



A Questioning Into The Epistemology of Value

Amanda Coen

December 1998

Class: Directed Studies

I have studied four contemporary philosophers -- Richard Rorty (*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*), John Kekes (*The Nature of Philosophy*), Martha Nussbaum (*The Fragility of Goodness*), and Pierre Hadot (*Philosophy as a Way of Life*) -- in an attempt to learn from what they have to say about different ways of knowing. I have, in my philosophical studies, discovered an unease with the practice of the standard philosophical way of knowing as the *one* legitimate way of knowing. Each of the four philosophers that I've studied offers (at least a glimpse of, or space for) ways of knowing that have different textures than this style of philosophical reasoning, which I'll call logical, calculative reasoning. It is my experience that this style of reasoning characterizes most of what has ever been called philosophy -- calculative reasoning is *usually* assumed to be the necessary and sufficient form for good philosophical thought. I want to challenge the assumption that calculative reasoning is *sufficient* for philosophical thinking -- in particular, I will challenge the notion that calculative reason is sufficient for philosophical thought concerning value. Thus, this study is centered around the questions: how do we know value? How do we know what is good? And, correspondingly, how do we know how to be good people and to act well in the world? These questions are, perhaps, standardly explored in moral philosophy. However, in studying the aforementioned books, I have come to think that these sorts of questions are at the center of more general epistemological and metaphysical inquiries.

I agree with Nussbaum and Hadot that, in our attempts to answer these questions, one of the first exercises to engage with is listening to teachers -- that is, listening to people who, whether encountered in person or via a text, you trust have already thought a great deal about what matters in life. We start to pay close attention when we encounter people and books that might a) help explain our experiences, and/or b) show us a new, meaningful perspective. I mean a) in the sense that someone's ideas speak to us clearly, and 'stick' -- it feels like these ideas resonate, are coherent, with some personal experience. Nussbaum calls this the "testing of the text against [your] own ethical experience and intuitions" (p14). Some teachers articulate threads of what we, drawing on some experience, seem to share with them; thus, we feel the rightness

of what they say. Experience a) is the experience of some sort of clarity -- it is where we start to learn the vocabulary that comes closest to describing our experience.

"We feel the rightness"? It sounds as though I think I already know value. So why don't I just paddle off into the world, secure with an intuitive sense (i.e., meaningful and known in experience, but not examined logically) of what matters in life? Because of the experience of often being wrong, of acting poorly; or, the experience of finding, *after* reflection and critical examination, with the help of a teacher, that my perspective is out of focus -- that I am not quite sure about my beliefs. This is the sense in which I mean part b) from above -- that teachers show us new, meaningful perspectives. The corresponding exercise, when approaching a teacher or text, is to test my experiences against what they say. It involves examining what I think I know, and wanting to learn. It involves listening with what Rorty describes as the awareness of "the permanent possibility of someone having a better idea" (p349) than I. It is where I respond to some new perspective, and recognize it as meaningful, because it sounds as though it is more honest about what matters in the world. I am using the phrase *honest about* here, instead of *true to*, because of the contemporary connotations of these words -- where *true to* tends to imply "scientific consistency with fact." For the purposes of this study, I am more interested in the personal / "characterological" dimensions implied by *honest about*. Experiencing that someone else's ideas are more honest about what matters affects me integrally. It affects who I am because the experience compels me not to posture and assert the rightness of my beliefs. Rather, this experience compels me to *change* my beliefs. Further, I have to internalize and live out the new perspective -- make it part of who I am, and develop experience with it to see if it works -- in order to know its truth. Nussbaum explains these "testing" exercises by saying that "through work on the alternatives and through dialogue with one another, [we] arriv[e] at a harmonious adjustment of [our] beliefs, both singly and in community with one another, [and] this will be the ethical truth" (p10).

It seems as though these two initial exercises (testing a text against your experiences, and testing your experiences against a text) are possible ways of knowing value -- knowing value by sorting through and becoming clear about experiences. They are the kind of exercises that each person must do for her or himself. The general structure for the remainder of this paper involves my attempt to clarify how this sort of "testing," in order to know value, is both different from a standard epistemological framework for knowledge *and* different from a license for relativism.

The standard epistemological framework is set up as a permanent, absolute method for adjudicating knowledge. Such frameworks make "knowing" a measurable science. They make individual 'pieces' of knowledge commensurable according to presupposed criteria. Rorty argues against this sort of totalizing epistemological project. He connects such projects with the notion of "knowledge as the assemblage of accurate representations" (p11), and thinks that this notion cannot be coherently maintained as *the* general definition for knowledge. Rorty argues that the notion of knowledge as the relation between persons and objects (i.e., knowledge as accurate representation) is a

historical construct -- that it is a *chosen* metaphor for knowledge (p163, Rorty). Rorty traces this conception of knowledge back to "Descartes' invention of the mind" (p136) (i.e., Descartes' invention of an inner space that is capable of mirroring an outer space). According to this Cartesian frame of reference, the way to have certain, objective, "mirroring" knowledge is to find, within the mind / Mirror, "a special class of representations so compelling that their accuracy cannot be doubted" (p163). These "indubitable" representations are, then, the foundations for authentic knowledge -- they are presupposed criteria which structure "an ultimate context for thought" (p5). For example, according to Rorty, Locke constructed an epistemology such that the simple ideas from sensation are the presupposed, indubitable foundations for knowledge. Rorty argues that Locke set up the simple ideas "as premises to infer [inductively] everything else" (p160). (In Locke's case, the foundations for knowledge are not themselves *a priori* ideas; but Rorty makes the point that the framework which is built from foundations, the system which is set up to collect conformable knowledge, is a rational, *a priori* construction, "isolated prior to the conclusion of inquiry" (p8)).

Rorty argues against such algorithmic epistemologies by arguing that all of the so-called "indubitable representations" are *not* necessary truths; rather, they "have a historical origin" (p10) -- they *assume* the Cartesian metaphor for knowledge (a metaphor for which there is no *necessary* reason to maintain). Rorty summarizes his position and says:

to think of knowledge which presents a 'problem,' and about which we ought to have a 'theory,' is a product of viewing knowledge as an assemblage of representations -- a view of knowledge which, I have been arguing, was a product of the seventeenth century. The moral to be drawn is that if this way of thinking of knowledge is optional, then so is epistemology (p136).

Rorty is arguing that without the "indubitable" mirrors of reality, there is no *universal* ground which "unites [all speakers] in a common rationality" (p318). In his analysis, he wants to clarify that the epistemological frameworks which have been construed as absolute, and that seem privileged, are merely optional discourses that have been *agreed* upon by the participants. The fundamental basis for this agreement, even among epistemologists with conflicting epistemologies, is faith in logical, calculative reasoning. Rorty claims that "the dominating notion of epistemology is that to be rational, to be fully human, to do what we ought, we need to be able to find agreement with other human beings" (p316), and that "if we deny that there are foundations to serve as common ground for adjudicating knowledge-claims, the notion... of rationality seems endangered" (p317). Rorty's reply to this threat to (logical, calculative, commensurating) rationality is, basically, to *let* the commensurating aspects be endangered. Rorty is arguing that there is no point in trying to find *one* synoptic way

of analyzing knowledge (p381). We should realize that "coming to understand is more like getting acquainted with a person than like following a demonstration" (p319). That is, there *is* no formulaic, absolutely right way -- Rorty *wants* to "prevent philosophy from attaining the secure path of a science" (p372).

In summary, according to Rorty, we should not appeal to commensurating frameworks, because all descriptions are historically and culturally relative (p362). Rorty is attending to the fact that there are various *equally important and informative* conceptions of our relations to things (p163). In other words, the frameworks which arise from the theory of representation are "on a par with the various alternative descriptions offered by poets, novelists, depth psychologists, sculptors, anthropologists, and mystics" (p362). Thus, because all descriptions are relative, we must, according to Rorty, rid ourselves, or at least recognize, commensurating frameworks and vocabularies, by seeking out unfamiliar perspectives (arguably similar to the "testing" exercise b)). For Rorty, the most important project we have in life is to enrich ourselves by becoming open to as many different frameworks as possible; to be able to describe ourselves and reality in various incommensurable ways.

The traditional epistemologist might object by saying: "O.K., perhaps we haven't yet found the one right framework for knowing. But we can't give up on epistemology, as a measuring science, altogether. If we do, we'll never have agreed upon, justified knowledge -- everyone will just assert the rightness of their 'incommensurable' beliefs. The fact is that humans do have the capacity to reason logically; this is a valuable common ground to continue working from."

In response, I agree with Rorty that we should set aside logical reasoning (in its connection with algorithmic epistemology) as the *exclusive* common ground. I agree (as I hope, in this paper, to show) because, like Rorty, I believe that such exclusive focus blocks the road to what we can know. Humans share more capacities than just the ability to reason logically. However, I agree with this objection insofar as I agree that Rorty's claim (that we should not feel that any one description is *more* right than the next) has dangerous implications.

One such implication, in the living out of Rorty's relativistic position, is that we should not *commit* to any one perspective as being more right than another. The danger involved with this implication is that there is, then, no way to assert the wrongness of people with extremely destructive descriptions of reality. (For example, people who maintain that the supremacy of white coloured skin is, somehow, written into the nature of reality.) I think that despite not being able to get at a firm, universal, logical ground, where no assumptions are being stood on, we need to commit to some descriptions as true, some as false. Since Rorty's analysis invites us to see how algorithmic epistemologies (which depend on calculative reasoning) are optional, perhaps (in order to determine true commitments) we might also understand Rorty's analysis as a suggestion regarding why it is intelligent to attend to other-than-logical ways of knowing (although this is *not* his project). Rorty does say, at the end of his

book, that in matters of morality, we do need to commit to (non-absolute) "truths" in particular situations, but that there is no formulaic decision procedure to follow, and that these decisions cannot rest on some notion of objective, true reality (p383). As this study proceeds, I will disagree, somewhat, and try to show that the non-formulaic way we know moral truths is not distinct from how we know metaphysical truths.

Kekes pushes to get outside Rortian relativism. Kekes is aware of some of the problems of justification that Rorty fleshes out. However, Kekes sees our society as being morally unrooted, and wants to stabilize our values by constructing a "rationally justified systematic way" (p198, Kekes) of knowing value. One reason that Kekes is confident that the framework he has constructed for justifying values works is that, as part of the justification procedure, Kekes considers pre-philosophical values. He maintains that the test for the initial plausibility (the "problem-solving" criterion (p102)) of a knowledge claim is consistency with cultural influences -- such as "psychological, social, moral, religious, historical, or political influences" (p79). Further, Kekes recognizes that these values are bound-up with common sense truths about the nature of reality. He wants to "combine an account of the nature of reality and a system of ideals which give meaning and purpose to life" (p3). So, the values / ideals must cohere with a common sense metaphysics. In this way, Kekes appeals to a justification that is external to any theory -- he appeals to the common sense beliefs which are successful ways of coping with life -- and claims that he is, therefore, "acknowledging that the philosophical task is greater than the construction and justification of a theory of reality" (p217). Although Kekes claims that it is necessary to look outside philosophy for *suggestions* about what is valuable -- and although claims which do not cohere with what common sense and educated culture maintain as valuable *cannot* be argued, philosophically, to be true -- determining what is *truly* valuable depends also, and finally, on a logical-consistency criterion (the "truth-directedness" criterion (p120)). Thus, although Kekes says that "problem-solving and truth-directedness are to be applied jointly" (p127), in the end, logical consistency is set up as the permanent, rigid standard for *truth*. Ultimately, then, Kekes can be criticized by Rorty for offering a conception of knowledge that is still a function of a commensurating, algorithmic *science*. Kekes is implying that all knowledge is commensurable when he says that "to know anything is to bring it within rational comprehension" (p209). This means, according to Kekes, that *the* way to *know* values is to find logical, rational justifications for them. Further, according to Kekes' framework for knowledge, in order to know value and know how to act well, we must have rationally calculated and justified policies, or formulas, for action. Kekes does claim that *assenting* to justified values and policies is not just a matter of logical, calculative reasoning: the values must be assented to emotionally (p199). However, emotions do not, for Kekes, play a crucial role in coming to *know* values.

Despite the fact that Kekes is not attempting to set up universal values and policies (he is sensitive to cultural and historical contexts (p191)), it seems as though Kekes intends his system to be formally complete. He has mapped out, and argued for, a

necessary framework for knowing value. Knowledge of value "*depends on...* conformity to the standards of problem-solving and truth-directedness" (p127, my emphasis). Ideally, then, every value that a thoughtful person commits her or himself to will have successfully passed through Kekes' system of justification, and will emerge in the form of a rational policy for action.

I do not think that the weight Kekes places on rational justification and policies (or principles) for action sufficiently explain my experience with choosing to act on a particular value. I am aware of sometimes acting according to "policy", but these policies are not the sort of rationally justified policies that Kekes means. For example, let me consider a past dilemma. I realize that I don't love my lover, X, anymore. X still has feelings for me, and I know that it is wrong and insensitive to X for us to continue being lovers. My dilemma is that I find it difficult to tell X that I don't love him -- I know it will hurt him and (probably more honestly central to the dilemma) I know it will hurt me (I will selfishly miss having X love me). At one point, the phrase, "now is the time" occurs to me. "Now is the time" is a phrase that I just happened to pick up (from a fortune cookie, actually) and it has meaning to me because it speaks to some of my experiences (this is comparable to exercise a) from above). I've experienced my weakness for shuffling issues such as this one under the carpet, instead of acting appropriately, immediately. When I procrastinate, it feels wrong; I know I am hurting another person. As such, the phrase "now is the time" rings true to me in a range of situations, and I can use it to test my experiences in various contexts (exercise b) from above). I can use it to adjust my beliefs; that is, I see, suddenly, that by not acting, I am putting my selfishness before X's well-being. The phrase forces me to question myself and my motives, and with the new perspective, I am able to adjust my belief (i.e., that it is acceptable to be selfish), and act according to my perception of the relative values of taking X's well-being into account as well as my own. In retrospect, I can formulate this phrase into a policy, or principle: "It is right to tell X that I don't love him rather than imagining that the problem will go away." So I have, in a sense, acted according to policy.

But the policy is not something that has been arrived at according to a rational system of justification such as Kekes'. So, according, strictly, to Kekes, I do not *know* the rightness of the policy (until I submit it, successfully, to his system of rational justification). I disagree with this conclusion -- I feel that I know both what is valuable in the situation, and the rightness of my policy for action. Coming to know, for me, involves the two aforementioned exercises (a) and (b), and is a very particular, internal process. Indeed, I picked the phrase up from an external source, but its generality and mutability allow me to shape it into a "policy" for action according to particular context. Kekes would agree that I should begin with general, modifiable values. But I think that Kekes' system becomes rigid and unrealistic to the extent that general ideals must be made into particular maxims according to a formal system of justification. The justified policies for particular action are, for Kekes, an example of rationally making the general value particular, according to context. The implication --

that I, according to his framework, do not know value -- reveals the tension in Kekes' position -- because he *is* interested in including my common sense knowledge that X's well-being is valuable into his system. Perhaps it would be helpful (for me, as a reader trying to make sense of his position) if he were to articulate that his definition of what it is to know is meant in terms of retrospective, demonstrative knowledge. Kekes' system of justification is not the sort of thing that occurs to a person (or at least not to me) when faced with an immediate moral situation.

Nussbaum makes the point that demonstrative knowledge and systems of practical policies are not adequate for knowing value. She argues against the "Anglo-American philosophical tradition [which] has tended to assume that... ethical [inquiries] should... converse with the intellect [or, logical, calculative reason] alone" (p15, Nussbaum). Nussbaum shares threads of thought with Rorty, when she says that calculative reason measures and commensurates value; that, in its demand for universality, it judges value according to rigid criteria. Furthermore, the ethical scientist, who focuses solely on calculative reason, aspires for us "to see the new situation in terms of [the constructed] system [of practical rules]" (p298). According to Nussbaum, this aspiration blinds us to the complexity and richness of the values particular to each situation. Values are plural and incommensurable. Nussbaum claims, for example, that "a particular beloved person's particular salient properties can have ethical value when they are not anticipated by the principle -- even when they *could not* because of their very nature be captured in any general formulation" (p300). According to Nussbaum, therefore, in order to know value and to act well, we need to *be* in the particular situations. We need to immerse ourselves in the context -- we must attend, openly, to the situation and be able to respond to what the situation calls for. Nussbaum, following Aristotle, calls this practical reasoning. This sort of reasoning is a responsive perception; it requires a willingness to revise rules and principles in order to be informed by the situation. Nussbaum explains that "'perception' can respond to nuance and fine shading, adapting its judgement to the matter at hand in a way that principles set up in advance have a hard time doing" (p301).

A very important part of attending to the incommensurable nature of values, for Nussbaum, involves attending to our emotional responses in ethical situations. One of the most exciting aspects of Nussbaum's discussion of practical reasoning is her claim that our emotional ways of knowing are not set down as a secondary sort of knowing. Nussbaum maintains that emotions have very meaningful cognitive content. Our emotions inform us of value, and are not reducible to calculative ways of knowing. For example, at a poetry reading, I might be struck, emotionally, by a particular image, or by the particular sound of a line. Often, what I respond to emotionally in a poem resonates with some experience I've had, or illuminates a particular question I'm grappling with in my life. The meaning I draw from the poem, the emotional response, cannot be translated into any explanatory language; and yet, I walk away from the reading feeling that I have learned something. Further, I am able to, later, draw on such emotional experiences, recall how they *felt*. This recollection provides some sort of

guidance for how to live my life, in that I can work towards acting and being in the world in a way that is attuned to these meaningful emotional experiences. Nussbaum speaks to this experience when she says that what we know by attending to how we feel does not need to be submitted to calculative reasoning in order to be understood as knowledge. (At least, Nussbaum maintains this position for matters of moral philosophy; perhaps she doesn't maintain it concerning philosophy in general).

A very illuminating conclusion, concerning how I (aspire to) know value, can be drawn from Nussbaum's discussion of practical reasoning in moral issues. When I'm in a situation where I need to choose how to act, I am not merely calculating, or logically reasoning; further, I am not just responding emotionally. Rather, I am trying to engage, holistically, with the concrete particulars of the situation. I am thinking -- which is both a tense activity and a responsive perception, or a listening. Thinking is holistic, perhaps, in that it involves communication between internalized general principles (principles which may or may not be logically justified), and situational perceptions (which open the space for informative emotions). Nussbaum concludes that my commitments to general principles, including logically justified principles, are "continually evolving, ready for surprise, and not rigid" (p306). In turn, my responsive perceptions -- including my emotions, which are "capable of a flexible ethical development" (p307) -- are continually evolving. There is a flexible movement back and forth between principle and perception. Nussbaum's point is that principles and policies should not "*bind*" practical reason (p306). This means being open to knowing things differently in different contexts. I will come back to what I am calling 'holistic thinking' in connection with Hadot.

Developing practical reason, so characterized, as a way of knowing value, is problematic for traditional epistemology. It might be objected that Nussbaum has, by introducing a mutable, dynamic, subjective way of knowing value, forced the understanding of 'value' to be simply relative to each individual subject. Nussbaum *might* first reply that the charge of relativism, coming from the traditional epistemologist's perspective of there being a logical, rational common ground, is itself questionable (under, for example, Rorty's analysis). Nussbaum would (secondly) reply that although we will not find absolute, epistemological frameworks for knowing value, and we will not find formulaic, absolute moral truths, value is not relative. There is a right thing to do in most situations, and if we all think well, have good teachers, and are responsible, dedicated workers, we should all come the the same general fabric of values. She explains that "the outstanding obstacles to communal agreement are deficiencies in judgment and reflection; if we [i.e., 'individuals who are capable of seriously pursuing the search for truth'] are each led singly through the best procedures of practical choice, we will turn out to agree on the most important matters, in ethics as in science" (p11, footnote). This description of what it takes to realize non-relative values is problematic in relation to people who don't have the luxury of "seriously pursuing the search for truth," or, perhaps, whose circumstances do not allow them the fortune of having good teachers. For example, consider a single

parent with young children, whose time is consumed by doing household chores and organizing children's lives. This person may not have time to read or search out teachers in order to challenge and develop their ethical conceptions. And perhaps that person often acts very poorly. This person is not being "led through the best procedures of practical choice," and so is not coming to Nussbaum's shared (at least, by privileged, wise people) perceptions of value. And yet, when this single parent acts unselfishly out of love for the child, it is my intuition that (s)he knows value -- basic, non-relative value. In order to show this, because of the way I have constructed the case, I need to find something other than what Nussbaum appeals to, something that all (or, at least, more) human beings have access to. I will, with Hadot's help, suggest how a general, simple understanding (that can be experienced by anyone that slows down to listen) of metaphysical truths offers a non-relativistic picture of knowing value.

Hadot talks about living the life of reason. I think that he has, similar to Nussbaum, a holistic understanding of reason. This comparison, initially, is problematic, because in describing the exercises that lead to the life of reason, Hadot does talk about ridding oneself of certain emotions. However, at one point he defines these certain emotions as the "*unregulated* desires and *exaggerated* fears" (p83, Hadot, my emphasis). Further, Hadot says that he is not talking about asceticism (p128). Thus, I think it is likely that Hadot does not mean for us to eliminate our emotions, but rather to regulate excessive, blinding passions. (Similarly, Rorty and Nussbaum can be read as suggesting that we must regulate excessive, blinding, calculative reasoning.) This interpretation of Hadot leaves room for the recognition that emotions are informative (i.e., are ways of knowing). Hadot does not explicitly say this, but he does talk about reason in the context of emotional identification with an "other." Hadot, unlike Nussbaum, is extending this emotional identification beyond anthropocentric connections. He talks about identifying with the organic unity of the universe -- an identification which is, according to Hadot, the feeling that you belong to a whole human *and* cosmic community. When Hadot describes this identification as happening "in the light of reason" (p58), he does not mean calculative, logical reason. He says that philosophical discourses -- that is, discourses which are characterized by the logical, calculative style of reasoning -- that attempt to translate this experience of identification into some sort of logical explanation "are nothing but clumsy attempts, coming after the fact, to describe and justify inner experiences whose existential density is not, in the last analysis, susceptible of any attempt at theorization or systematization" (p212). And yet, according to Hadot, one *knows* value, how to be a good person, and how to act well by judging in accordance with this (non-calculative) inner reason (p207). This knowledge of value, for Hadot, involves something like Nussbaum's receptive, practical reason. It involves the "lived experience of the concrete, living, and perceiving subject... as an effort to become aware of our situation as a part of the universe... [as] an attempt to render oneself open" (p212). This inner reason reveals, through *concrete* experiences, that "we share a common participation in the universe [with everything else]" (p255). This unity with beings and things is, in

the immediate experience, *felt* -- it is not the product of logical reasoning (p255). Our emotions are (at least part) of what informs us of this unity.

Hadot claims that this experience of reason involves having an "objective" vision of reality. By this, he means a "disinterested" view: an objective, disinterested vision is the vision "which is interested in reality for its own sake" (p232). In other words, it is the experience of the value of nature and the interconnected whole of other beings for their own sake, in themselves, and not for the sake of your *self*. Hadot's objective visionary is not, then, the impartial, detached self-sufficient observer that Nussbaum is (rightly) weary of. The experience Hadot points to is, I think, an experience where you let go of the ego precisely because you are attending to and engaged with concrete particulars in the world. Hadot call this engagement with concrete particulars a "disinterested, aesthetic perception" (p255), whereby one "accede[s] concretely to... the wonderful mystery of the presence of the universe" (p212). What I would most readily illustrate this experience with are experiences in nature. Non-linguistic experiences. For example, I can remember watching two crows by the ocean some time ago. I was sitting on a bench, relaxing, allowing my thoughts slow down, allowing myself to *be*, concretely, in the present moment. I started to become absentmindedly interested in certain characteristics of the crows: their mercurial blackness, the way they pecked each other, scrapping for bits of food. As I started to see the crows with more attention (their necks bobbing in different rhythms as they walked, their restrained relationship to each other), I was truly caring for them. I was aching to hear what they heard when they'd stop moving, when they were completely still. In between this deep emotional response to the crows, and the painful knowing of my separateness from them, I think I had a taste of (what I understand as) ego-subdued experience. Perhaps it was just a matter of existing with them for a few moments, being in wonder at their being. This 'being in wonder at being' is, I think, what Hadot means by "interest in reality for its own sake." It is a response, rather than an active, ego-centered pursuit. According to Hadot, this experience of wonder "is a profound feeling of participation in and identification with a reality which transcends the limits of the individual... [it is a] wonderstruck consent to being" (p234).

And, most importantly for the purposes of the present discussion, through this experience of wonder, I knew the *value* of the crows just as surely as I knew their and my existence. Hadot's vision, which I am construing as a letting-go of the "I" and a connecting with other things and people in the world, is a metaphysical experience. An uncomplicated, non-doctrinal metaphysics; perhaps an attentive, experiential metaphysics. I think that this sort of metaphysical experience -- a 'connected knowing' that a thing or person has being -- is inseparable from knowing that thing or person's value. When you identify with other beings in the world, it is my experience that you are compelled to attune your actions, your way of being in the world, to respect this sense of connectedness. The 'connected knowing' of a thing's ontology is bound up with a feeling of unselfish ("ego-subdued") love for that thing. Attention to this 'connected

knowing' thereby compels you to respect the value of things, simply because they exist, *and* to act in accordance with such perceived value.

* * *

[Art images] marry the world, but they do not claim to possess it, and in this they have the power and the limitations of intimate knowledge. As someone can own a piece of land and have the power to change it or dispose of it as he pleases, and someone else can use that land, walk on it, work it, know the color of it in changed gray light, when the wild radish flowers, where the deer leave imprints of their bedding down, and not own it, have no external claim to it. Some images speak to this phenomenon more profoundly than others. Vermeer's paintings, for example, are so haunting because the women in them are so intimately observed, known, and there is something peaceful and disturbing at once in the fact that they invite absolutely no claim of possession. The image in Japanese poems has that same quality. Basho's most well-known haiku is also probably a very great instance:

*An old pond,
frog jumps in:
sound of water.*

It lays claim to the world, coming and going, whole, alert, secret, common, in the way that the image does, and it doesn't possess it, or think it can. And so it has become a figure for that clear, deep act of acceptance and relinquishment which human beings are capable of.

-- Robert Hass, Twentieth Century Pleasures, my emphasis, p305

* * *

This excerpt from Hass captures what I am trying to mean by 'connected knowing' and 'unselfish love.' Knowing the ontology and value of a thing does not involve "possessing" that thing, as a 'piece' of logically justified knowledge, in some Cartesian mind-space. Rather, it requires the "intimacy" of an emotional response -- the feeling of love -- and involves 'being in wonder at being.'

Hadot illuminates this experience of wonder by referring to it as "acced[ing] to beatitude" (p271, Hadot). Hadot does not say "acceding to reality" here for, I think, reasons similar to those that previously motivated me to use *honest about* (rather than *true to*) to describe the recognition of the meaning of someone else's perspective. In tracing their Latin etymologies, Klein relates *beatitude* to *beauty* (*A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, Klein, p75). Hadot, arguably, is using *beatitude* in a sense that corresponds to how *beauty* is often used; and *beauty*, like honesty, is associated with a more organic wholeness than the (often scientific) term *reality*. The experience of beauty elicits an integral response -- one's emotions and intuitions are crucial for coming to know in this context. Further, (in my experience) the experience of beauty affects who you are. It compels you, in its presence, not to posture or try to navigate according to self-interest. It requires careful attention to particulars (attention where the ego is, to varying degrees, subdued) in order to see. It is the experience of knowing something that you cannot grasp-on to and hold; that you cannot "bind" down with calculative reasoning; that you cannot formulate according to an algorithmic epistemology. As Hass suggests, it is an experience that compels one to act in clarity -- to know and to relinquish; to value the "other" for itself.

I think this "experience of wonder" is essential to keep in mind while working at developing practical reasoning. I think it can even be read into Nussbaum that some of what practical reasoning involves the attempt to quiet the ego and be able to think responsively, perceive what is before you. Perhaps it can even be said that friends are, for Nussbaum and Aristotle, important for practicing practical reason (p336) because with friends, we start

becoming a little more familiar with ego-subdued attention to value. We identify with our friends, love them, thus value their existence, and are usually easily able to act with their interests in mind.

In connection with my experience that it is not sufficient to "paddle off into the world, secure with an intuitive sense of what matters," I want to conclude that this experience of wonder requires philosophical reflection in order for me to be able to claim -- confidently -- that, *in* the experience, I know value and metaphysical truths. Before I am confident in asserting such knowledge claims, I need to question, thoroughly, how meaningful the experience is to me. I need to make sure that I am being honest about what I know. Having some experience with traditional epistemology, and the truths which are reached via logical reasoning, gives me a basis for comparison, gives me a framework with which to test my experiences (exercise b)).

Traditional epistemology's first reaction would, likely, be to label my knowledge claims invalid -- to call them naturalistic fallacies (that is, to charge me with determining normative concepts from empirical facts) -- and thereby to dismiss them. My response to this charge involves the suggestion that to think philosophically does not mean, *prima facie*, that the *analysis of concepts* is authoritative over, is reason to dismiss, the

existential and moral import of what is being said. The epistemological connection between ontology and ethics that I am suggesting does not depend, solely, on the logical entailment between normative concepts and empirical facts. I am attempting to show how coming to know this connection involves a more holistic style of reasoning -- a way of thinking which involves emotions, intuitions, and honesty about one's experiences. Thus, my response to the traditional epistemologist is, ultimately, to say that I am *gripped* by the existential meaning that the "experience of wonder" has for me; and the fact that this experience can be analyzed as being logically fallacious *does not* compromise the significance of the experience.

Thus, it emerges that testing what I think I know is, for me, balanced with *knowing-in-the-experience* (a phenomenon which, I have been attempting to show, is not -- in its relation to philosophical knowing -- given sufficient attention). After such reflection, and after experiencing that traditional epistemology does not do justice to what I am questioning in the experiences of wonder, I think I have good reasons (if I am still gripped by the meaning) to call what I learn in the experience of wonder *knowledge* -- albeit incommensurable with traditional epistemology's logical knowledge.

In conclusion, then, I will claim that I know value and metaphysical truths in a way that cannot be sufficiently explained, and cannot simply be (without some good reason -- which I have not, presently, encountered) dismissed by traditional epistemology's style of reasoning. Further, I will claim that I know value and metaphysical truths in a way that is *central* to developing into the sort of person that knows how to act well in the world. Finally, not only do I think that the *way* in which I know ethical and ontological truths is compatible (not commensurable) with the standard style of philosophical thinking, but I also think that this *different way of knowing* is a *necessary* part of good philosophical thought. In my experience, it has been crucially important, in thinking philosophically, to acknowledge and to "keep space open for the sense of wonder which poets can sometimes cause" (p370, Rorty).

Bibliography

Hadot, Pierre *Philosophy as a Way of Life* (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers Ltd., 1995).

Hass, Robert "Images," *Twentieth Century Pleasures Prose on Poetry* (New York: The Ecco Press, 1984).

Kekes, John *The Nature of Philosophy* (Totowa: Rowman and Littlefield, 1980).

Klein, Ernest *A Comprehensive Etymological Dictionary of the English Language* (New York: Elsevier Scientific Publishing Company, 1971).

Nussbaum, Martha C. *The fragility of goodness Luck and ethics in Greek tragedy and philosophy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).

Rorty, Richard *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

Edited by Patrick Edward Meyer.
Revised May 1, 1999.