What is the Importance of Discourse in Relation to Values? What are the Implications of Your Answer for Education?

Zaeem Maqsood

Education for Values Module Assessment

31 August 2001

Word length: 5651

Introduction

This paper will focus on two positions regarding the role of discourse in relation to values. The first is drawn from the work of Jurgen Habermas, specifically his theory of Discourse Ethics (DE), which seeks to ground moral norms in communication. The second is from Richard Rorty's metaphilosophical approach to the relation between values and discourse and his 'liberal ironist' philosophy generally. This paper seeks to compare a leading modernist to a leading postmodernist position and to trace the implications of this comparison for education.

Habermas is a critical theorist from the Institute for Social Research in Germany – the so-called 'Frankfurt School'. Much of his work was influenced by his experience of growing up and living under Nazism, with its suppression of human rights and its use of mass propaganda (Terry, 1997, p. 269). Terry also lists as significant the re-education policy of the post-war occupying powers and Habermas' experience as a journalist. For Habermas, modernity is an unfinished project, with the goal of attaining full democracy throughout society (Terry, 1997, p. 274).

For Rorty, as a postmodernist, society has no such goal, if any at all. All such projects, or metanarratives, are rejected and indeed the use of metanarratives in the pursuit of lofty ideals such as 'Justice', 'Truth' or 'Freedom' is merely an attempt to "justify a social reality dominated by power and violence" (Rosenow, 1998, p. 253). Postmodernism, in its celebration of difference, disqualifies any ultimate criterion by which to judge the various modes of existence. It "disclaims the general validity of norms and values" (*ibid.*).

Habermas' concern is to produce a defence of philosophy's role as the 'guardian of reason', validating or invalidating certain moral norms and to show that with the help of reason, philosophy can tell us, if not what is right, at least how we can

find out. Rorty sees his task as firstly to debunk this idea of philosophy being the guardian of anything apart form it's own, peculiar way of speaking and secondly to show that this sceptical attitude is not inconsistent with a broadly liberal political philosophy.

Habermas' Discourse Ethics

Discourse Ethics (D), as expounded in *Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action* is an attempt by Habermas and Karl-Otto Apel to "reformulate Kant's ethics by grounding moral norms in communication" (Habermas, 1990, p. 195). It is a principle that seeks to replace Kant's Categorical Imperative (or at least scale it down) as a means of justifying moral intuitions and it is stated as:

> "Only those norms may claim to be valid that could meet with the consent of all affected in their role as participants in a practical discourse."
>
> (*ibid.* p. 197)

A practical discourse is a one that follows the principle of universalisation (U), which is stated as:

> "For a norm to be valid, the consequences and side effects of its general observance for the satisfaction of each person's particular interests must be acceptable to all".
>
> (*ibid.*)

Being based on Kantian moral philosophy, (D) has a number of features. It is deontological, cognitivist, formalist and universalist. Being deontological, (D) conceives the "rightness of norms and commands on analogy with the truth of an assertoric statement" (*ibid.*, p. 196). Rightness has an objective, impartial quality to it (validity), although Habermas makes clear the relation to truth is an analogy, not an equivalence (since validity is a theoretical quality and truth a practical quality). A cognitivist ethic is one which "answer[s] the question of how to justify normative statements" (*ibid.*, p. 197, my brackets). It is an ethic that produces debatable statements, as opposed to for example one which describes personal

emotions or preferences. An ethical theory is formalist in that it makes use of a rule or a procedure when discriminating between valid and invalid norms. This is a rule of argumentation and its part is played by (U). Finally, a universalist ethic is one that claims validity beyond the current time and place; it is valid for all people everywhere at all times.

(D), as a Kantian ethic is concerned with right or just action, rather than "the good life" of classical moral philosophies. It is an ethic in which conflicts are settled by rationally motivated agreement. This can be compared not only with the original Kantian Categorical Imperative, but with alternatives formalist proposals by Rawls and Mead, each of which provide a rule for constructing the 'moral point of view' for judging moral questions impartially. Rawls' construct is the 'original position', where rational and equal individuals decide a contract behind a 'veil of ignorance' (about social position). Mead's construct is of 'ideal role taking', when a moral subject puts "himself in the position of all affected if a plan or norm were to take effect" (*ibid.*, p. 198). In Habermas' construct, all take part freely, equally and co-operatively and are coerced only by the better argument. Habermas' objection to Rawls is that although it is a public process, and hence warranting, it is fairly unrealistic to ask that each participant be behind a 'veil of ignorance'. Conversely, Mead's construct is a private, individual process (like the Categorical Imperative), which to Habermas can only produce unwarranted norms, although it is a more practical proposition than the 'original position'. Only practical discourse can claim to be both warranting and possible, since it is a public process that requires only free, equal and rational individuals, regardless of what they know about each other's social positions.

Habermas requires that his ethical theory protects individual freedom as well as the web of interpersonal relations. Neither has a greater claim over the other and in fact neither could exist without the other. Becoming an individual is the result of a social process, since individuality is meaningless outside of a social context. Individuation as socialisation forms a complex of interdependencies, which in

turn results in extreme vulnerability. Habermas requires his theory to advance both justice (individual rights) and solidarity (protecting the complex of interrelations). Justice is reflected in the practical discourse by the right of each individual to agree or disagree with anything said in the discourse. Solidarity is reflected by the requirement for each individual in the practical discourse to overcome their egocentric points of view and to empathise with others in their lifeworld [1].

We can see already that practical discourse has certain procedural requirements. Each individual has a right to disagree and each needs to overcome their egocentricity. Habermas argues that these requirements are not ad-hoc, that they can be grounded. To do this he points to certain features of argument in general and shows not only how they are transcendental[2] but also that they carry ethical weight. Habermas employs the Transcendental-Pragmatic argument to ground his requirements:

> "Every person who accepts the universal and necessary communicative presuppositions of argumentative speech and who knows what it means to justify a norm of action implicitly presupposes as valid the principle of universalisation, whether in the form I gave it above or in an equivalent form".
>
> (*ibid.* p. 86)

In other words, those who accept what it means to engage in argumentation and those who accept what it means to justify a norm must also implicitly accept the

---

[1] Lifeworld refers to the intersubjectively shared culture of all that is certain (though not necessarily known), that is reproduced through the communicative action of its members. Hence it can apply to family, community, city, state or even beyond, perhaps into online environments.
[2] Transcendental refers to the a priori conditions of existence, conditions which we always already intuitively use and for which there is no alternative. As mentioned postmodernists reject that it is useful to talk of any conditions being a priori.

principle of universalisation (U). This highlights the need to explicate the rules of argumentation, in order to show how (U) is always already implied by those rules.

Habermas follows Aristotle in distinguishing three levels of presuppositions of argumentation: the logical level of products, the dialectical level of procedures and the rhetorical level of processes (*ibid.* p. 87). Only the third level is seen as having any real ethical import. The rules of this level flesh out, in operational (though high-level) terms, what it means to engage in a practical discourse. These rules define the set of potential participants, guarantees to all participants equal opportunity to contribute to the discourse and sets out the conditions under which there would be no possibility of coercion in the discourse. As these rules are presupposed by any and every argument (though perhaps only in its idealised form), these rules and hence (U) are universal and not local to late-modern Western society.

Habermas' theory of discourse ethics as open to confirmation by other theories and he sees Kohlberg's psychological theory of the development of moral judgement as one such candidate. This theory holds that "the development of the capacity for moral judgement from childhood to adolescence and adult life follows an invariant pattern" (*ibid.* p. 117). The highest stage of this development, a stage that not everyone reaches, is a broadly Kantian morality based on universal ethical principles. Although Kohlberg made use of Kantian then Rawlsian ethics as his normative reference point, Habermas argues that the highest developmental stage is one in which we can recognise the main features of discourse ethics. Discourse ethics is open to indirect validation by an empirical theory because Habermas does not see philosophy as 'strongly' foundationalist, that is as the "usher and judge" of science and knowledge in general, but rather as the "guardian of rationality" only, in a symbiotic relationship with science. Philosophy provides the assumptions of science and science provides indirect confirmation for philosophy (*ibid.* p. 3).

Kohlberg's theory is cognitivist, universalist and formalist. As a cognitivist theory, as opposed to ethical scepticism, moral judgements can be argued over and decided on the basis of reason. As a universalist theory, as opposed to ethical relativism, it applies to all people in all historical ages. As a formalist theory, as opposed to a material ethics of happiness, it provides a rule for deciding between lives rather than advocating a particular type of life.

Kohlberg's model of moral development has three levels; each divided into two further substages:

Kohlberg's Model of Moral Development

Preconventional Level

1. Punishment and obedience
2. Individual instrumental purpose and exchange

Conventional Level

3. Mutual interpersonal expectations, relationships and conformity
4. Social systems and conscience maintenance

Postconventional Level

5. Prior rights and social contract or utility
6. Universal ethical principles

(Habermas, 1990, pp. 123-125)

The highest point of moral development, Stage 6, is characterised by reversibility, universalisability and reciprocity and it is at this stage of universal ethical principles that Habermas places discourse ethics. The transition between stages is seen by Kohlberg as a matter of learning. The inspiration for Kohlberg's model of development is Piaget's earlier study of cognitive development in children, which followed a similarly invariant pattern of stage transitions. The type of learning that characterises these transitions is called constructivism, or rather cognitive constructivism, to distinguish it from

Vygotsky's social constructivism[3], and it arises from a "creative reorganisation of an existing cognitive inventory that is inadequate to the task of handling certain persistent problems" (*ibid.* p. 125). Habermas sees discourse ethics as compatible with Piagetian constructivism. It is a reflective form of communicative action, displaying a similar "creative reorganisation" and it requires a change of attitude for the move from action to discourse, reflecting a transition from one stage to the next, higher stage. Part of this change of attitude consists of adopting a hypothetical stance to controversial validity claims.

For Habermas, the moral point of view, in the form of discourse ethics, emerges "when the conventional role structure is made reflexive" (*ibid.* p.132). The decentering of the young person's understanding of the world provides the context for the development of sociomoral perspectives. Relations to the world, claims to validity and basic attitudes all become differentiated. Decentering is characterised by a complex of world and speaker perspective structures[4] and this provides a logic of development with which to justify moral stages.

---

[3] One of the main differences between the two types of constructivism is that Vygotsky conceived of all learning as being through social interaction, which is always to some degree mediated. Piagetian constructivism holds that learning occurs not only through mediated interaction but directly with the physical environment as well.
[4] World perspectives consists of states of affairs, legitimately ordered interpersonal relations and expressions of lived experiences. Speaker perspectives are first, second and third person.

The Implications of Habermas' Theory of Discourse Ethics for Education

At the crux of Habermas' discourse ethics is the notion of a practical discourse. One of the arguments that favour it, over the comparable Kantian, Rawlsian and Meadian constructs is that not only is it a public activity, but it is also 'realistic'. It is, unlike Rawls' similarly public 'original position', implementable. Yet the practical discourse is an idealised construct. It points to a way of communicating that, although possibly desirable, may not be practically possible. It is not clear that any one group of people engaged in an argument will ever be fully free, equal and rational enough not to coerce or to be coerced, as the practical discourse demands. That being the case, it may not matter that Habermas' idealised speech is not realistic enough. What Habermas is pointing to is a goal to be aimed at and to motivate, in perhaps the same way that economic theorists point to constructs such as 'perfect' competition with full information and immediate reactions or the 'perfectly' rational economic actor who possesses and acts on all publicly available relevant knowledge. In that sense then, it wouldn't seem far-fetched to advocate the introduction of the idea and the mechanisms of Habermas' practical discourse into education, perhaps as a simulation, or even possibly as part of school life with real-world consequences. With training and practice, students may eventually be able to approximate the perfect argument.

An important aspect of any discourse-based curriculum would be the technical mastery of the form of the argument itself, rather than any substantive issues. Here, we could, like Habermas, follow the lead of R. Alexy[5] (Habermas, 1990, p. 86) in setting out in explicit detail the logical, dialectical and rhetorical rules that must be followed to realise an ideal argument. Terry provides a useful explication of Habermas' model of knowledge that includes the relevant interests, types of knowing and curricular examples for the areas of analytical-empirical and hermeneutic-historical, but notes the lack of material for the critical-emancipatory

---

[5] Habermas notes R. Alexy as an example only.

area (Terry, 1997, p. 272). Perhaps a curriculum that includes a set of argumentative rules could help plug this gap.

Any curricular innovation regarding values education with the aim of realising a practical discourse would need to take into account Kohlberg's model of moral development. This would imply that values based instruction in general and one aimed at discourse ethics in particular[6] be grounded in Piagetian constructivist approach. Theoretically, we could and should continue on this path until we reach the final stage of development – the sixth stage of universal ethical principles. If a form of assessment of moral capacity or judgement were introduced it could quite conceivably be based on Kohlberg's model, with students working toward the highest level of an ethic based on practical discourse. Of course such a reading of Kohlberg's model is overly simplistic. It would need to take account of such important criticisms as those of Carol Gilligan (Habermas, 1990, pp. 175-184), which, briefly, proposes an alternative to Kohlberg's notion of a postconventional stage based solely on abstract, logical principles and instead offers the stage of "contextual relativism" based on an ethic of responsibility and caring.

Rorty's Ironic Discourse

One of the main concerns that Richard Rorty seeks to address in *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* is the possibility of unifying the public and the private, of reconciling the rights of the individual with the rights of the web of social relations in which he or she exists. Rorty refers to this distinction as private self-creation and public hope, or solidarity. He locates himself within the historicist tradition; as among those who deny the existence of a human nature or a deepest level of the self. For historicists, history is the most fundamental thing about human nature and "Truth is replaced by Freedom as the goal of thinking and social progress" (Rorty, 1989, p. xiii). Questions such as "what is it to be a human

being?" are replaced by "what does it mean to inhabit a rich twentieth-century democratic society?" (*ibid.*).

Yet within the historicist tradition there are those for whom private self-creation, or private autonomy dominates, for example Heidegger and Foucault, and those for whom the need for a more just and free human community is more important, such as Dewey and Habermas[7]. Rorty cannot accept that either sphere dominates and argues that any attempt to ground the one in the other would be impossible. These two can never be brought together in a single theoretical vision because the "vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared […] The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared" (*ibid.* p. xiv my addition in brackets).

The type of person who urges us to "treat the demands of self-creation and of human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" (*ibid.*), is what Rorty calls a "liberal ironist". She is a liberal in that for her, cruelty is the worst thing we can possibly do, and she is an ironist in that she has accepted the unending contingency of her most central beliefs. The liberal ironist cannot ground her morality in a non-circular theory. Neither can theory provide any criteria to prioritise between public solidarity and private self-creation, since such a theory would be necessarily metaphysical, pointing to an enduring nature of humankind on which to ground this hierarchy. Rorty's solidarity is not achieved by inquiry or reflection, or by removing prejudice and achieving any supposed 'objectivity'. It is actively created through using the imagination to see and describe others as fellow sufferers, sensitising ourselves to the pain, and in particular humiliation, of other human beings.

Rorty points to the German Idealists, the French Revolutionaries and the Romantic Poets and argues that what they offered was the realisation that 'Truth'

---

[6] Since it is located at the highest stage of development in this model.
[7] It is not clear that Habermas is among those 'for whom human nature doesn't exist', as claimed by Rorty. Surely for Habermas' discourse ethics, rationality is essential to all humans.

is made, rather than discovered. We do not use criteria to change vocabularies, whether it is the vocabulary of physics or poetry. For Rorty, the philosopher is an auxiliary to the artist rather than the scientist. Ironism points to the Romantic notion that imagination, rather than reason is the central human faculty and that "a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change" (*ibid.* p. 7). So Rorty presents two visions of philosophy. The first is the traditional view of a discipline that analyses concept after concept and the second is one that works holistically and pragmatically, redescribing many things in new ways until a new generation adopts this pattern of linguistic behaviour and the correspondingly different patterns of social behaviour. For Rorty, the history of language is the history of metaphor, as opposed to the history of language getting better and better at expressing meanings or representing facts. Thus the history of moral theory (as well as art and science) is a the history of poetic metaphors that become over-familiar with use, eventually "dying off into literalness, and then serving as the platform and foil for new metaphors" (*ibid.* p. 16).

Metaphors form the major part of what Rorty calls our "final vocabulary" (FV). The (FV) is the "set of words that we carry about to justify our actions, beliefs and lives" (*ibid.* p. 73). This vocabulary is final in that there is no way to defend, in argument, the use of these words without the argument being circular. Beyond any such argument is either passivity or a resort to force. The (FV) is made up of "thin" words such as "true, good, right and beautiful". These words are flexible and ubiquitous. The major part of the (FV) though is made up of the metaphors, the "thick" words like "Christ, decency, rigorous and professional standards" (*ibid.*). These words are more rigid and parochial. When we make use of our (FV), we employ thin words to justify thick words and thick words as exemplars of thin words. This method of explaining words like 'true' and 'good' by pointing to words like 'Christ' and 'rigorous' is what Rorty calls the common sense method. Beyond this resort to common sense platitudes is the Socratic method of attempting to identify an essence separate from particular instances. Both

methods are inherently metaphysical. The ironist's approach to the (FV) is one of doubt and redescription. The ironist thoroughly and continually doubts the existence of any real essences. The use of thicker words to explicate thinner words begs the question for the ironist, but the answer comes not in the form of a Socratic inquiry after essences but of a continual redescription of the thinner words in terms of other thicker words of the ironist's choosing (*ibid.* p. 74).

The aim of discursive thought thus differs between the metaphysician and the ironist. The traditional philosopher believes there are real essences out there that it is our duty to discover. Whilst they may accept that things may be made to look good or bad by mere redescription, they deplore this fact and urge us (assisted by a clear procedure for argumentation perhaps) not to be seduced by this possibility. For the ironist the point of discursive thought is not 'knowing', in the sense of a correspondence of language to reality since reflection is not governed by any criteria of ultimacy, whether it be logic, reason, argument, debate or any kind of 'objectivity', no matter how idealised. For the ironist, (FV)s diverge over time and for the metaphysician, (FV)s converge, assisted by the benevolent force of reason.

An interesting parallel may perhaps be drawn at this point between the thinness and thickness of Rorty's final vocabulary and Haydon's conception of the possible thinness and thickness of the cognitive content of moral education (Haydon, 1995, p. 53). Haydon uses the idea of 'thin' to refer to values with minimum cognitive content. The thinner the value the easier it would be to agree on and share among diverse members of a community. Conversely, thicker values have more content, perhaps in the form of a particular cultural tradition. We can see the consonance between thick values with a lot of cultural 'baggage' and Rorty's thick, parochial, particular vocabulary. Haydon's argument is that in a plural democracy, it is precisely those values with thicker cognitive content that need to be included (alongside thinner content) in values education, not to promote a particular culture or way of life, but to enable people to be intellectually

challenged by ethical questions, to develop a sense of solidarity as part of "the requirements of citizenship within a plural society" (*ibid.* p. 54).

This then is the position of the metaphysician versus the ironist, according to Rorty. The metaphysician's method of discussion is logical. His unit of analysis is the proposition and the operation he performs on that unit is one of inference. To him, the dialectical method is ancillary to the logical. The ironist's method of discussion is dialectical. It takes the form, broadly, of literary criticism. Her unit of analysis is the vocabulary and she performs operations of redescription on it. To her, the logical method is ancillary to the dialectical method. For the ironist, the literary critic is the main moral advisor, not the philosopher or the theologian. Literary critics revise final vocabularies by providing new metaphors, or thick words, and hence they revise our moral identities. The books critics read have moral relevance because they provide a sense of what is possible and important. Ironism, in the line of thought that runs from "Hegel, Foucault and Derrida [… is] largely irrelevant to public life and to political questions [… but] invaluable in our attempt to form a private self-image." (Rorty, 1989, p. 84, my additions in brackets).

Ironism doesn't tell us what is good or bad, or how we can even find out. It tells us our most cherished beliefs are utterly contingent and offers us, constantly, alternative, equally contingent beliefs. What is 'true' or 'good' for the ironist is simply what is the outcome of 'free discussion', or "undistorted communication" (*ibid.* p.84). Whereas for Habermas, 'free discussion' means free from ideology and coercion, for Rorty it simply refers to a wealthy, liberal, educated kind of freedom of institutions[8] that tends to exist in wealthy, liberal democracies when they are functioning well. It is when "peace and wealth have made possible the leisure necessary to listen to lots of different people and think about what they have to say" (*ibid.*). The topics of this undistorted communication would be firstly, how to balance the needs for peace, wealth and freedom and secondly how to

---

[8] Freedom of press, judiciary, elections, free universities, frequent and rapid social mobility, universal literacy & common higher education.

equalise opportunities for self-creation and then to stand back and let people make use of these opportunities. Far from being impossible to reconcile Nietzsche and Mill, of reconciling both a private self-creator and a public liberal, Rorty claims that the constant redescription required by ironism sensitises us to all the possible ways of hurting and especially humiliating others. More than that, in redescribing ourselves using the final vocabularies of others, we in fact recreate ourselves in the image of others, in a sense 'becoming' others, doing more to create a sense of solidarity than any philosophical, argumentative approach to interpersonal values ever could. By ironically redescribing ourselves, we are in effect reprogramming, rather than (re)educating, which is the goal of metaphysics.

The kind of discourse recommended by Rorty is the 'abnormal' or 'edifying' discourse. A 'normal discourse' occurs when "methods become available that make problem solving and dispute settling possible […] commensurable discourses are those that operate with reliable criteria of consensus building. In contrast, discourses are incommensurable or abnormal when basic orientations are contested. " (Habermas, 1990, p. 13). Usually abnormal discourses tend to pass over into normal ones, but occasionally they are content with "interesting and fruitful disagreement" (*ibid.*). Instead of trying to converge to a specific point of understanding and agreement, we should engage in reinventing vocabularies; more poetry than philosophy. In fact, Rorty calls this poetic discourse 'edifying' and the traditional discourse 'systematic', terms of distinction that he applies to philosophy. For this kind of edifying discourse, Rorty recommends literature, ethnography and journalism over theory as this is intended to increase sensitisation and hence the chance of (unendingly) creating solidarity, though Habermas doesn't think keeping up this edifying discourse is a viable proposition (Habermas, 1990, p. 13)). Whereas theory provides social hope for the metaphysician and private perfection for the ironist, literature provides social hope for the ironist and private perfection for the metaphysician.

The Implications of Rorty's Theory of Ironic Discourse for Education

Rorty derives his approach toward education from Dewey, of whom he is apparently "'a fairly faithful follower'" (Rosenow, 1998, p. 561). He sees lower education as a matter of socialisation only and higher as a matter of individuation, of helping the student recreate herself (*ibid.* p. 560). Rorty doesn't see the possibility of an ironic disposition in young children, not for developmental reasons, but because he finds it hard to imagine a society that is ironic about it's own process of socialisation *en masse*. For either socialisation or individuation, Rorty sees no part to be played by systematic philosophy. Others who have attempted to develop a view of Rortyan liberal education have found that this was only possible while undertaking a 'rational reconstruction' of Rorty's arguments (Neiman in Rosenow, 1998, p. 561). This paper attempts such a reconstruction, albeit a very brief one concentrating on the role of discourse.

Since Rorty argues that truth is made, not discovered, a values education based on ironic discourse would similarly seek to make, rather than arrive at 'Truth'. And since, following from the Romantic Poets, cultural change is instigated chiefly by people with a 'talent for speaking differently', rather than arguing well, it would make little sense including anything resembling logic for the sake of argumentative clarity in a curriculum. It might be helpful as a strategic, rhetorical device for attracting attention away from other contributors to a discussion, but not much else. Education should concentrate on the development of the imagination and on methods of conveying the products of ones imagination to others in the most attractive way possible[9]. The product of the imaginative exercise should be not solutions, but metaphors; not essences but redescriptions of thin (FV) words. There is little use for rational discourse in Rorty's values education and certainly no use for any attempt by students to make truth claims (Poulimatka, 1997, p. 468).

---

[9] Which may include formal logic, if the audience is likely to appreciate it.

The form of the discourse should not aim at either producing paradigm cases of thin final vocabularies, nor should it attempt to go beyond this and employ the Socratic method. What students of values should do, according to Rorty is engage in the continual production and consumption of thick words for their final vocabularies. These thick words are far more likely to be found in literature and media generally than in systematic philosophy. Rorty would like to see students as budding literary critics and writers of texts ranging from books, newspapers and articles to television, film, radio, music, photography, painting, sculpture and even multimedia and web sites[10]. Any text that explores what is possible and important is morally relevant to this endeavour. Rorty counts Orwell and Nabokov as particularly important, but this list count just as easily include Steven Spielberg (for 'Schindler's List'), Isaac Asimov (for 'machine intelligence'), John Lennon (for the part of his music in the 'peace movement') and Michael Palin (for his travel documentaries). The object of any values education is not a cerebral agreement on what constitutes goodness, truth, freedom, justice or responsibility, but a rich description of all the possible ways to humiliate and be humiliated[11].

It seems Rorty recommends not so much a 'know why', but a 'know how', in Terry's scheme of Habermas' model of knowledge (Terry, 1997, p. 271). The emphasis is on aesthetic skill, rather than rational judgement. There is no possibility of removing the influence of ideology or power in discourse, and Rorty's 'liberal utopia' and 'undistorted communication' consists of what is, to a large extent, the status quo in modern liberal democracies today (Bernstein in Rosenow, 1998, p. 259). Rorty seems to be encouraging Sophistry, in the sense of engaging in discourse for the purpose not of rationally convincing other participants, but of using a vocabulary in such a way as to almost subversively change the behaviour of partners to the discourse. To a certain extent, what Rorty recommends is what is increasingly being resorted to in a 'tribalised'

---

[10] Though Rorty does not mention these sites of production, or indeed 'production' generally, the concept can be easily stretched to include these sites and activities.
[11] For environmental and animal rights issues, surely the term 'humiliation' should be substituted by 'hurt', 'damaged' or 'made to feel pain'.

postmodern society. Bauman refers to 'tribal politics' depending not on an attempted rational interchange of ideas, but on needing to "compete for the scarce resource of public attention as the major (perhaps sole) source of survival" (Bauman, 1992, p. 199). A discourse made up of political 'tribes' should expect a "tendency to render the rituals as spectacular as possible – mainly through inflating their power to shock" (*ibid.*). "That is why the novel, the movie and the TV program have, gradually but steadily, replaced the sermon and the treatise as the principal vehicles of moral change and progress" (Rorty, 1990, p. xvi). Increasingly there is scarce room here it seems, for the force of reason in any discourse and as in Bauman's postmodern vision, Rorty's ironic discourse may end up not sensitising, as he predicts, but actually, through over-exposure both in frequency and intensity, desensitise the participants to the point of perhaps being counterproductive.

Conclusion

There are a number of points at which Habermas and Rorty explicitly 'cross swords'. The public-private distinction and how it gives rise to vulnerability, the concern for both solidarity and justice, their positions regarding the foundationalism of systematic philosophy, the possibilities of abnormal discourse, the similarities between Lifeworld and final vocabulary and a theory of knowledge that locates 'know how' and 'know why'.

Habermas argues for a theory of discourse ethics, a Kantian ethical theory that seeks to replace the Categorical Imperative with a public and 'realistic', though idealised practical discourse. The practical discourse relies on a Principle of Universalisation, which was found to be implicit in and grounded by argumentative action generally, as shown by the Transcendental-Pragmatic Argument. Discourse ethics was located by Habermas at the highest stage of Kohlberg's model of moral development. A values education based on Habermas' discourse ethics would encourage the exploration of the procedures of argumentation by students, especially the abstract levels that have more of a direct bearing on ethical issues. Kohlberg's model of moral development and Piaget's model of cognitive development offer possibilities for assessment and structuring the learning experience.

Rorty, as a postmodernist, argued for the ultimate contingency of all our most central beliefs and desires. He offers us the "liberal ironist" as one who is able to engage in private self-creation and public solidarity at the same time. He encourages us not to analyse the contents of our final vocabularies, but simply to redescribe them, a process that is considered to account for cultural change far more than argumentative discourse. Rorty's discourse is aimed at 'reprogramming' others (and ourselves), not educating, enlightening or liberating them. Rorty recommends we engage in 'undistorted communication', with the end of a poetic, edifying discourse in which we are content with "interesting and

fruitful disagreement". Specifically, activities that involve cultural criticism and production are thought to be the most useful in sensitising us to the possible pain that others can experience, which in turn will assist in promoting solidarity. Rorty sees little room of systematic philosophy in values education, since the aim of discourse is not to reach a debated agreement. Rather, literature, ethnography and journalism are the preferred moral advisors, given their powers of redescription.

Despite the seemingly unbridgeable gap between the two positions, there may be possibilities for a synthesis. Perhaps there is a role for media and cultural consumption and production in values education and conversely a need for a critical, argumentative approach to media and culture. Literature and media texts generally can make values accessible and relevant. It can assist in the process of reaching a rational understanding since we are not perfectly rational and creating a power-free discursive environment which is a laudable though impossible goal. At the same time, students should approach media and culture with the aim of intersubjective understanding, if not actually reaching an agreement. Otherwise not resorting to intimidation in discourse would be ad-hoc, as Rorty's 'undistorted communication' is. In a broad sense, aesthetics can provide the content, whilst systematic philosophy can provide the structure.

Bibliography

Bauman, Z. (1992), Intimations of Postmodernity

Habermas, J. (1990), Moral Consciousness and Communicative Action

Haydon, G. (1995), "Thick or Thin? The Cognitive Content of Moral Education in a Plural Democracy", *Journal of Moral Education 24(1)*

Poulimatka, T. (1997), "The Problem of Democratic Values Education", *Journal of Philosophy of Education 31(3)*

Rorty, R. (1989), Contingency, Irony, Solidarity

Rosenow, E. (1998), "Towards an Aesthetic Education? Rorty's Conception of Education", *Journal of Philosophy of Education 32(2)*

Terry, P. (1997), "Habermas and education: knowledge, communication and discourse", *Curriculum Studies 5(3)*