fully accomplished does not diminish its merit. That we can not provide every American a university education, does not mean that we should stop striving to provide those who are fortunate enough to be currently attending a university the best education possible. Is it not better to do what we can with what we have, rather than rue the injustice of it all, and to do nothing? If we could only educate one person, would that not be better than to educate no one? If that is elitism, so be it.

<u>The developmental nature of education: The developmental nature of political</u> <u>reform.</u> Rorty is a reformer, not a revolutionary. As such he relies on argument and persuasion and rejects the use of force, cohesion, humiliation, intimidation and/or violence. He applies this perspective to political, social and educational reform. Those individuals who believe that revolutionary change is the only way to achieve the objective of universal access to higher education, if they are concerned with internal consistency, will continue to believe that Rorty is a conservative elitist. Those who reject revolution, particularly in the context of contemporary America, as a viable alternative, should be more understanding and sympathetic.

Rorty argues, for example, that socialization and cultural literacy, prime functions of K-12 education, are necessary preconditions for individuation and edification, primary functions of higher education. Consequently, if socialization and cultural literacy are not achieved at the K-12 level, they must be performed at the university level. This means that the university can not do the job it is designed and intended to do, because it expends its time and resources remediating student who did not learn what they should have learned in elementary and high school. More specifically, a student, while in school prior to entering the university, should develop fluency in the language of their culture, the language of their parents, the language of good citizenship. These languages and their mastery serve as the foundation of what students will attempt to accomplish while at the university. Upon completing an undergraduate education, a student has ideally made significant progress toward becoming an individual fully capable of communicating with the other members of their community, and also developing an individualized and personal language necessary to begin the ongoing process of self definition. In other words, a person who has graduated high school and completed college should be a functional member of the

group, i.e., a community or society, that also exercises some command over who they are and who they are becoming.

Mathematics provides a meaningful analogy. Students must master arithmetic, the fundamental language of mathematics, in elementary school, to be properly prepared to study algebra, geometry and trigonometry in middle school and high school. In turn the mathematical skills and competencies they master in high school provide the foundation for, i.e., make possible, the study of calculus and other forms of higher mathematics at the university. The fact that students are not expected to master calculus or study physics before they have learned to add and subtract, does not reflection negatively on, nor does it diminish the importance of, elementary schools or arithmetic.

"Achieving our country." One of Rorty's major overall objectives is to create a liberal society that respects and attempts to propagate individual freedom while striving to diminish suffering of its residents. In addition to protecting and manifesting public hope, the society that Rorty envisions also creates an environment in which each individual has the right and freedom to pursue their private passions and strive to create or recreate, i.e., define or redefine, themselves and their respective realities in a language and personal vocabulary of their own creation and choosing. The process of self-creation/definition is ultimately a personal, private and solitary endeavor, something that each individual must ultimately do for themselves and by themselves. A liberal society, and its institutions designed to safeguard and facilitate the individual's pursuit of private passion, can only hope and strive to create an environment in which the individual is free to choose and to struggle. In much the same way, the university does not do for the individual student; it simply attempts to facilitate the individual's doing for themselves.

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Education, including higher education, may support every individual's personal freedom and facilitate their pursuit of their private passions by contributing to and supporting the kind of reformist society that recognizes and protects such ultimately egoistic endeavors, as well as the individual's right to pursue them. This is achieved, in part, by supporting the development of the kind of self-respecting citizens who love their country without giving in to the temptations of nationalism, knowledgeable caring citizens who are motivated and capable of implementing liberal reforms.

These individuals, who Rorty now chooses to identify as leftist reformers, if they are to succeed, must challenge the beliefs and question the actions, both contemporary and historic, of their culture. This must be done without developing self-loathing, a characteristic that Rorty associates with the "new Left." Such a difficult task requires individuals who have an internalized and unqualified but not unquestioning love for their country. Rorty's objective is to develop citizens who, like Camus, love their country too much to be nationalists. The primary responsibility for instilling this love for America in its citizens, this first and critical phase of a developmental process that will hopefully increase and protect the freedom of all, Rorty assigns to the nation's elementary and high schools. Responsibility for the next phase, analysis and questioning, Rorty delegates to higher education.

In order to protect the students and support the success of the over-all educational process, a student's love and understanding must be strong enough that they will not to be destroyed when America's flaws and weaknesses are presented and analyzed in the university. This process should be undertaken by individuals with full command of the language of their culture. The objective is to produce liberal or leftist reformers who strive to make the United States a better place for all of its residents, not nay sayers, revolutionaries, nihilists or anarchists who wish to destroy it.

<u>Higher education is not magic: The high school graduate does not suffer.</u> At the
heart of the accusation of elitism exists the perception that only the privileged, those
who attend university, benefit in the system described by Rorty. Although undoubtedly
heart- felt and idealistic, such observations are not grounded in the social, political and
economic environment of contemporary America, nor are they grounded in the possible.
Rorty suggests that we avoid the academic's temptation to over-philosophizing, take as
our starting point how things are, not how we would like them to be, and work to make
them better. He argues that it is better to deal with the concrete, and make a small
improvement today in the hope of making another small, but hopefully bigger,
improvement tomorrow, rather than strive for a nonexistent ideal and accomplish
nothing.

Let us for a moment return to the analogy between Rorty's educational vision
and the study of mathematics that was discussed earlier. After graduating high school,
an individual either goes or does not go to college. If the individual goes to college,
they may or may not study higher mathematics, but if they have the desire, they will
probably have the opportunity. To succeed in that opportunity, however, requires a
certain level of ability or aptitude and a knowledge and competency in the fundamental
principles of mathematics, which they hopefully acquired during their years in grade
school and high school. If students fail to achieve fluency in the basic language of
mathematics, they will be denied the opportunity to pursue their desires to study higher
mathematics, or they must waste their time, energy and resources, as well as those of the
university, remediating, i.e., learning what they failed to learn in high school and grade
school. Time, energy and resources so spent can not be recaptured and/or used to
support the teaching and study of higher mathematics.

The other alternative is that the individual does not attend the university. Their lives may or may not have been better if they had had that opportunity, but they did not. Because students do not attend a university upon graduating high school, however, does not mean that they might not do so at a later point in their lives. If an individual attends college as a non-traditional student, their potential study of higher mathematics can only be facilitated by what they learned, or hampered by what they did not learn, in high school. Even if an individual never attends a university, are they not better off than they would have been if they had not been given the opportunity to learn basic mathematical skills and understand the principles of arithmetic, algebra and geometry in grade school and high school?

Conclusion. I would like to conclude this brief discussion of elitism with a few closing observations. First, the lives of students attending Rorty's high school have certainly not been worsened by the experience. Second, high school graduates will have the ability to function and communicate effectively in their community. Third, students graduating high school will hopefully be good citizens who support America's democratic traditions and the institution and laws designed to protect the freedom and liberty of all individuals. Fourth, high school graduates will support the changes and improvements advocated by Leftists reformers. Fifth, although the high school graduate may have been denied the opportunity to attend a college or university, if reforms envisioned by Rorty are ever actualized, their children may enjoy the opportunities that they were denied. Finally, and before we move on, a moment might be well spent reflecting on the elitist nature of the assumption that the quality of an individual's life depends on, and will necessarily be made better by, attending a college or university.

Meaning and Implications

Three radically different futures for American higher education have been

considered. Two were described by Lyotard and the other by Rorty. They range from Rorty's near glorification and empowerment of the university, to the postmodern performative/vocational university, to Lyotard's depiction of its ignominious and overdue demise and replacement with a computer network and data banks. Despite their contrasting outcomes, all of these futures are predicates of the "postmodern condition."

The second portrays the university as a performativity-driven minor institution that is little more than an extension of, and support for, the dominant institution of capitalism. Only activities that increase productivity and contribute to enhanced profits are tolerated. This "university" has no students. They have been exchanged for trainees, i.e., potential workers being prepared to assume or reassume roles as productive members of the labor force. If the social, political and economic trends currently affecting higher education continue, one may envision the "performative university" as the future awaiting American higher education. As discussed, this alternative remains unacceptable to both Rorty and Lyotard and, one would hope, to most people who value liberal higher education.

Rorty and Lyotard propose two radically different futures. Lyotard would simply do away with the traditional university, disband its faculty, and replace both with massive computer networks, data banks and technicians. Students would be free to study whatever they choose, but they would do it without the interference and noise of a manipulating and silencing faculty. Although the intent of Lyotard's university is markedly different from that of the "performative university," they both result in the death of the modern university, its faculty and liberal higher education.

In contrast to these alternatives, Rorty's vision not only saves but also strengthens the university, allowing it to assume a role of increasing importance in

shaping the contours of national reality. Rorty's university protects and empowers faculty. It also privileges human passion over technological efficiency, and the interests of students over those of employers.

The list of alternatives presented here does not presume to be exhaustive. In fact, the specifics of any of the alternatives are less important than what their existence indicates. The university and liberal higher education, because of a rapidly evolving postmodern condition, confront a perilous and uncertain future, a situation that major segments of the academic community either find acceptable, or are unwilling or unable to address. An example of the university's potential duplicity in its own demise is the enthusiastic and at times seemingly unqualified embrace of technology. If this situation continues to be ignored by those who, although they may recognize the need for reform, believe that liberal higher education significantly contributes to the quality of human life, today's university will soon become a historical relic. Professors and higher educational administrators must recognize the reality of the postmodern condition and the need for changes and reform necessary to facilitate the contemporary university's successful adaptation to its dynamic and rapidly evolving environment.

<u>One Person's Choice</u>

Rorty suggests that we should not hang our hopes for the future of the university on a skyhook. Rather, after deciding what we value and aspire to, we should listen with open minds to as many different arguments framed in as many different languages as possible. The only real advice he gives on assessing these arguments is to beware of anyone claiming to know the Truth. Rorty recommends that, after listening carefully, we select those arguments that we find most convincing, internalize them, and thus, produce a new, modified and expanded "final vocabulary." This dialectical process should be ongoing, and if sincerely implemented, may allow each of us to expand and

enrich the reality that we respectively occupy and increase our solidarity with other human beings.

Rorty's ideas provide an attractive alternative, particularly to someone like myself who agrees with his ideas about skyhooks, liberal democracy, irony, human suffering, solidarity, contingency, wild orchids, passion, consumerism, cultural literacy and edification. I agree with Rorty's belief that the university and liberal higher education contribute to the quality of human life and should be allowed to continue. Within the context of his and Lyotard's basic assumptions about the postmodern condition, if one believes as I do, Rorty's vision offers greater appeal. For those who believe that the era of the university and the professor should be allowed to pass away, and that technology represents the future, two alternatives have been presented. One can do nothing, ride the "performativity wave" and watch the traditional university be consumed by Microsoft© and the University of Phoenix. Or one can embrace technology and Lyotard's misguided belief that electronically provided information is miraculously transparent, an act that Camus, and probably Rorty, would equate to embracing the absurd.

I find Rorty's argument more convincing than the others that I have read, including Lyotard's. I believe that his ideas demand serious consideration until, as he counsels, something better comes along. Therefore, I conclude this narrative by briefly considering what I see as a major obstacle to the academy's survival into the twenty-first century--the Academy itself.

"We Have Met the Enemy and They Are Us"

That the barbarians not only stand at the gate of the modern university but that they have also breached its walls, is an idea that, if not already recognized by the reader, has been demonstrated in the foregoing discussion. Equally obvious should be that the

future of liberal higher education is made even more perilous by the lack and/or nature of the response of the contemporary university and its leadership to the challenge posed by the forces of postmodernism and performativity.

If this is so, one must address the critical question: why do supporters of liberal education respond as they do? Although a countless number of conceivable answers could be formulated, most of them appear to involve two alternative, but not necessarily exclusionary, responses. First: the liberal minded elements within the university are unable, i.e., lack the capacity or ability, to meaningfully respond. Second: they are not limited by an inability to formulate a viable response, but rather by their inability or unwillingness to recognize the nature and magnitude of the challenge that confronts them. In effect, the modern university's only significant response to the forces of postmodernism and performativity appears to be coming from what could be pejoratively described or characterized as a Fifth Column, the members of which choose to collaborate with the "barbarians." These are the people within the university who see its postmodern assailants as friends, allies, even liberators, but not enemies and certainly not barbarians. They view performativity and reliance on technology as neither threatening nor dangerous. These people knowingly and sincerely applaud the replacement of liberal higher education with performative and/or Lyotardian institutions as something desirable, something to be embraced, not resisted. Although the hope remains that the people who hold these views may someday be convinced that better alternatives exist, at this point, they do not represent the intended audience of this discussion. The primary objective of this discussion remains to help awaken and mobilize liberal education's friends and supporters, not to convert its enemies.

If Lyotard's assessment of the postmodern condition is correct, the first of the two possible scenarios cited above, i.e., the liberal elements within the university lack

the capacity to meaningfully respond, more accurately describes what is occurring. The modern university and its liberal professors have been rendered anachronisms by advancing postmodernism, just as the importance and influence of the medieval church and its clerics were diminished and, to a large extent, displaced by the Enlightenment. If we accept Lyotard's assessment, we would be hard pressed to justify repudiating his conclusion. If we accept the idea that the era of the modern university and its professors has passed, there appears little that can be done to save either from irrelevance, if not extinction. Attempts at reform in Lyotard's future, although possibly heroic in an existential sense, would be as fruitful as attempting to convince the majority of Americans to forsake chemistry for alchemy or astronomy for astrology. Those who strive to transform lead into gold are surely still among us, but they remain as anachronistic as the contemporary professor in Lyotard's postmodern future. This idea does not suggest historical determinism, but simply recognizes Lyotard's understanding of current historical conditions that will themselves eventually change. If Lyotard is correct, we need only prepare for the wake. Great modern universities may one day soon be visited by postmodern tourists, in much the same way that we visit ancient temples and medieval cathedrals. These postmodern travelers will undoubtedly stand in awe at the grandeur of the edifice and wonder about the people who chose to squander their wealth and energy on such unproductive, foolish and maybe even sadomasochistic pursuits.

The other possible explanation for higher education's lack of effective response, i.e., an inability to recognize and/or articulate the problem, although no less dangerous, does offer some hope. Once they recognize the problem, educators may begin conceptualizing necessary changes and reforms that will allow the university and some form of "liberal" education to exist in a rapidly evolving postmodern future. However,

this occurrence depends on the belief or hope that meaningful action and reform remain viable possibilities.

Taking heed of Diogenes' advice to avoid the counsel of people who declare their own wisdom, and Rorty's and Lyotard's warnings to be suspicious of those who issue truth claims and prescriptive statements, no attempt will be made here to dispense the truth or to offer a prescription to cure the ill afflicting the university. Although I find Rorty's argument more convincing, and his language and the reality that it describes more appealing., i.e., more consistent and compatible with the reality I choose to create for myself, in this context, Lyotard's paralogy also has merit.

I do not read Rorty or Lyotard in search of the Truth or because they provide answers. I read them because they pose the kind of questions that, in the words of Rorty, help me to break "the crust of convention" (Rorty, 1990, p. 44). Both men believe that questions, not answers, should form the foundation for education and facilitate freedom, while answers accompany the possibility of hierarchy, exclusion, silencing, "suffering" and "terror." I read Rorty and Lyotard because they speak in strange and wonderful new languages with which I am unfamiliar. To read either man in search of a blueprint for a postmodern university or a prescription for saving liberal higher education, is to misinterpret what they say and misunderstand what they attempt to accomplish. To expect answers to emerge from either man's narrative is to misuse a potentially useful tool, to waste a potentially valuable resource.

<div align="center">Barbarians at the Gate</div>

As I ponder the words of Rorty and Lyotard, I reflect on the history of American higher education and think of both its accomplishments and its failures. Although one of the most open, accessible and productive higher educational systems in the history of the world, its past, and, to a lesser extent, its present, remain deeply rooted in well

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documented and publicly acknowledged economic, gender, class/social, religious, political, intellectual, and racial and ethnic bigotry, discrimination and oppression. The history of American higher education is also characterized by its reluctance to initiate the reforms necessary to facilitate adaptation to changing economic, political, social and popular realities. To understand the reactionary tendencies of American higher education, one need only look at the long and often painful struggle to open the doors of American colleges and universities to women, people of color, the non-socially and economically privileged or anyone professing faith inconsistent with mainstream Protestant Christianity. The theoretical opening of American higher education to the traditionally disenfranchised required a ferocious, although essentially bloodless, struggle. No less an effort was required to transform the American college from an essentially medieval theologically-based institution into the "modern" research and service-oriented university that exists today. In short, despite its great liberal traditions and accomplishments, the history of higher education in America is the history of obstructionism and resistance to change, which at times borders on the fanatical. Contemporary modern higher education manifests the same conservative or reactionary tendency that characterized its theologically-based predecessors.

A review of Western history reveals many examples of institutions and societies that steadfastly refused to acknowledge and/or adapt to transformative changes occurring in their environments, and thus were crushed by the weight of events. For example, striking similarities exist between the fall of Rome and the decline of the contemporary American University. Because of the ultimate fate of the Empire, the Roman analogy is painfully accurate to anyone who looks back fondly at their undergraduate years as a time of great awakening, but the similarities in the two sets of events cannot be denied.

Rome can lay legitimate claim to having "civilized," or, more appropriately, "Romanized," Continental Europe, the present-day British Isles and a fair share of the surrounding world. The accomplishments of Rome are impressive. The Roman legal system and ideas of order and social structure to this day provide the basis for fundamental Western belief in, and reliance on, codified rule as a basis for society and community existence. Roman accomplishments continue to touch and shape many aspects of contemporary human existence in much of the world. Roman aqueducts and the Roman arch, for example, had a truly transformative, beneficial and lasting impact on the quality of human life. Knowledge of the Roman road system helped Patton successfully advance against Hitler's armies, assisting in the ultimate destruction of Nazism. Our debt to Rome cannot be denied. However, despite all its accomplishments, despite all the grandeur and power, Rome fell. Was its decline and fall inevitable? Could anything have been done to prevent or even significantly delay the fall? Did the oblivion, inaction and counter-productive actions of the Romans, and particularly their leaders, contribute to decline? Probably.

Several years ago, my interest in the relationship between postmodernism and American higher education was originally energized by the Bloland (1995) article that has been referenced several times in this discussion. He argues that, although "postmodern perspectives, terms, and assumptions have penetrated the core of American culture over the past twenty years" (1995, p. 1), they have minimally effected American higher education which remains formally committed to modernist tenets and methodologies. I found Bloland of specific interest because of his concern about the status and potential impact that the modernism/postmodernism debate holds for higher education.

Despite the pervasiveness of postmodernism, higher education, with the exceptions of some scholars in the humanities and social sciences, remains firmly in the modernist camp, relatively untouched in any meaningful way by postmodernist thought. Addressing the Academy as a whole, Wills writes, "Our universities are rooted in modernist views and values. They are the citadels of our culture's excessive hope for knowledge and critical rationality . . . The university's educational goal, in rhetoric and often in reality, is a modernist one" (1995, p. 60). Although he restricts his primary focus, Bloland agrees with Wills' contention that higher education remains dominated by modernism and modernists, and identifies as "unfortunate" the failure of higher educationists to engage postmodernism (Bloland, 1995, p. 1).

If we take a moment to reflect on the legacy of the Romans, along with all their accomplishments, we also think of their excesses, their self indulgence, their inability to hear any voice not their own, and their unwillingness to learn any languages other than their own. On the rare occasion that late twentieth-century Americans think about Roman history, what, in all likelihood, first comes to mind are dictators and autocrats. Men often driven by boundless egos fueled by seemingly unchecked power. Men who refused to recognize that the barbarians were not only at the gate but also in the courtyard. The Romans refused to acknowledge, and thus failed to address, the existent and emerging dangers that existed within their rapidly changing internal and external environments. The Romans failed to acknowledge obvious flaws and weaknesses within their culture and institutions, or to make the necessary reforms that might have saved their city from barbarian plunder.

How ironic that Caligula, who painted himself gold, declared his own divinity, and ordered his worship by his subjects, or Nero, who, in a fit of blind rage, kicked his pregnant wife to death and figuratively "fiddled" while Rome literally burned, remain

just as clear in our collective memories as the statesman, orator and legal theorist Cicero or the philosopher-emperor Marcus Aurelius Antoninus. Bloland attempts to make this point about higher education and its unwillingness or inability to honestly engage in the modern/postmodern debate. As discussed, the hazards confronting the modern university are not less threatening, and the changes no less transformative than those faced by ancient Rome. Both situations, both institutions represent a transition between eras. Although the contexts differ, the fall of Rome and the decline of modernism and its "citadel" both represent not only the death of institutions, but also cultures and ways of life.

The inadequacy that ultimately destroyed Rome was not the lack of capacity to craft the answer, but the inability to formulate the question. Who knows what reforms the Romans could have implemented, what further greatness they could have achieved if only they would have allowed themselves the opportunity. Who knows what reforms the American university can implement, what further greatness it can achieve--how many more people it can touch, how many more lives it can improve--if only it allows itself the opportunity.

Conclusion

If one takes a historical perspective, but views Lyotard's work from a contemporary vantage point, i.e., twenty years after its original presentation, Lyotard accurately predicted the future. Consumerism has become rampant in the United States. Students focus on obtaining employment to the seeming exclusion of learning, let alone self-exploration and individuation. Multinational corporations and international trade progressively dominate the American economic scene. What many Americans still like to think of as third world nations are rapidly emerging as major economic powers and important trading partners. China has a positive trade balance with the United States,

and American jobs are regularly exported to Mexico. The corporate model continues to grow in popularity, and the influence of vocationalism and performativity grows more dominant daily in America's universities. The Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education now commit major financial resources to efforts that tie state universities and colleges to the private sector, work place development and technology transfer. As the founder of the University of Phoenix, who has opened outlets in both Oklahoma City and Tulsa, gleefully points out, Microsoft© is more influential than Yale.

Proven to be accurate in his assessment of, and predictions about, higher education in all these areas, Lyotard's predictions about computers and the influence that electronic information technology is having on the American university also ring true. This remains an area where Rorty's assessment appears in error. He mistakenly discounts the influence of computers and related technology on higher education. Lyotard provides accurate, insightful and at times even prophetically descriptive information about the status, conditions and future of the Western university. He fails, however, in his recommendations about how best to respond. Rorty, who views technology as neither a Luddite or an idolater, although he may have erred in his description, provides by far the most compelling response.

<u>Closing Thought</u>

In a recent newspaper article appropriately titled, "OU, OSU Bragging On Classes," James Halligan, President of Oklahoma State University, reflects on an increase in the school's fall 1998 freshman enrollment, compared to the comparable period in the preceding year. Referencing OSU's recent designation as "America's best college buy," Halligan comments on the cause of the school's increased appeal. He writes,

We've upgraded our busiest general classroom building for multimedia

instruction. We've installed 500 new state-of-the art computers in

student labs. Student organizations have brand new office space. We're

committed to making the OSU student experience great. (Halligan

quoted by J. Killackey, August 22, 1998)

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APPENDIX

Selected Definitions

I present the following discussion not in an attempt to provide authoritative

definitions, but to contextualize some of the more important terms, ideas, and concepts

used throughout this narrative. My objective is to discuss my understanding of the

terms and how I use them. Some of the terms that I attempt to define have no popularly

accepted or precise definitions or meanings. Some are relatively new terms that have

multiple and evolving meanings. Postmodern(ism) offers the most extreme example of

a term without definition. I attempt to provide relatively succinct definitions in this

section, and many of the terms will be discussed at greater length at various points

throughout the document. In many instances my objective, in addition to

contextualizing, is to demonstrate diversity and lack of consensus.

Agency: The ability to act both collectively and individually in a conscious and

purposeful manner to encourage emancipation through the initiation of major political,

social and cultural change.

Alternative Theory: Alternative theory collectively describes those theories and points

of view that do not embrace the basic tenets of "traditional theory" (see following

definition). As used in this discussion, the term "alternative theory" implies neither

marginalization nor the existence of a hierarchy.

Consumer/International/Late/Third Wave Capitalism: As used in this narrative, third

wave, late, consumer, and international capitalism become interchangeable, i.e.,

synonyms. They describe the most advanced stage of capitalism. First wave capitalism

represents entrepreneurial capitalism, the popular version that exists in myth and legend. Second wave capitalism represents monopoly capitalism as described by Paul Baran and Paul M. Sweezy in Monopoly Capitalism (1964). Third wave capitalism represents international consumer capitalism or "late," i.e., postmodern, capitalism described by Fredric Jameson in Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism (1994/1997) and discussed by Lyotard in The Postmodern Condition (1984/1993).

Continental Postmodernism: Essentially the position articulated by Lyotard, who has the same relationship to Continental postmodernism as Rorty has to American/pragmatic postmodernism. I use the term "Continental" because of Lyotard's and postmodernism's common European ancestry. Essentially, Lyotard argues that the modern university and the modern professor are either dead or dying and will be replaced by the postmodern university, which basically consists of data banks and computer terminals. According to Continental postmodernism and Lyotard, the loss of faith in metanarratives drives this transformation and its replacement by performativity (see following definition) as the criteria for validating knowledge, the resurgence of liberal capitalism and advancing technology.

Denotative Statement: A denotative statement is a true-false utterance that positions its sender, i.e., the person making the statement, as a knower, i.e., the sender knows the truth about the referent or object that s/he describes. Denotative, along with performative and prescriptive (see following definitions), are three types of statements considered by Lyotard and discussed in greater detail in Chapter Three. According to Lyotard, denotative statements serve as the primary form of communication of idealized modern science (1993, p. 9).

Edification: Rorty uses the term edification to describe the appropriate function of higher education, individuation (see following definition), and to distinguish it from

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vocational training. Edification and individuation are used interchangeably.

Final Vocabulary: Rorty employs the phrase final vocabulary to identify the language

that an individual currently uses to describe reality and define truth. Because he

believes that truth is contingent and reality is a product of language, and he rejects all

hierarchies of knowledge, Rorty argues that all anyone can ever say with any authority

is that at a specific point in time a thing is true for us and others who share our

vocabulary and speak our language. That language, never static or fixed, is a "final

vocabulary."

Individuation: Rorty believes that education consists of two distinct enterprises:

individuation and socialization (see following definition). Individuation serves as the

primary function of higher education. It involves questioning the traditional societal

and family beliefs and values that the individual/student learned prior to entering

university. The objective of individuation is "edification," awakening the student's

imagination in the hope that s/he will become able to "re-create" or redefine him/herself

in his/her own language. Chapter Two discusses individuation at length.

Legitimation: Legitimation is the process of presenting and accepting an assertion of

knowledge, or a knowledge statement, as being true. Any number of authorities, such

as custom, tradition, competence, consensus, logic, reason, bureaucratic rules, ideology

or religion can support, or legitimate, the truth assertion of a knowledge statement. The

popular acceptance of the authority on which the legitimation is based remains critical

to the effectiveness of the process.

Liberal Education: As used throughout this narrative, the term liberal education

combines the traditional modernist definition with the vision of higher education

articulated by Rorty and briefly described in the definition of American postmodernism

provided above. In modernist language, liberal education involves the emancipation of

the individual and the transmission of cultural values and a body of knowledge. Using

the language of Rorty, "self-creation" or "redefinition" may be substituted for

emancipation.

Liberal education rejects all canonical and methodological hierarchies and the

attempt to privilege or empower all voices that have been traditionally marginalized or

silenced. It does not involve the denial or exclusion of any voices, including those of

the traditionally privileged. The curriculum of liberal education is multicultural and

based largely on the liberal arts, although not to the exclusion of more practical subjects.

Liberal education is the American postmodern alternative to the performance-based

computer-driven vision or the traditional positivist and the Continental postmodernist.

Performative Statement: A performative statement is an utterance that actually alters

the condition of its referent by addressing or including it in the statement. For example,

in American courts, a defendant becomes guilty of an accused crime at the instant s/he

is declared so by a judge. As described by Lyotard, the effect of the performative

statement on its referent "coincides with its enunciation." (*See denotative statement*

above and performative statement below)

Performativity: Lyotard defines performativity as "the best possible input/output

equation" in an effort to obtain a "desired effect" (Lyotard, 1993, p. 46). In Lyotard's

postmodern environment faith in metanarratives has been lost, and Truth has been

replaced by performativity.

Pragmatic or American Postmodernism: Within the context of this narrative, pragmatic

postmodernism is essentially the position articulated by the philosopher Richard Rorty,

a position which he describes as "postmodernist bourgeois liberalism." The elimination

or diminishing of human suffering and the consequent improvement of human life

remain his primary objectives and criteria for decision making and the evaluation of

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action(s). The primary objective of higher education is individuation (*see following definition*)

Prescriptive Statement: Two unique characteristics distinguish a prescriptive statement from denotative and performative statements (see definitions above): the sender of the statement occupies a position of authority and expects the addressee to comply with the sender's request. A prescriptive statement may take a variety of forms, including a command, order, recommendation, instruction, request, plea or prayer. As described by Lyotard, a prescriptive statement "entails concomitant changes in the posts of addressee and referent" (1993, p. 10).

Socialization: Rorty believes that education consist of two distinct enterprises: socialization and individuation (see preceding definition). Socialization is the primary function of K-12 education. It involves trying to inculcate students with a sense of citizenship and providing them with a knowledge base, i.e., making them "culturally literate" prior to entering university. Chapter Two discusses socialization at length.

Traditional Theory: The term "traditional theory" represents the body of theories and beliefs associated with positivism and the privileging of the methodology of science above all others. Examples of proponents of traditional theory include Daniel E. Griffiths and Donald J. Willower.

Vocational Education/Vocationalism/Vocational School: I use these term in their most basic and fundamental sense, i.e., as used by Robert Maynard Hutchins. Vocational education conceives as its sole objective the transmission of vocational or job skills. Its mission is the production of employable workers, i.e., competent, compliant and technically proficient laborers. Labor is viewed as a factor of production used by capitalists in their various profit-making activities. The needs of the student remain subordinate to the needs of the employer. Most vocational educators speak the language

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of the dominant capitalist culture. Vocational education stands as an alternative to, not in binary opposition to, liberal education.

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