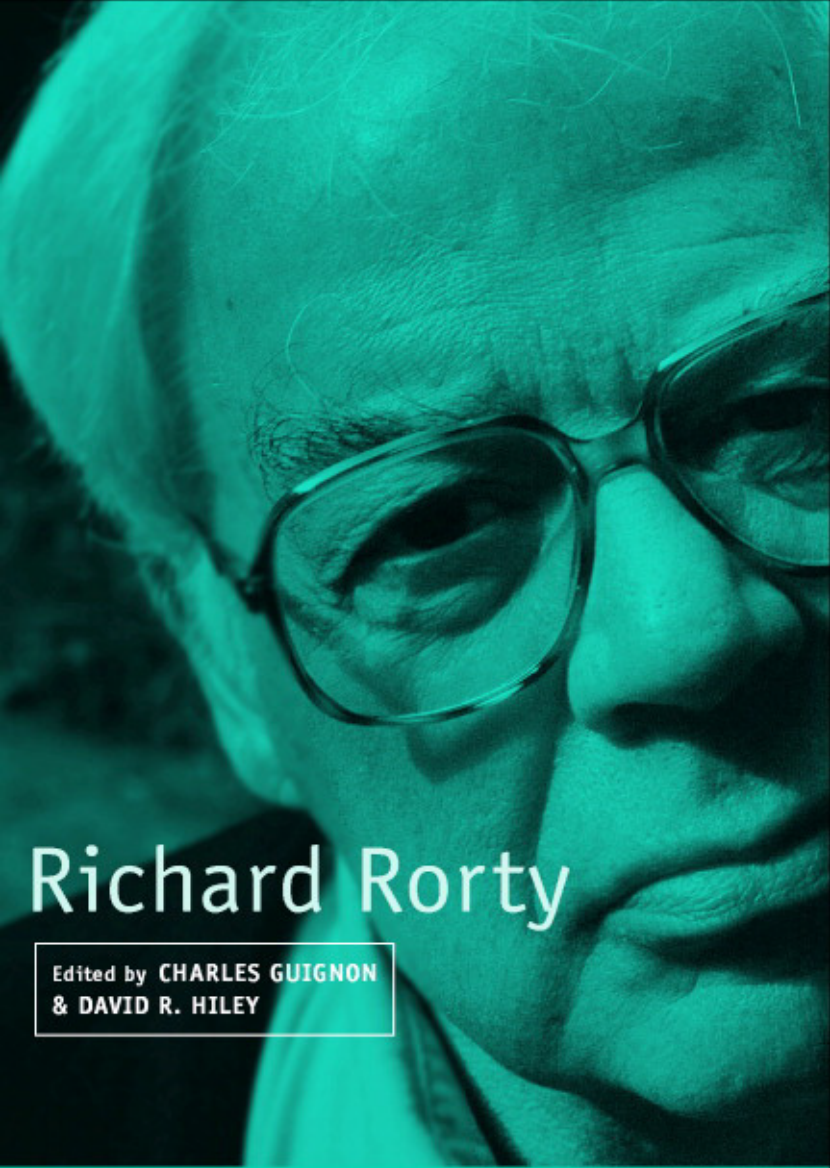

Richard Rorty

Edited by CHARLES GUIGNON & DAVID R. HILEY

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Richard Rorty

Arguably the most influential of all contemporary English-speaking philosophers, Richard Rorty has transformed the way many inside and outside philosophy think about the discipline and the traditional ways of practicing it. Drawing on a wide range of thinkers from Darwin and James to Quine, Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Derrida, Rorty has injected a bold antifoundationalist vision into philosophical debate, into discussions in literary theory, communication studies, political theory, and education, and – as a public intellectual – into national debates about the responsibilities of America in the modern world.

The essays in this volume offer a balanced exposition and critique of Rorty's views on knowledge, language, truth, science, morality, and politics. The editorial introduction presents a valuable overview of Rorty's philosophical vision. Written by a distinguished roster of philosophers, this volume will have an unusually wide appeal outside philosophy to students in the social sciences, literary studies, cultural studies, and political theory.

Charles Guignon is Professor of Philosophy at the University of South Florida.

David R. Hiley is Provost and Professor of Philosophy at the University of New Hampshire.

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Richard Rorty

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We have a special debt of gratitude to Dick Rorty. Through the years he has shown boundless generosity and kindness to colleagues around the world, as well as to students, fans, and critics. As recipients of this kindness at important points in our careers, we cannot think of a better person to dedicate this book to than Dick Rorty himself.

Abbreviations

Works by Rorty

AC	*Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998.
CIS	*Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989.
CP	*Consequences of Pragmatism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.
EHO	*Essays on Heidegger and Others, Philosophical Papers, Volume 2*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
PMN	*Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979.
PSH	*Philosophy and Social Hope*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1999.
ORT	*Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth, Philosophical Papers, Volume 1*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.
TP	*Truth and Progress, Philosophical Papers, Volume 3*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

Work by Other Authors

RHC	Robert B. Brandom, ed., *Rorty and His Critics*. Oxford: Blackwell, 2000.

Richard Rorty

1 Introduction

Richard Rorty and Contemporary Philosophy

CHARLES GUIGNON AND DAVID R. HILEY

1. INTRODUCTION

Richard Rorty has been a lightning rod for conflicting currents in recent philosophy. No American philosopher in the second half of the twentieth century generated such an intense mixture of consternation, enthusiasm, hostility, and confusion. His controversial positions in debates about the nature of mind, language, knowledge, truth, science, ethics, and politics have been regarded by some as opening fresh new possibilities for thought and by others as undermining the very possibility of meaningful inquiry. His more recent praise of American democratic culture and 1930s progressivism is seen by some as a needed antidote to the academic left and by others as politically naïve.

While Rorty is arguably the most controversial American philosopher within the discipline of philosophy itself, he has also been the most influential American philosopher since John Dewey in other areas of inquiry. At a time when the discipline of philosophy has become increasingly professionalized, technical, and remote from the rest of culture, Rorty's work has moved freely in and influenced such areas as literary theory, law, historiography, psychotherapy, education, and social theory. He writes regularly for the popular press, and he is a frequent lecturer and symposium participant in events drawing nonphilosophical audiences on a wide range of culturally important issues. He has reestablished the philosopher as public intellectual and has been no less controversial in that role.

Rorty's influence outside of philosophy is not accidental. It follows from the very reason he is so controversial to traditional philosophers. For three decades Rorty has been attacking the concept of philosophy that has been responsible for both its remoteness and its increasing professionalization. In the Introduction to *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the book that launched Rorty's reputation as contemporary philosophy's chief

gadfly, he characterized the traditional view of philosophy in the following way:

> Philosophers usually think of their discipline as one which discusses perennial, eternal problems – problems which arise as soon as one reflects. Some of these concern the difference between human beings and other beings, and are crystallized in questions concerning the relation between the mind and the body. Other problems concern the legitimation of claims to know, and are crystallized in questions concerning the "foundations" of knowledge. To discover these foundations is to discover something about the mind, and conversely. Philosophy as a discipline thus sees itself as the attempt to underwrite or debunk claims to knowledge made by science, morality, art, or religion. It purports to do this on the basis of its special understanding of the nature of knowledge and mind. Philosophy can be foundational in respect to the rest of culture because culture is an assemblage of claims to knowledge, and philosophy adjudicates such claims. (PMN 3)

Rorty captures the source of this view of philosophy – a view extending from Plato through Kant and into our own day – in the metaphor that forms the title of his book. "The picture which holds traditional philosophy captive is that of mind as a great mirror containing various representations – some accurate, some not – and capable of being studied by pure, nonempirical methods" (PMN 12). Philosophy's task is to use its special methods in order to secure the relationship between the mind's representations and the world represented. On such a view, philosophy is foundational for culture because it is the tribunal of reason before which all other areas of inquiry are to be judged. Rorty believes that philosophy's remoteness from the rest of culture follows from this privileged and special self-understanding – "the cultural overseer who knows everyone's common ground . . . who knows what everybody else is really doing whether *they* know it or not, because [philosophy] knows about the ultimate context . . . within which they are doing it" (PMN 317–18).

For the past three decades, Rorty has sought to dispel the image of the mirror of nature and the view of philosophy proper to it. In its place he has championed the view of the philosopher as "the informed dilettante, the polypragmatic, Socratic intermediary" (PMN 318) between various forms of inquiry. This is the role Rorty himself has occupied. And he has occupied it fearlessly and with considerable panache. This too explains why he has been so widely read outside of the discipline of philosophy. Few philosophers are so engaging to read. He writes with self-effacing charm, a quick and biting wit, a dizzying capacity for broad analogies, and a way

of dividing through diverse thinkers in a single sentence that in less skilled hands would be mere pastiche. Let one brief sample, picked almost at random, serve: "When we consider examples of alternative language games – the vocabulary of ancient Athenian politics versus Jefferson's, the moral vocabulary of Saint Paul versus Freud's, the jargon of Newton versus that of Aristotle, the idiom of Blake versus that of Dryden – it is difficult to think of the world as making one of these better than another, of the world as deciding between them" (CIS 5). Rorty seems to read everything. He moves easily from Wittgenstein to Heidegger or from Dewey to Derrida, but he is as apt to draw from a Philip Larkin poem, from Proust, or from a Nabokov novel as from Kant or Nietzsche.

Rorty seems to have always been a voracious reader. In a rare autobiographical essay he describes his childhood as bookish and solitary. He grew up in a household steeped in leftist politics. "When I was 12, the most salient books on my parents' shelves were two red-bound volumes, *The Case of Leon Trotsky* and *Not Guilty*. These made up the report of the Dewey Commission of Inquiry into the Moscow Trials. I never read them with the wide-eyed fascination I brought to books like Krafft-Ebing's *Psychopathia Sexualis*, but I thought of them in the way which other children thought of their family's Bible: they were books that radiated redemptive truth and moral splendour" (PSH 5). He also read Marx, *Marius the Epicurean*, Proust, Eliot, Plato, *The Brothers Karamazov*, and so forth. And he devoured books about wild orchids. His was an unusual childhood and family.

Rorty was born in 1931, the only child of James and Winifred Raushenbush Rorty.[1] James and Winifred Rorty were prominent in leftist and literary circles in New York. James was sympathetic to the Communist Party, though he never became a member. During the 1920s, he served as editor of *The New Masses*, a Communist journal that published the likes of John Dos Passos, Ezra Pound, Upton Sinclair, and other then-controversial writers. Winifred Rorty was also a writer – a specialist on race relations – and like James she was a Communist and active on behalf of leftist social causes. Daughter of the well-known theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, the founder of the Social Gospel Movement, she was steeped in progressive values and the connections of a socially active and politically conscious family. She had been a graduate student of Robert Parker at the University of Chicago during the heyday of the Chicago School of social theorists.

When Richard was barely a year old, James and Winifred made a highly contentious break with the Communist Party. Along with a few others, they were convinced that Stalin had betrayed communism, and they were concerned by the extent to which the Communist Party in America was

controlled from Moscow. In the overheated politics of the day, such a break produced enemies of former colleagues, along with their disillusionment about communism. The Rortys left New York for the remote rural community of Flatbrookville in the Delaware Water Gap area of New Jersey. Richard grew up in Flatbrookville, dividing his attention between his books, his fascination with wild orchids, and the stream of guests of his parents that included John Dewey, Carlo Tresca (the Italian anarchist), John Frank (Trotsky's secretary, who lived with the Rortys under an assumed name), Sidney Hook, Whittaker Chambers, and Lionel Trilling. Rorty says of this period:

> I grew up knowing that all decent people were, if not 'Trotskyites' at least socialists. I also knew that Stalin had ordered not only Trotsky's assassination but also Kirov's, Ehrlich's, Alter's and Carlo Tresca's . . . I knew that poor people would always be oppressed until capitalism was overcome . . . [I knew] a lot about what factory owners did to union organizers, plantation owners to sharecroppers, and the white locomotive engineers' union to the coloured firemen (whose jobs white men wanted, now that the diesel engines were replacing coal-fired steam engines). So, at 12, I knew that the point of being human was to spend one's life fighting social injustice. (PSH 6)

Though raised in the causes of social justice, Rorty records that he also had an abstract, absolutist, and aesthetic bent. While in Flatbrookville, he went through a religious period and also developed his lifelong Wordsworthian love of nature, especially wildflowers and birds.

At fifteen his parents enrolled him in a new college for precocious teenagers at the University of Chicago. As Rorty recounts it: "At fifteen I escaped from the bullies who regularly beat me up on the playground of my high school . . . by going off to the so-called Hutchins College of the University of Chicago. (This was the institution immortalized by A. J. Liebling as 'the biggest collection of juvenile neurotics since the Children's Crusade'.)." Rorty reports – in an especially telling observation – that insofar as he had any project in mind at the university, it was "to find some intellectual or aesthetic framework which would let me – in a thrilling phrase which I came across in Yeats – 'hold reality and justice in a single vision'" (PSH 7).

To hold reality and justice in a single vision: how better to express the fundamental goal of the philosophical tradition initiated by Plato? "I read through Plato during my fifteenth summer, and convinced myself that Socrates was right – virtue *was* knowledge. That claim was music to my ears, for I had doubts about my own moral character and a suspicion that

my only gifts were intellectual ones" (PSH 9). He did his best at Chicago to be a Platonist but, as he puts it, "it didn't pan out." He worried about the tension in Plato's thought between constructing arguments for one's position that will convince all comers and achieving the incommunicable certainty of the Good that lies beyond dialectic and argument. He worried about the problem of giving noncircular arguments for one's first principles and the inability to achieve a neutral standpoint from which to adjudicate alternative first principles. He came to worry about the worth of philosophical talent itself, since it seemed to come to nothing more than "a matter of proliferating as many distinctions as were needed to wriggle out of a dialectical corner. . . . I became less and less certain that developing this skill was going to make me either wise or virtuous. . . . Since that initial disillusion (which climaxed about the time I left Chicago to get a Ph.D. in philosophy at Yale), I have spent 40 years looking for a coherent and convincing way of formulating my worries about what, if anything, philosophy is good for" (PSH 10–11).

Though he may have harbored doubts about the possibility of holding reality and justice in a single vision, and though he may have worried about what philosophy was good for, the early years of his academic career – first at Wellesley College and then at Princeton – seem firmly grounded in the philosophical mainstream. Since World War II, the philosophical mainstream in the United States was defined by logical positivism and its aftermath. Rudolf Carnap, Carl Hempel, and other prominent philosophers fleeing the rise of Nazism came to occupy important positions in America, bringing with them the methods of logical analysis of language that served to render traditional metaphysical questions nonsensical. They brought an ambitious view of the unity of science through the reduction of all scientific inquiry to physics and a view of philosophy as providing the foundations of science. The ascent of positivism in American philosophy departments served to marginalize indigenous philosophers such as James, Dewey, and Lovejoy. It also provided the logical apparatus to dismiss the metaphysical and humanistic interests of contemporary German and French philosophers. For at least a generation of analytically trained American philosophers, Heidegger was known only through a paragraph from "What Is Metaphysics?" that Carnap cited to demonstrate the power of the logical analysis of language to ferret out metaphysical nonsense. The methods of logical analysis of language and the alliance of philosophy and science relegated the history of philosophy to antiquarian interest. Philosophy had to do with the problems of meaning, truth, and knowledge, to which it brought its special methods of analysis.

If one knew Rorty only through the handful of papers he published early in his career, he would appear to be a reasonably skilled and well-trained analytic philosopher. He published papers in the mid-1960s and early 1970s on the mind–body identity theory, arguing against the incorrigibility of mental representations and favoring what he termed "eliminative materialism." He edited a collection of essays under the title *The Linguistic Turn*, which brought together a range of philosophers writing on the topics of language, meaning, and truth – then central to analytic philosophy. He wrote on Wittgenstein and Strawson. He seemed to be staking out a career as another talented philosopher applying the methods of analytic philosophy to the perennial problems of the nature of mind, language, and reality.

In retrospect, of course, we can see that something else was going on. Perhaps a better indication of what he was thinking could be found not in the papers he was then known for but in the books he was reading and reviewing throughout the 1960s – John Blewett's *John Dewey: His Thought and Influence*; Raymond Aron's *Introduction to the Philosophy of History*; Edward Moore's *American Pragmatism: Peirce, James, and Dewey*; Paul Goodman's *Utopian Essays and Practical Proposals*; Edward Madden's *Chauancy Wright and the Foundations of Pragmatism*; H. D. Lewis's *Clarity Is Not Enough: Essays in Criticism of Linguistic Philosophy*. In retrospect, we can take seriously Rorty's introduction to *The Linguistic Turn* – as Jürgen Habermas has recently done[2] – in which he raises doubts about the future of analytic philosophy, writing about it in the past tense, and in which he announces his anti-Platonic sympathies with Heidegger and the later Wittgenstein. In retrospect, we can see that Rorty's eliminative materialism, then deemed to be merely one among various alternative positions available in the debate over mind–body identity, was actually an attempt to undermine the entire modern (Cartesian) philosophical tradition that organized the world in terms of mind and matter.

For mainstream (that is, analytic) philosophers in the 1960s, however, Rorty was a mainstream philosopher. That perception changed in December 1972, however, when he delivered a paper at the annual meeting of the Eastern Division of the American Philosophical Association (APA) titled "The World Well Lost." Rorty, of course, had been trying out the ideas in this paper prior to the APA presentation and its subsequent publication in the *Journal of Philosophy*. But to most who heard and read this paper, it was a turning point. Marshaling the views of W. V. O. Quine, Wilfred Sellars, and Donald Davidson, Rorty sought to *trivialize* then-current debates over correspondence and coherence theories of truth and scientific

realism in order to undermine the very notion of a world independent of thought. Even more disconcerting, he had good things to say about Dewey. The paper ended with the claim that "if we can come to see both the coherence and correspondence theories [of truth] as non-competing trivialities, then we may finally move beyond realism and idealism and to the point at which, in Wittgenstein's words, we are capable of stopping doing philosophy when we want to" (CP 17).

Throughout the 1970s, Rorty published papers that blended the ideas of Dewey, Heidegger, and Wittgenstein in a crusade against any concept of philosophy that gives legitimacy to mainstream philosophical debates about truth, knowledge, and realism. Worse, he took Derrida seriously, taught Michel Foucault's works in his classes, and paid attention to what was happening in English departments where new approaches to literary theory were emerging. He was also traveling the lecture circuit, trying out chapters of what would become *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature is in some sense a "god that failed" book for Rorty. In it he aimed to show why reality and justice could not be held in a single vision, and why the view of philosophy that runs from Plato and Kant through contemporary analytic philosophy does not come to very much. It is one thing, however, to place this book in Rorty's intellectual development and the philosophical context in which it was written. It is another thing to get clear about what his position is and the basis for it.

2. THE PRAGMATIST CRITIQUE OF EPISTEMOLOGY-CENTERED PHILOSOPHY

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature challenged a conception of philosophy that was almost universally accepted among mainstream Anglo-American philosophers in the 1970s. This conception of philosophy, inherited from Descartes and given its clearest formulation by Kant, holds that before philosophers begin to speculate about what is and what ought to be, they should first get clear about what they can know and what they can't know. For this standard conception of philosophy, theory of knowledge is "first philosophy," and all other areas of philosophy should accede to its judgments about the limits of knowledge. At the heart of traditional epistemology is "representationalism," the view that we are, at the most basic level, minds containing beliefs of various sorts, and that our first task is to make sure our beliefs accurately represent reality as it is in itself. The project of determining which representations are accurate and which are not is seen as having broad implications for culture as a whole. Philosophy aims to be

"a general theory of representation, a theory which will divide culture up into the areas which represent reality well, and those which do not represent it at all (despite their pretence of doing so)" (PMN 3). It is because of its claim to be the final court of appeals for any knowledge claims whatsoever that philosophy can see itself as foundational in respect to the rest of culture.

Epistemology-centered philosophy assumes that our primary goal as philosophers is to find a set of representations that are known in such a way as to be beyond the pale of doubt. Once such privileged representations are identified, they can serve as the basis for the foundationalist project of justifying beliefs that make a claim to being knowledge. The representations that have been taken to be inherently and automatically accurate have been of two sorts. First, there are beliefs based solely on the meanings of the terms they contain, *analytic* sentences such as "A doe is a female deer." Second, there are beliefs that immediately register the deliverances of sensory experience, beliefs such as "Red here now" or "Ouch! Pain!" The ideal of foundationalism is to ground our entire system of beliefs on the basis of such bedrock representations.

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature is especially good at spelling out some of the core assumptions about foundationalism and representationalism widely accepted by the philosophical mainstream. The dominant outlook in Anglo-American philosophy assumes that the world consists of natural kinds of items and that our task is to achieve a correct mapping of these types – a grasp of how the world is "carved up at its joints." This approach assumes a sharp distinction between the world of facts, on the one hand, and our minds and their representations, on the other. And it assumes that since natural science alone is properly equipped to know reality as it is in itself – since it alone succeeds in identifying facts – it is the only form of inquiry that achieves true knowledge. All other purported forms of knowledge (moral reflection, literary criticism, the *Geisteswissenschaften*) can only hope to approximate the ideal of knowledge achieved by natural science.

Rorty thinks this entire conception of our epistemic situation is shot through with conceptual logjams and insoluble puzzles. The prime offender in this circle of problems is the uncritical assumption that representationalism gives us the right picture of our basic predicament. To circumvent these puzzles, Rorty suggests that we need to replace "the notion of knowledge as the assemblage of representations" with "a pragmatist conception of knowledge" (PMN 11) that focuses on what humans *do* in coping with the world rather than on what they *find* through theorizing.

Rorty gives the name "epistemological behaviorism" to the pragmatist conception of knowledge he works out in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. His alternative approach is called "behaviorism" (or "psychological nominalism") because it rejects the idea that experiences play a crucial role in making sense of our claims to knowledge and proposes instead that we see knowledge as based on social practices. Epistemological behaviorism is claimed to be the common denominator in the three philosophers Rorty takes as role models for his critique of traditional philosophy – Wittgenstein, Dewey, and Heidegger. But the key arguments he uses to support this view are taken from Quine and Sellars.

From Quine, Rorty takes the critique of the analytic–synthetic distinction, the distinction between sentences that are true solely by virtue of the meanings of the words they contain and others that are known through experience.[3] The upshot of this argument is that any statement can be revised when it is found to be inconsistent with a large enough batch of our beliefs. Although we are inclined to suppose that such sentences as "A doe is a female deer" are analytic – that is, true by virtue of the concepts they contain – Quine's argument suggests that the apparent infallibility of such sentences results more from their central position in our web of beliefs than from anything having to do with the meanings of concepts. Given sufficient pressure from other areas of our web of beliefs, we would be willing to abandon any belief.

What this shows is that no beliefs have the status of being privileged representations solely because they are analytic or conceptually true. Instead, our beliefs form a holistic web in which the truth of any particular belief is established on the basis of its coherence with the whole set of beliefs. From this critique of the idea that some sentences are true solely by virtue of the meanings of their terms, Quine calls into question the usefulness of the very idea of meanings – understood as mental items – in determining reference or the correctness of belief. Quine's rejection of "the idea idea" – the idea that ideas mediate between us and things – is one key building block in Rorty's attempt to show that the mental has no crucial role to play in making sense of our capacities as knowers.

The second building block of Rorty's epistemological behaviorism is Wilfrid Sellars's attack on "the Myth of the Given" in his essay "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind."[4] In this essay, Sellars calls into question the traditional empiricist assumption that our ability to use language and our knowledge of the world must be grounded in immediate sensory experiences, in raw feels and preconceptual sensations that are just "given" in the course of our transactions with objects.

In opposition to this assumption, Sellars claims that "all awareness is a linguistic affair." To back up this claim, he draws a distinction between (1) awareness as discriminative behavior (the raw ability of sentient creatures to register inputs from the environment, a capacity common to humans and amoebas) and (2) awareness that involves the ability to notice what *sort* of thing something is (the ability of sapient beings to perceive something *as* such and such). The first type of awareness is a matter of causal interaction with the world – being affected by pain, for example, or responding differentially to stimuli in one's environment. Sellars does not deny that such episodes and states occur, but he holds that they can have no role to play in grounding knowledge. This is so because knowledge, that is, justified true belief, always has a propositional structure – it is belief *that* such and such is the case. Moreover, the only way a proposition can be justified is by means of inferences from other propositions – in Rorty's words, "there is no such thing as justification which is not a relation between propositions" (PMN 183). It follows, then, that only the second type of awareness can be used to justify knowledge claims. It is not the raw stimulus in the perceptual field that is relevant to knowledge, but the awareness *that* "this is red," which contributes to the formation of justified true belief.

Where empiricism tried to show how all concepts arise from particular instances of sensory experience, Sellars, like Wittgenstein before him, argues that one must already possess a fairly wide range of concepts before one can have sensory experience in the epistemically relevant sense. To be aware of something in a way that can serve as a basis for knowledge, we must know what *sort* of thing it is, and that means being able to experience the thing under a description – to see that it is *F* but not-*G*, not-*H*, and so on. We "have the ability to notice a sort of thing" only if we already "have the concept of that sort of thing."[5] Since, on Sellars's view, having a concept is being able to use a word, it follows that having a concept involves being a participant in a linguistic community in which justifying claims is carried out. Awareness in the relevant sense always presupposes the ability to abide by the norms that govern the shared space of reasons of a linguistic community. Justification is therefore always "a matter of social practice" (PMN 186). Sellars sums this up by saying, "The essential point is that in characterizing an episode or state [of observing] as that of knowing . . . , we are placing it in the logical space of reasons, of justifying and being able to justify what one says."[6]

Rorty interprets Sellars as having shown that justifying knowledge claims "is not a matter of a special relation between ideas (words) and objects, but of conversation, of social practice" (PMN 170). Forming beliefs,

determining what we know, defending our claims – these are all matters of interacting with others in a linguistic community where the members exchange justifications of assertions with one another. There is no basis for deciding what counts as knowledge and truth other than what one's peers will let one get away with in the open exchange of claims, counterclaims, and reasons. And this means that justification reaches bedrock when it has reached the actual practices of a particular community. As Rorty puts it in a later essay, "reference to the practices of real live people is all the philosophical justification anybody could want for anything" (ORT 157). Quinean holism and Sellarsian antifoundationalism tell us that, in the search for grounds for beliefs, there is no exit from the beliefs and reasons we currently accept as a community. The conclusion to draw is that "nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and that there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence" (PMN 178).

Rorty is the first to admit that this conception of the public space of reasons entails a thoroughgoing ethnocentrism, the claim that the project of grounding knowledge claims is circumscribed by the practices of a particular cultural group at a particular point in history. For, in his view, we can find no higher tribunal than our current practices to use in trying to ground those practices. When asked about this "we" who determine truth and knowledge, Rorty bluntly says that it is "us educated, sophisticated, tolerant, wet liberals" (TP 52), us products of contemporary, affluent, bourgeois North Atlantic culture, who make up the vast majority of philosophers today. On this view, to say that *p* is a warranted assertion is to say that we can "feel solidarity with a community that views *p* as warranted" (TP 53).

It is important to see that Rorty's claims about what philosophy can do are based on a rather austere, minimalist conception of what one can possibly say in talking about things. In Rorty's account, all talk about the world concerns either causal interactions or justification. With respect to talk about our causal transactions with the world, Rorty wholeheartedly affirms the "brute, inhuman, causal stubbornness" of objects (ORT 83), but he thinks that the brute physical resistance and shoves we receive from the world are irrelevant to accounting for the justification of our beliefs. This is so because totally arbitrary causal factors may be involved in the formation of beliefs. A mathematician, for example, might arrive at beliefs about mathematical relations as a result of delusions that are themselves caused by chemical imbalances in his brain. Yet the truth of those mathematical discoveries is independent of those causal factors. As a general strategy, Rorty adopts a "neo-Darwinian" approach to belief, analogizing a

culture's getting particle physics right to elephants coming to have a trunk (TP 152). All sorts of arbitrary factors may have causally contributed to the emergence of Galileo's view of motion, yet none of these is relevant to the question of whether Galileo's views are better than Aristotle's.[7]

With respect to talk about the justification of belief, we have nothing to go on besides our actual practices as a community of inquirers. Certainly causal factors enter into this domain. But such causal factors are always processed by the programs we have devised for ourselves in becoming the kinds of people we now are. "We humans program ourselves to respond to causal transactions between the higher brain centers and the sense organs with dispositions to make assertions," Rorty says. "There is no epistemologically interesting difference between a [computer's] program state and our dispositions" (TP 141). What is distinctive about our own case is that we have no way to step outside ourselves to look at the unprocessed causal inputs as they are prior to processing in order to compare them to the way they come out after they have been processed. There is simply no way to gain access to reality as it is in itself in order to ground our ways of talking in the "things themselves," no way to "distinguish the role of our describing activity, our use of words, and the role of the rest of the universe in accounting for the truth of our beliefs" (TP 87). And if there is no independent test of the accuracy of our beliefs, if there is no way to compare belief and object to see if they correspond, we have nowhere to turn for justifications than to the ongoing practice of reason-giving and deliberation. Objects and their causal powers drop out as explanatorily useless. Rorty suggests that saying "Our talk of atoms is right because of the way atoms really are" is like saying "Opium puts people to sleep because of its dormitive powers" (ORT 6). It seems, then, that objects and their causal powers can play no role in justifying belief. Justification is achieved in the space of reasons in which beliefs are played off against one another according to social norms. As Rorty says, "only a belief can justify a belief" (TP 141).

The pragmatist picture of our situation as knowers leads to a radical overhaul of our ordinary ways of thinking about truth. Traditionally, truth has been conceived as a matter of correspondence between beliefs in our minds and facts out there in the world, between a sentence and "a chunk of reality which is somehow isomorphic to that sentence" (ORT 137). The trouble with this conception of truth as a relation between something in us and facts "out there" is that it assumes that we can pick out and identify worldly items called "facts," items that have objective existence independent of us and our beliefs, in order to establish that there is a relationship between them and our beliefs. Yet the only way to pick out and identify a fact is by

means of the vocabulary in which we formulate our beliefs. In this sense, facts are artifacts of our language, not things that have an independent existence distinct from us and our beliefs. There are, of course, objects with causal powers out there in the world. But there is no way these objects can congeal into sentence-shaped facts except through our uses of language to describe them and talk about them. Besides, as Rorty never tires of saying, the very idea of facts as truth makers becomes absurd when we think of such true sentences as "Love is better than hate," "Shakespeare wrote better plays than Jonson," or "There is no Santa Claus."

Once the concept of a fact is abandoned – once we grant that there is no way to make sense of the idea of nonlinguistic entities our linguistic entities can be true of – the whole cluster of notions traditionally employed when talking about truth also must be abandoned. Beliefs are seen not as intentional relations to reality, but instead as tools for coping with things, means of adaptation to the environment we have picked up over the course of our evolution. And truth is no longer seen as a relation to reality, but instead as a feature of our interactions with one another. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty was inclined to describe truth as "warranted assertability" and to see the concept of truth as inseparable from that of justification (PMN 176). As the years have passed, however, he has come to hold that it will always make sense to say, for any belief *p*, that *p* is regarded as fully justified by a speech community, yet *p* is actually false. As a result, he now adopts what he calls a "minimalist" or "deflationist" approach to truth (TP 21–2). There is no way to give a definition or analysis of the concept of truth. The most one can say about truth is that, for any word to count as a translation of our word "true," its use in the language of a linguistic group must satisfy Tarski's Convention T, which dictates (putting it roughly) that, for any sentence S, " 'S' is true in language L if and only if S" (for example, " '*Schnee ist weiss*' is true in German if and only if snow is white"). Though this "breezy disquotationalism" does nothing to clarify truth, it gives us all we can ever say about the topic of truth (TP 21).

In *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty sums up the strand of philosophy he finds in Sellars, Quine, and others as leading to the idea of the "ubiquity of language" (CP xix), the view that (as 1970s postmodernists were wont to say) there is "no exit from the prison-house of language." In an important essay, "Nineteenth-Century Idealism and Twentieth-Century Textualism," Rorty refers to the idea of the ubiquity of language as "textualism" and argues for the idea as follows. First, he notes that "all problems, topics, and distinctions are language-relative – the results of our having chosen to use a certain vocabulary, to play a certain language game" (CP 140).

Second, he claims that, since "any specification of a referent is going to be in some vocabulary," and since there is no way to refer to anything outside all vocabularies, "we shall not see reality plain, unmasked, naked to our gaze" (CP 154). From these premises he concludes that the idea of gaining access to reality as it is in itself, independent of any particular mode of description, makes no sense. And this, in turn, implies that the very idea of justifying what we say by something independent of what we say makes no sense. If there is no way to justify our use of one vocabulary over another by reference to the way things are outside of all vocabularies, and if assertions are always vocabulary-dependent, it follows that there is no way to justify any truth claims by reference to nonlinguistic reality. A "thorough-going pragmatism" will therefore abandon "the notion of *discovering the truth*" and recognize that the only point to inventing vocabularies is to "help us get what we want" (CP 150–1).

The claim that truths are made, not found, is presented succinctly in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*: "Since truth is a property of sentences, since sentences are dependent for their existence upon vocabularies, and since vocabularies are made by human beings, so are truths" (CIS 21). Rorty does not want to deny that reality (understood as the totality of objects in causal transactions) is "out there." But he insists that "truth is not out there," where this just means "that where there are no sentences there is no truth, that sentences are elements of human languages, and that human languages are human creations" (CIS 5). *Within* a particular language game or practice, we can speak of letting the world determine what is right or wrong. Given the game of checkers, for example, the position of the pieces on the board can justify us in saying "Red wins." But the idea that reality determines correctness seems to fail when we speak of vocabularies as wholes. When it comes to questions about vocabularies as wholes, our concern should be with achieving solidarity with others in our community, not with getting reality right.

The pivotal concept in Rorty's version of pragmatism is that of a "vocabulary" or "language," a concept he draws partly from Wittgenstein and partly from Quine and Davidson. But the notion is perhaps best understood as a development of Thomas Kuhn's conception of "normal discourse" in *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*.[8] In a Postscript to the second edition of that book, Kuhn defines a "paradigm" as a "disciplinary matrix," where this is understood to include standardized and widely accepted texts and formulations; a tacitly agreed-upon sense of what is real; agreement about what questions are worth asking, what answers make sense, and what criteria of assessment are to be used; and a background of shared practices and

skills that have become second nature for a particular group.[9] A disciplinary matrix makes possible and embeds the sort of "space of reasons" that such inferentialists as Sellars and Brandom take as bedrock in making sense of our claims to knowledge. For Kuhn, a science is "normal" when the vast majority of researchers in that field are in agreement about a disciplinary matrix. Science becomes revolutionary when conditions arise in which researchers are no longer in agreement about an older disciplinary matrix and are chaotically shopping around for a new paradigm.

The Kuhnian conception of an agreed-upon disciplinary matrix seems to be the best model for what Rorty means when he talks about a "vocabulary" or a "language-as-a-whole." Rorty expands this notion well beyond the scientific examples that occupied Kuhn in order to embrace human creations in all areas of culture, including poetry, morality, religious belief, pop culture, and so on. At any given time, Rorty claims, most areas of culture will share a vocabulary that ensures that their ways of talking have the form of "normal discourse" (the correlate of normal science). This normal discourse will ensure that most people are in agreement about most things at any time.

But, in Rorty's view, language is contingent. The fact that we speak one way rather than another is determined by historical events that could have been different, events that have no bearing on whether a way of speaking is more in touch with reality or objectively better than any other. For example, 500 years ago people were worried about the question of consubstantiation and transubstantiation in the Holy Eucharist. Today, not many people worry about this. Does that mean we have gotten closer to the issues and questions that are rooted in the things themselves? On Rorty's view, the answer is "No." All that has happened is that one way of talking has replaced another. Perhaps in 500 years all our talk about quarks and punctuated equilibrium will seem as quaint as talk about consubstantiation seems to us today. Will that mean that our successors are closer to the truth than we are? Once again, the answer is "No." All it will mean, Rorty thinks, is that our contemporary scientific language game has been replaced by another, not because of insight into the way the world is, but rather in the same sort of way that dinosaurs came to be replaced by mammals. Change just happens.

Instead of seeing language games or vocabularies as ways to map the world, then, we should think of them as tools that may prove useful for some purposes and not for others. One of the ways Rorty breaks from pragmatists like Dewey is in saying that science has no privileged status among language games, that it is just one tool among others, with no special

access to reality. Science is "one more human activity, rather than . . . the place at which human beings encounter a 'hard,' nonhuman reality" (CIS 4). Rorty scorns the very notion of *hard* facts and *hard* sciences. In his view, "the reputed hardness of facts [is] an artifact produced by our choice of language game" (ORT 80).

So one strand of Rorty's thought moves toward a Jamesian pluralism that encourages us to think that there are a number of equally acceptable language games or vocabularies, with no basis for saying that any one of them is the truest or best way of describing things. At the same time, as we shall see in Section 4 of this Introduction, in various contexts Rorty seems to affirm his commitment to a "nonreductive physicalism," the view that reality consists of physical objects in causal interactions that, though susceptible to a variety of interpretations, have distinctive properties of the sort discernible by the physical sciences. There seems to be a tension, then, between Rorty's commitment to physicalism and the "contingency of language thesis" he espouses elsewhere.

The strong conclusion Rorty draws from his conception of the contingency of language is that "No area of culture, and no period of history, gets Reality more right than any other. The difference between areas and epochs is their relative efficiency at accomplishing various purposes. There is no such thing as Reality to be gotten right – only snow, fog, Olympian deities, relative aesthetic worth, the elementary particles, human rights, the divine right of kings, the Trinity, and the like" (RHC 375). We can get the latter items right only if we have a form of normal discourse that gives us the framework for talking about such things. But Rorty suggests, in the context from which this quote is taken, that we do indeed have a vocabulary for talking about all these things: "We know a lot more about Zeus than was known in the Renaissance," he claims.

The only way to speak of "progress" in knowledge, on this view, is to consider cases where individuals produce radically new metaphors, ways of speaking that do not fit into any existing language game and so produce a sort of revolutionary discourse for a period of time. When the metaphor comes to fit into the normal discourse of a relevant community – when it becomes a "dead metaphor" – new ways of talking are opened up. But there is no sense in which this sort of progress can be seen as having achieved a better grasp of reality, any more than the *symboliste* poets can be seen as having gotten in touch with something genuinely more poetic than earlier poets did. There is a change in the style of expression, perhaps a feeling of having improved our ways of coping with our environment, but no gain in representing power. As Rorty now sees it, to be a pragmatist is to start

from a Darwinian picture of human beings "as animals doing their best to cope with the environment – doing their best to develop tools which will enable them to enjoy more pleasure and less pain." Beliefs, words, and languages are among the tools these animals have developed. To "become fully Darwinian in our thinking," Rorty says, "we need to stop thinking of words as representations and to start thinking of them as nodes in the causal network which binds the organism together with its environment" (PSH xxiii).

From the outset Rorty has been aware that his version of pragmatism threatens to lead to charges of relativism. The problem is made clear if we focus on a natural way of reading Kuhn's views about scientific change. Kuhn's *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* suggested that the transition from Newton to Einstein could not be thought of as mere improvement or progress in grasping some antecedently given set of facts, in part because the transition was achieved by redefining key words in such a way that the new paradigm was incommensurable with the older paradigm. Seen in this way, it is possible to think of scientific change as involving shifts from one conceptual scheme to another, with no way of explaining or grasping the terms of one conceptual scheme in the terms of the other. This, in turn, leads to the idea that all we have access to are shifting, incommensurable conceptual schemes, with no way to determine which, if any, is correct. And this picture of our situation can lead to the idea that behind all conceptual schemes there is (or might be) a reality that is either an unknowable *Ding an sich* or is something known only to God. On such a view, conceptual schemes mediate our access to reality; they are a *tertium quid* standing between the facts and us. The outcome of such a view seems to be, first of all, a conceptual relativism, according to which all belief is mediated by worldviews or systems of categories that could be different from what they are and, second, a thoroughgoing skepticism that holds that we can never know reality as it is in itself.

Rorty found his way out of these conundrums in Davidson's influential essay "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme."[10] Davidson's aim in this essay is to show that the very idea of a conceptual scheme, as conceived by philosophers who think such a notion implies conceptual relativism or global skepticism, is unintelligible. He does this by trying to show that we have no way to individuate or identify schemes in a way that enables us to speak of *different* schemes. If we can "find no intelligible basis on which it can be said that schemes are different," Davidson says, then we have no criteria of identity for such things, and the notion is, strictly speaking, meaningless (198).

Only a sketch of the main moves of this intricate argument can be presented here. Davidson first proposes that instead of talking about conceptual schemes we should talk about languages, and he recasts the issue of conceptual relativism in terms of the question of whether there can be radically incommensurable – that is, nonintertranslatable – languages. Because conceptual schemes are seen as determining the meaning of beliefs rather than their factual content, the notion of conceptual schemes can get off the ground only if we can draw a clear distinction between sentences that are true because of both meaning and content and sentences that are true because of meanings alone. So the notion of schemes stands or falls with our ability to distinguish meaning and empirical content in sentences. For example, if Aristotle believed "The sun is a planet" and Newton believed "The sun is not a planet," this would give us a reason to think Aristotle and Newton were operating with different conceptual schemes only if we could determine that they were using the word "planet" with different meanings and not just disagreeing about the facts. To undermine the idea of conceptual schemes, therefore, Davidson sets out to show that there is no way to draw a clear distinction between meaning and belief in interpreting what another person says.

The argument to show that there is no way to distinguish meaning and belief begins by suggesting that we can attribute a conceptual scheme to another person only if we assume that this conceptual scheme is largely true. Conceptual schemes are usually thought of as organizing or fitting experiences. If, on the one hand, a conceptual scheme is thought of as *organizing* experience, then we must assume that this organizing activity is carried out according to familiar principles. Insofar as attributing familiar principles to the other person presupposes that the person accepts as true most of what we accept, however, this option does not allow for radically different conceptual schemes. If a conceptual scheme is conceived of as a global set of sentences that *fits* experience, on the other hand, then we are supposing that the sentences of the scheme are "borne out by the evidence" (193). As Davidson points out, however, there is no clear difference between saying that a set of sentences is borne out by the evidence and saying that the set of sentences is true. So "the notion of fitting the totality of experience . . . adds nothing intelligible to the simple concept of being true" (193–4).

To say that a conceptual scheme organizes or fits experience, therefore, is just to say that it is for the most part true. If this is the case, however, then the question of whether there could be a conceptual scheme radically different from our own comes down to the question of whether there could be a linguistic group with a language that is largely true but not translatable

into our language. So long as truth and translatability are kept distinct, relativism and skepticism seem to stand.

Davidson deals with this possibility by drawing on Tarski's writings on truth in order to show that truth and translatability are conceptually intertwined. Tarski held that though truth cannot be defined, our best intuition about truth can be captured in what he called "Convention T." Formulated more precisely than earlier, Convention T says that "any satisfactory theory of truth for a language L must entail, for every sentence *s* in L, a theorem of the form '*s* is true if and only if *p*' where '*s*' is replaced by a description of *s* and '*p*' by *s* itself if L is English, and by a translation of *s* into English if L is not English" (194). But this means that to say that a set of beliefs is true is just to say that it is (largely) translatable into our language. So it appears that the notions of belief, truth, and translatability are inseparable from one another. And if identifying a set of sentences as a conceptual scheme distinct from ours requires that we be able to see it as untranslatable into ours, then the very idea of conceptual schemes turns out to be incoherent.

Rorty extends this line of argument to a general claim that when trying to make sense of an alien language, there is no higher perspective than that of the field linguist who is doing her best to make sense of the natives' vocalizations in interacting with their environment. There is no standpoint above the concrete practice of actual field linguists from which we can correlate the natives' acoustic blasts with "facts" in order to determine that the former "correspond to" the latter. The best we can do is to try to find ways of interpreting their behavior so that it makes sense *by our best lights*, which is to say: in such a way that what they say comes out true according to our beliefs. As we shall see in Section 4, Rorty uses this Davidsonian tactic to argue that we cannot make sense of a higher standpoint – of a "God's-eye-view" outside all concrete, local practices and points of view – from which philosophical truths about the relation of language to reality can be formulated. There is no higher standpoint than that of the field linguist trying to give a consistent and sensible translation of the natives' beliefs.

Davidson sees his argument for the impossibility of incommensurable conceptual schemes as undermining the possibility of global skepticism about our own web of beliefs. There can be disagreement about conceptual schemes, he suggests, only if there is a wide background of agreement in terms of which those disagreements can be specified. But that means that we can encounter another's behavior as meaningful language behavior only on the supposition that most of what he or she says is true. But if we cannot make sense of the idea of an *other* view of things being right while ours is wrong, we cannot make sense of the idea of ours being totally wrong. From

this we can conclude that "the general outlines of our view of the world are correct; we individually and communally may get plenty wrong, but only on the condition that in most large respects we are right." In other words, with respect to the overall ontology we hold, "what we take there to be is pretty much what there is" (xviii–xix). Or, as Rorty puts it, "most of our beliefs – most of *anybody's* beliefs – must be true" (TP 25). To say, as Davidson does, that "belief is in its nature veridical" is to say that "the pattern truth makes is the pattern that *justification to us* makes" (TP 25). This is why Rorty can claim that most of what the Neanderthal believed must be the same as what we believe and, moreover, that most of what the Neanderthal believed must have been true (ORT 160).

A quarter century of debate has left it still unclear what the force of this argument is, but it is clear that Rorty embraces its conclusions wholeheartedly. In his view, getting rid of the scheme–content distinction means that we are always directly in touch with reality and that there is no way to raise charges of relativism against his views. To be sure, there are language games that determine our understanding of things in particular areas of our lives. Christianity would never have been possible without a language game that speaks of God, the soul, redemption, judgment, and so on, just as chess would never have been possible without practices in which words like "king," "rook," "castling," and so on make sense. But with respect to the world of material objects that surrounds us, no general doubts or conceptions of alternatives can make sense.

As we have already noted, Rorty is inclined to accept a thoroughgoing physicalism concerning the world, a position powerfully defended in his essay "Nonreductive Physicalism" (1987, reprinted in ORT). According to this essay, human beings can be regarded from an "intentional stance" as beings with intentions, beliefs, and desires, just as sufficiently complicated computers and higher-level animals may be so regarded if that proves useful in predicting their behavior. But, Rorty suggests, at a bedrock level, human beings, like everything else in the universe, should be seen as physical objects in causal interaction with a physical environment, no different in type from other physical organisms. A rather simple diagram (Figure 1) appears at the end of "Nonreductive Physicalism" that is supposed to represent what this might look like. Rorty's suggestion is that, though for practical purposes we would do well to think of ourselves as constantly self-reweaving webs of beliefs and desires, such a picture is not in conflict with a picture of ourselves as physical bodies in which neural and physiological episodes and states are in causal interaction with a physical environment as well as with each other.

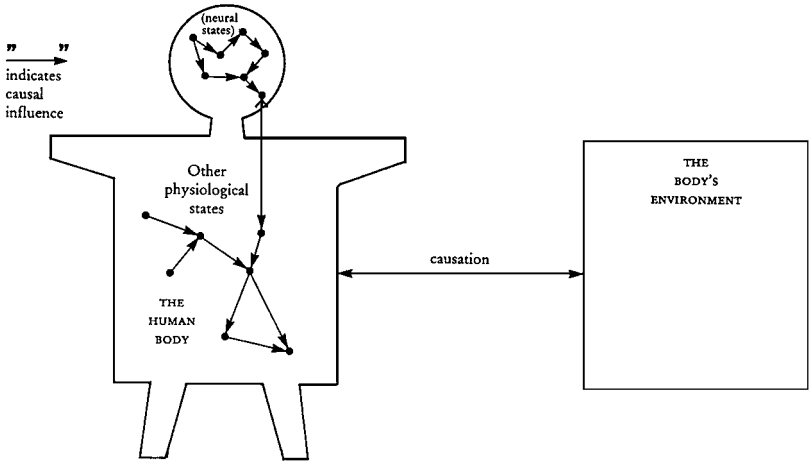

Figure 1 Human beings in interaction with a physical environment. *Source*: Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers* 1, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, p. 122. New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Rorty has become fond of quoting Berkeley's line to the effect that we must think with the learned while continuing to speak with the vulgar. In his view, philosophy should, as Wittgenstein said, leave everything as it is. We can continue to talk about "the self" and the project of self-fulfillment so long as we do not let these humdrum ways of talking delude us into thinking that there is some grand Philosophical sense in which there is "A Self" or "The True Self," a hypostatized entity about which there are many important truths to be discovered. Rorty holds to a full-blooded antiessentialism about the self, denying that there is anything there to be discovered. The chapter titled "The Contingency of Selfhood" in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* draws on Nietzsche in trying to get us to see that our own identity as humans, our deepest self-understanding, has been shaped by accidental historical and cultural factors that have no binding significance for us. Rorty's hope, as we shall see in the next section, is that recognizing this will open us to a way of living that sloughs off the shackles of older traditions and makes possible a freer, more playful form of life.

3. PRIVATE AND PUBLIC LIFE

Since the mid-1980s, Rorty has devoted more and more attention to moral and social philosophy. In essays such as "Postmodernist Bourgeois

Liberalism" and "The Priority of Democracy to Philosophy" and in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity* and *Achieving Our Country*, he develops his views about the self, the difference between public and private life, social solidarity, democratic culture, and leftist politics. It is tempting to see his interest in these topics as merely working out the consequences of his antifoundationalist epistemology for other areas of philosophy. But, as we have argued elsewhere,[11] there was a deep moral commitment at work in Rorty's thinking from the beginning. Near the end of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty made explicit how his moral concerns and epistemological concerns are connected. Traditional philosophy's search for final accounts of knowledge, if achieved, would result in the "freezing-over" of culture and the "de-humanization of human-beings" (PMN 377). Philosophy's quest reflects our craving for metaphysical comfort, as Nietzsche had put it – the desire to bring inquiry to an end in order to escape our contingency. By contrast, Rorty's antifoundationalism aims at *heightening* our sense of contingency in order to avoid dehumanization and the freezing over of culture. Antifoundationalism aims at expanding possibilities for self-description, thus rehumaninizing humans by affirming freedom and opening up possibilities through greater tolerance.

There is both an existential and a pragmatic strand to Rorty's way of working out the consequences of antifoundationalism. The existential strand of Rorty's thought follows from his critique of the Cartesian picture of the self. In Part I of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty argued that the Cartesian tradition conflates ancient concerns about reason, personhood, and moral agency with the specifically modern concern about the nature of consciousness and what distinguishes us from the brutes. The point of the first part of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* was to show that there is nothing necessary or intuitive about the Cartesian conception of the mental. The idea of the mental is merely part of the language game we happen to find ourselves playing today, and once we realize that the Cartesian metaphor of the mind as mirror of nature and the view of knowledge proper to it are optional, we realize that knowledge is not the sort of thing that presents a problem that a foundational theory of knowledge must solve. Knowledge is simply "successful coping," or "what society allows us to get away with saying," or "what inquiry, for the moment, is leaving alone."

The realization that there is something optional about epistemology-centered philosophy serves to undermine one of the central motivations for the kind of philosophy that extends from Plato through Descartes and Kant – the need to liberate ourselves from the enslaving shadows and appearances of the cave, the need to ground our knowledge and discover

truth in order to be fully human. In the Introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism*, Rorty puts this point as follows: "[The traditional conception of philosophy] is the impossible attempt to step outside our skins – the traditions, linguistic and other, within which we do our thinking and self-criticism – and compare ourselves with something absolute ... [it is the] Platonic urge to escape from the finitude of one's time and place, the 'merely conventional' and contingent aspects of one's life" (CP xix).

Rorty's aim is to return us to the idea of knowing as one among various human activities and social practices, characterized by all of the contingency, fallibility, and finitude as the rest of life. In this way he disconnects Cartesian issues about the irreducibility of mental representations from concerns about the self, autonomy, and moral agency. The Cartesian picture is merely one among many possible descriptions of the self. No single description can capture the whole truth about human beings. This existential strand of Rorty's thinking paves the way for his favorable readings of Nietzsche and Freud.[12] In his view, Nietzsche and Freud have ended all attempts to discover a common human nature or a substantial center to the self, and have thereby undermined any notion that there is something about human being that is either realized through self-discovery or waiting to be developed through establishing the right sorts of social institutions.

Nietzsche's contribution was to shift the locus of thought about the self from discovering deep truths about the self to the project of self-creation. Freud, in Rorty's view, goes even further than Nietzsche in undercutting the notion of a proper way to be human. Where Nietzsche glorified the self-creator – the "Overman" – Freud dispels the notion that there is a right choice to be made in deciding what sort of self to be. Freud's contribution was to blunt any philosophical choice between a Kantian or Nietzschean paradigm for deciding what it is to be human. Rorty summarizes the point this way:

> It has often seemed necessary to decide between Kant and Nietzsche, to make up one's mind – at least to that extent – about the point of being human. But Freud gives us a way of looking at human being which helps us evade the choice. ... For Freud eschews the very idea of a paradigm human being. ... By breaking with both Kant's residual Platonism and Nietzsche's inverted Platonism, he lets us see both Nietzsche's superman and Kant's moral consciousness as exemplifying two out of many forms of adaptation, two out of many strategies for coping with the contingency of one's upbringing. (CIS 35)

The pragmatist strand in Rorty's thought paves the way to his conceptions of solidarity and loyalty. On his view, our heightened sense of our contingency should lead us to recognize that, like truth, we and our community are made, not discovered. The upshot of this recognition, Rorty believes, will be greater freedom, on the one hand, and increasing solidarity with those like us, on the other. There is no "essence" to the self that constrains possibilities for self-elaboration, there is no "common human nature" that necessarily binds us to our fellows, grounding our community's values. "Our identification with our community – our society, our political tradition, our intellectual heritage – is heightened when we see this community as *ours* rather than *nature's*, *shaped* rather than *found*, one among many which men have made. . . . [W]hat matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right"(CP 166).

Rorty sometimes draws the distinction between traditional political theory and his brand of pragmatism in terms of the difference between the desire for objectivity and the desire for solidarity. The desire for objectivity is the epistemologically motivated attempt to provide a firm basis for community by grounding social practices in something that is not itself a social practice – namely, truth, rationality, or some other ultimate ground. The desire for solidarity, in contrast, seeks only an ethical basis for cooperative inquiry and human community, replacing the search for objectivity with the search for solidarity.[13]

The political consequences of this pragmatic strand become increasingly prominent in Rorty's critique of philosophical liberalism and his praise of liberal democracy. As Rorty sees it, philosophical liberalism seeks to ground values of liberal culture such as justice and equality in a metaphysical conception of reason and human nature. Michael Sandel, for example, has given John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* a Kantian reading of this sort. Sandel criticizes Rawls's theory of justice as fairness because he thinks it cannot be supported by the conception of the individual antecedent to society that he sees as presupposed by Rawls's theory.[14]

By contrast, Rorty reads Rawls as a pragmatist rather than as a philosophical liberal. To say that Rawls is a pragmatist is to say that he is working out his conception of justice as fairness from within the background of our democratic social practices and institutions rather than trying to ground it in something outside our practices. Rawls himself provides support for this interpretation of justice as fairness, claiming that "since justice as fairness is intended as a political conception of justice for society, it tries to draw solely upon basic institutions of democratic society and the public traditions

of their interpretation. Justice as fairness is a political conception in part because it starts from within a certain political tradition."[15] Rorty's way of stating it is that Rawls is putting democracy before philosophy. What Rawls shows us, according to Rorty, is that the values of liberal democracy do not need to be grounded in something antecedent to or independent of the practices themselves.

According to Rorty, he also shows, that pace Sandel, issues of justice do not depend on prior assumptions about the nature of the self. Rorty's support for this aspect of Rawls's view takes its lead from Thomas Jefferson's well-known observation that "it does no injury for my neighbor to say that there are twenty Gods or no God." The point of Jefferson's observation, Rorty contends, is that liberal democratic society does not require shared beliefs about matters of private conscience. If this is the case, then it seems that there is no fundamental link between politics and private morality, except that one provides a framework of tolerance for the other. Rorty's gloss on Rawls is that by treating the conception of justice as political rather than philosophical, he has made conceptions of human nature, moral agency, and the meaning of authentic life as irrelevant to democratic politics as Jefferson thought religious belief was. The consequence of this move for Rorty is both to abandon as unnecessary the attempt to provide a moral foundation for liberal democracy and to sever issues of private conscience from issues of politics, that is, to draw a sharp line between the Nietzschean task of self-elaboration and the political task of increasing solidarity and social justice. The existential strand of Rorty's thought constitutes the domain of private life. The programmatic stand constitutes public life. Rorty sees no need for any overarching standpoint that incorporates both.

Issues about the relation between private and public life have, of course, been a central concern of a great deal of recent social theory. One set of issues has to do with the degree to which one sphere is philosophically prior to and more fundamental than the other. The debate between certain liberal political theorists and certain communitarians turns on whether the individual (private self) is antecedent to or constituted by social relations and whether, on either account, social values such as justice and equality can be grounded. Many sociologists and cultural critics have claimed that the line drawn between public and private spheres is historically conditioned, and have called attention to how the shifting nature of the line generates some of the more troublesome aspects of modern Western culture. In addition, some feminists have pointed out ways in which the contrast between private and public spheres supports and perpetuates patriarchal systems of power.

In the face of the essentially contested nature of private and public life, the temptation is either to redraw them in a less problematic way or to try to fuse them into an overarching theory. Rorty resists both of these temptations. In the Introduction to *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*, he writes, "This book tries to show how things look if we drop the demand for a theory which unifies the public and private, and are content to treat the demands of self-creation and human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable" (CIS xv).

The book provides a picture of what Rorty calls the "liberal ironist." He defines his terms as follows: "I borrow my definition of 'liberal' from Judith Shklar, who says that liberals are the people who think that cruelty is the worst thing we do. I use 'ironist' to name 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" (CIS xv). Rorty imagines a liberal utopia where the world is made safe for the ironist, while at the same time cruelty is reduced and solidarity is increased.

Though Rorty defines liberalism in terms of reducing cruelty, he does not attempt to answer the question "Why is cruelty a bad thing?" He believes that there is no noncircular answer to this or to any other such moral question. He has argued recently that moral philosophy is stuck between Kant and Dewey – between the Kantian notion that morality is a special domain requiring philosophical analysis to unpack our moral obligations and Dewey's notion that the division between the moral and nonmoral, or the division between obligation and prudence, is part of the "brood and nest of dualisms" he sought to reject.[16] Contemporary moral philosophers are trapped in this dilemma because they share Dewey's post-Darwinian naturalism at the same time that they aspire to Kant's notion of a distinctive moral domain. For Rorty, there is no point to the morality–prudence distinction, and there is no special task that philosophers perform in determining how best to deal with our problems and live our lives. Rorty thinks that if philosophers have any special advantage in speaking about moral issues at all, it is because they tend to be widely read and so tend to bring greater imagination to the task of sympathetically considering suffering and to articulating options for how to live one's life. But these skills are hardly unique to philosophers. Very often historians and novelists have these skills as well. Rorty simply invites us to read books about slavery, poverty, exploitation, and prejudice in order to see the ways in which human beings are cruel to one another and in order to become less cruel. He interprets

the novels of Nabokov and Orwell instead of formulating a philosophical argument.

The flip side of the liberal aversion to cruelty is increased solidarity. For Rorty, "solidarity is not thought of as recognition of a core self, the human essence, in all human beings. Rather, it is thought of as the ability to see more and more traditional differences (of tribe, religion, race, customs, and the like) as unimportant when compared with similarities with respect to pain and humiliation – the ability to think of people wildly different from ourselves as included in the range of 'us' " (CIS 192).

Rorty's pragmatic brand of liberalism has been subject to substantial criticism. The common thread of the criticism is that his critique of epistemology-centered philosophy, his rejection of the idea that liberal democracy is in need of justification, and his notions of loyalty and solidarity, taken together, undercut the possibility of meaningful criticism of the practices of one's culture. Different critics draw different consequences from this criticism. Some claim that Rorty cannot avoid becoming a relativist. Some object to the "clubiness" of his view of solidarity – of "we" liberal democrats – and interpret the value he places on loyalty to our community as dangerously ethnocentric.[17]

Rorty has responded to each of these charges at one time or another. His responses typically depend on distinguishing pernicious and innocuous senses of the labels his critics have placed on his work. Relativism in the pernicious sense, for example, is the view that there are as many meanings of the word "true" as there are procedures at different times and places for justifying the things people believe. From this one might draw the conclusion that every belief is as good as every other belief. Rorty claims that relativism in this sense is either self-refuting or a view that no one holds (CP 160–75). He claims not to be a relativist in this pernicious sense, because he is loyal to the beliefs and practices we actually share at this time. Relativism in the innocuous sense, in contrast, is the view that there is nothing philosophical to be said about our beliefs and practices. In other words, relativism in the innocuous sense is simply pragmatism.

Ethnocentrism in the pernicious sense is thinking that everyone ought to share our beliefs because our beliefs are rational, true, and objective. This kind of ethnocentrism is merely the reverse side of pernicious relativism. Rorty agrees that ethnocentrism in this sense is dangerous. He characterizes his own view as mild ethnocentrism (ORT 203–20), the view that being true, rational, or objective is always a matter of *our* procedures for justification coupled with the realization that *our* procedures of justification are no more grounded than those of other cultures. The upshot of mild ethnocentrism is

the realization that loyalty to our own practices is compatible with openness to differences and tolerance of diversity.

In sum, Rorty is a relativist without giving up on the possibility of meaningful evaluation; he is ethnocentric with tolerance instead of dogmatism; he is a liberal relying on democracy instead of philosophy; and he is a pragmatist comfortable with contingency and solidarity instead of theories.

In *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty makes these themes concrete in terms of the promises and failures of American culture. He begins by observing that

> national pride is to countries what self-respect is to individuals: a necessary condition for self-improvement. Too much national pride can produce bellicosity and imperialism, just as excessive self-respect can produce arrogance. But just as too little self-respect makes it difficult for a person to display moral courage, so insufficient national pride makes energetic and effective debate about national policy unlikely. Emotional involvement with one's country – feelings of intense shame or of glowing pride aroused by various parts of its history, and by various present-day national policies – is necessary if political deliberation is to be imaginative and productive. Such deliberation will probably not occur unless pride outweighs shame. (AOC 3)

There are many things in America's past, many features of American social institutions, and many aspects of American self-understanding that are cause for shame. But Rorty sides with Dewey's and Whitman's hopefulness about America's possibilities. On his interpretation, they "see America as the paradigmatic democracy, and thus as the country which would pride 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 take nothing as authoritative save free consensus between as diverse a variety of citizens as can possibly be produced" (AOC 30).

This is the sort of society Rorty thinks the progressive leftist reformers of the twentieth century were trying to bring about. They attempted to do so not through theorizing, but through concrete attempts to reform democratic institutions in order to reduce suffering and increase possibilities. Rorty's praise of leftist reformers joins his own upbringing in a household steeped in leftists and progressive politics, his belief that they were the torchbearers of Whitman's and Dewey's sense of the promise of American democracy, and his disdain for the cultural left that has come to dominate the politics of the academy. In his biting criticism of the cultural

or academic left, Rorty says that it is the political analog of epistemology-centered philosophy. Rather than acting to reduce misery, the academic left theorizes, becoming merely observers of political problems. "These futile attempts to philosophize one's way into political relevance are a symptom of what happens when a Left retreats from activism and adopts a spectatorial approach to the problems of its country. Disengagement from practice produces theoretical hallucinations" (AOC 94).

There is a deep tension between the existential and pragmatic strands in Rorty's thought – between the private project of self-elaboration and the public project of reducing suffering and expanding solidarity. For it seems that my capacity for recognizing the many forms that cruelty can take and my ability to empathize with the many ways that others suffer is not independent of the kind of person I am trying to become. Some projects of private perfection are more likely than others to expand our sympathies. In a similar way, it is not unreasonable to think that the kind of person I wish to become is closely bound up with the kind of community that is worthy of my loyalty. And it is not unreasonable to think that, as important as the reduction of cruelty and the expansion of freedom are, more is needed of public institutions than that if we are to create conditions in which individuals can experiment with meaningful, as opposed to trivial, self-elaborations. Rorty's bifurcated way of thinking about public and private life seems unable to support his liberal utopian hopes. Jean Elshtain, in her essay in this volume, argues that this bifurcation undercuts the power of Rorty's own views, resulting in what she calls the "unbearable lightness of liberalism." And Richard Bernstein argues that Rorty's bifurcation of public and private life and his disdain for political theorizing leave him with no way to understand the motivation for the Progressive Era and New Deal social reforms that he takes to be liberal democracy at its best. But this leads us to the larger, more general criticism of Rorty we will consider in the next section.

4. CRITICIZING RORTY

Rorty's jaunty style and his insouciant attitude toward entrenched beliefs have sparked indignation and expressions of outrage from both outside and inside academia. On the one hand, Rorty has been vilified by the right-wing press. A conservative journal listed *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* as one of the fifty worst books of the twentieth century.[18] And George Will, writing in *Newsweek*, claimed that Rorty's *Achieving Our Country* "radiates contempt for the country. He seems to despise most Americans."[19] On

the other hand, Rorty has been attacked by mainstream philosophers who often find his views to be frivolous at best and destructive at worst. So the respected Cambridge philosopher Simon Blackburn, in a recent review of Robert Bandom's *Rorty and His Critics*, speaks of Rorty's refusal to engage in argument and his "extraordinary gift for ducking and weaving and laying smoke."[20]

Part of what arouses such outrage among philosophers is Rorty's willingness to throw out the entire philosophical tradition that defines the work of most mainstream philosophy today. Rorty understands philosophy to be a theoretical endeavor aimed at providing well-grounded and conclusive answers to a set of basic questions handed down by the tradition. So defined, philosophy is inherently foundationalist and essentialist; it is the project he follows Nietzsche in calling "Platonism." Rorty's claim is that we can simply do away with philosophy as Platonism once and for all. Calling himself a "militant antiauthoritarian," he notes the similarities between the philosophical idea that we should correctly represent an independently existing Reality and the old theological belief that we ought to bow down to and obey God. Just as we have found that replacing the theological idea of subjection to God's will with the ideas of democracy and rational deliberation has involved no great loss, so we should have no trouble replacing the idea of getting reality right with a commitment to noncoercive persuasion in the ongoing Conversation of Man. In this respect, Rorty sees his project as similar to Sartre's: the aim is to see what happens if we "attempt to draw the full conclusions from a consistently atheist position" (TP 48–9). We need to reeducate ourselves so that we will see the aim of inquiry not as correctly representing reality, but as increasing human freedom and expanding our possibilities of interpretation and self-understanding.

Rorty employs a number of rhetorical strategies to undercut Platonism and make a case for his transformed understanding of how we should think of ourselves. At times, he redescribes his opponent's position to make it seem either trivially true or outright false. At other times, he opposes a position by arguing for an extreme counterposition, a tactic that seems to suggest that all positions on the topic are somewhat arbitrary. Frequently he seems to simply change the subject, apparently ignoring his opponent's earnestly defended views. To philosophers intent on upholding traditional philosophy, this all looks like ducking and weaving and laying smoke.

But it is important to see that Rorty's goal is not to present and defend views so much as to employ various tactics to undermine the entire business of arguing in favor of views. His version of (lowercase "p") philosophy (or of what Wittgenstein once called "the legitimate heir of what used to

be called philosophy") is a sort of philosophical minimalism. Rorty firmly believes that most of what passes for philosophy is either useless, clever puzzle-solving, with no relevance to the lives of real people, or potentially damaging, an attempt to freeze over culture and put an end to inquiry. Instead of arguing for positions, he suggests, we should simply try out the pragmatist's view of the nature and aims of inquiry and see what happens. What he says is, "Let's try some new ways of thinking," "Let's see what happens if we try it this way" (TP 56, 57). Rorty's efforts at persuasion "take the form of gradual inculcation of new ways of speaking, rather than of straightforward argument within old ways of speaking" (PSH xix).

Most philosophers who try to argue against Rorty start from the conviction that more needs to be said than Rorty's minimalism allows. Standard criticisms try to show that Rorty, despite his avowed intentions, is committed to a number of substantive claims, and that these commitments subvert his entire attempt to simply sidestep mainstream philosophical discussions.

An example of this line of criticism is found in David Hall's *Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism*.[21] As we saw in Section 2, Rorty draws a sharp distinction between two sorts of issues philosophers may address. On the one hand, there are issues concerning causation among objects in the physical world; on the other hand, there are normative considerations concerning the justificatory relations among beliefs. Rorty is always willing to grant that objects in the world impinge on us and "shove us around," exerting "resistance" and "pressures" on us by their "blind impress." In his essay "Texts and Lumps," he expresses his "wholehearted acceptance of the brute, inhuman, causal stubbornness" of physical objects, and even claims that objects very often cause us to hold beliefs (ORT 83). What is important to see, however, is that the causal impact of objects cannot tell us *which* beliefs we should hold. When Galileo looked through the telescope at Jupiter, for example, there was surely some "brute physical resistance – the pressure of light waves on Galileo's eyeball." But there was nothing in that physical stimulus that, by itself, determined that Galileo would come to believe in the presence of moons around Jupiter (ORT 81). Given alternative histories of Western intellectual development, we can imagine innumerable other vocabularies Galileo might have employed in interpreting the pressure of light waves on his retina. Moreover, since no particular vocabulary is uniquely determined by causal inputs, there is no basis for saying that any one vocabulary is *more faithful* or *more true of* the world than any other.

The conclusion to draw is that, though causal interactions with the world may cause beliefs, they do not provide a clue to which beliefs we

ought to hold. What determines beliefs, then, is not the physical event, but the socially constructed, institutionalized vocabulary that provides the "space of reasons" in which causal stimuli come to have a propositional form and a place in a set of inferential relations. Only when Galileo and his contemporaries were "programmed" to respond to stimuli in terms of a vocabulary containing words like "planets" and "moons" as we understand them could Galileo register and meaningfully express the belief that Jupiter has moons. But if it is the case that the programming does all the work in establishing the propriety and accuracy of the belief, then the causal inputs no longer seem to have any role to play. This is the force of Rorty's claim that "nothing can justify a belief except a belief."

For critics like Hall, however, this way of hanging on to the physical world while trivializing it produces a problem for Rorty's view. For it begins to look as if Rorty is committed to some version of the Kantian *Ding an sich*, the notion of an ineffable, unknowable "something I know not what" that stands on the other side of our experience and judgments and has no real role to play in making sense of our ways of taking things. It might be claimed that the whole notion of objects and their causal powers existing distinct from and independent of our ways of speaking and giving reasons should be ruled out by Rorty's position. For even the idea of *causation* makes sense only relative to particular ways of describing things accepted at any given time, as Thomas Kuhn has shown.[22]

Moreover, it might be argued that Rorty's unquestioning acceptance of physicalism is fundamentally at odds with his pragmatist commitment to a Jamesian pluralism.[23] James held that there may be a number of equally acceptable descriptions of the world, with no description having greater validity than the others. In *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, speaking of the views of reality offered by science and religion, James wrote, "Evidently . . . both of them [are] genuine keys for unlocking the world's treasure-house to him who can use either of them practically. Just as evidently neither is exhaustive or exclusive of the other's simultaneous use."[24] It might be argued, however, that Rorty's adherence to his "nonreductive physicalism" tends to load the dice against spiritual or nonphysicalist interpretations of things. The most that can be said in a pluralist vein, on Rorty's view, is that some people interpret physical objects and their causal interactions in a spiritual vocabulary – a description that makes them look not too bright.

This line of argument against Rorty is typical of many of the most careful objections raised against his thought. The objector tries to show that, his philosophical minimalism notwithstanding, Rorty is committed to specific philosophical views and that these commitments, once made explicit, can

be shown to be in tension with other commitments in his thought. The objection aims at pressuring Rorty to say more – to engage in the kind of argument and counterargument characteristic of traditional philosophical dialogue. What is surprising and often annoying to philosophers who try to formulate such objections is Rorty's tendency to evade them by undercutting the entire line of argument. So, in dealing with the problematic nature of his apparent commitment to physicalism, Rorty might respond in a number of different ways. He might contend that his arguments on behalf of nonreductive physicalism are only meant to show that, while physicalist descriptions are viable options for use when it suits our purposes, physicalism is merely one contingent vocabulary among others, even if it is the "default setting" (as Dennett calls it) for "we" scientifically minded members of today's academe. Or Rorty might say that his goal is to make propaganda for a new physicalist way of speaking that might suit the purposes of the future better than older vocabularies that are now going extinct.

The important point behind such evasive maneuvers is that there is, in Rorty's view, nothing that philosophy can say that gives us good reasons to adopt one of these views of the situation over the others. There is no antecedently given Truth of the Matter, knowable through philosophical reflection, that dictates the Right Answer in addressing such issues. In other words, the point Rorty relies on is *metaphilosophical* in the sense that it is a claim about what philosophy should or can say. Rorty believes that once we abandon Philosophy (with an uppercase "P") – philosophy understood as the foundational inquiry into The Way Things Really Are – there is not much to be gained from disputes about whether one must accept physicalism and whether such acceptance is consistent with other things one might want to say. Ad hoc adjustments can always be made in one's texts that will serve to deflate such sterile debates. In the end, getting rid of foundationalism means getting rid of the idea that philosophy (qua Philosophy) has anything particularly important or deep to say about the real problems of real people.

The role played by such metaphilosophical considerations is evident in the way Rorty would respond to an especially compelling and plausible line of criticism formulated by John McDowell. As we saw in Section 2, Rorty, building on Davidson's characterization of what is involved in translating the language of a previously unknown linguistic group, claims that there are two possible viewpoints one may adopt in talking about this situation. There is, first, the viewpoint of the field linguist who, looking at what is going on *from outside the practice*, can talk about causal interactions occurring within the environment in which speakers are uttering various noises. And there

is, second, the viewpoint of the natives themselves, the insider's perspective of the "earnest seekers of truth" who are using language according to the norms laid out by their linguistic practices. The first viewpoint, that of the field linguist, can do nothing but describe causal correlations found between vocalizations and environmental factors. The second is normative: it exemplifies and clarifies the space of reasons in which beliefs are linked together for the natives in their search for the truth. Rorty emphasizes that there can be no third view – no sort of hyperoutsider's view – in which the word "true" could have a role in explaining practices because it denotes "a non-causal relation called 'correspondence' " (ORT 136). For Rorty, as he reads Davidson, there is no standpoint above those of the native and field linguist from which philosophical proclamations can be made about the ultimate grounds or lack of grounds of the practice.

McDowell argues that this attempt to restrict all discourse to one or the other of the two standpoints Rorty acknowledges makes it impossible to make sense of things we need to understand. Rorty is claiming, in effect, that "if we occupy a standpoint from which our beliefs are in view along with their objects and our causal engagements with the objects, then we cannot, from that standpoint, bring the beliefs under the norms of inquiry." If we cannot grasp the norms governing language use from that standpoint, however, "the result is to make it a mystery how what we are talking about can be beliefs, [how they can be] stances with respect to how things are, at all."[25] In other words, if no correlations can be identified between our beliefs and objects, why should we think that the vocalizations going on in this environment are expressions of *belief?*

Of course, Rorty grants that there is a second standpoint, the insider's standpoint, from which beliefs can be seen as subject to the norms of inquiry. But McDowell points out that this does not help. For if "the view from this second standpoint is not allowed to embrace the causal interactions between believers and the objects of their beliefs – since those interactions are the preserve of the outside view, which has to be held separate – then it simply becomes mysterious how we can be entitled to conceive of what organizes the subject matter of the second standpoint as the norms of inquiry."[26] If there is no way to account for the correlations between the objects of beliefs and beliefs, then it is incomprehensible why the natives have *these* norms and not others – or, indeed, why we should see these regularities in their practices as falling under norms at all.

McDowell's claim, then, is that any account of how field linguists work, if elaborated solely within the confines of the two viewpoints Rorty allows, must fail. There is no way to explain how the acoustic blasts human beings

emit can be expressions of belief about the world. If we are to avoid the limitations of Rorty's account, then, we must make use of the notion of "the perfectly ordinary world in which there are rocks, snow is white, and so forth: the world populated by 'the familiar objects whose antics make our sentences and opinions true or false,' as Davidson puts it."[27] Understanding how we would translate the language of a newly discovered linguistic group (and so get as much understanding of what *truth* is as possible, on Rorty's view) requires that we attain a standpoint from which we can look at both ordinary objects and the natives' speech acts in such a way that we can grasp the relation of correspondence that binds them together in norm-governed ways.

In response to such an argument, Rorty can say that there is no such standpoint – no "God's-eye point of view" or "view from nowhere" outside all local practices and situations – from which one can make observations about the foundations for linguistic practices. The highest standpoint is that of the field linguist, and all the field linguist can do is muck about, trying to get some handle on what the natives are up to in their noisy practices, moving back and forth from her own beliefs to guesses about what the natives must believe in situations of this sort. The field linguist will try different strategies at different times. She will try out different hypotheses about what the natives are doing to see how they work, always trying, through imaginative identification, to expand her own horizon in order to see things from the natives' point of view. But this is an endless back-and-forth process. It involves using one's own standpoint as a basis for making guesses about what the natives are up to, dropping hypotheses that do not work out, and starting again with new hunches based on what one has found out so far. The procedure is irreducibly "hermeneutic" in the sense of that term that Georgia Warnke explicates in her essay for this volume. In it, the linguist is always up to her elbows in things, with no vista that allows her to get an overview of the underpinnings of the process as a whole. Seen in this way, there is simply no external vantage point for discovering the sorts of connections between beliefs and objects that McDowell wants to find.

Putting the disagreement between McDowell and Rorty this way reinforces the idea that the real difference between Rorty and many of his critics lies in a deep difference in their conceptions of what philosophy can and ought to do. McDowell has said that his aim is to understand and diagnose certain anxieties that naturally arise when one is doing philosophy.[28] He explicitly rules out the possibility of achieving some standpoint for arriving at timeless truths about The Way Things Really Are, but he insists that there is nevertheless a great deal of worthy work philosophers can do to

show why seemingly intractable puzzles create the intellectual strains they cause. Rorty, in contrast, thinks that once we get rid of Philosophy as a foundational discipline, there simply is not much for philosophers to do. The idea that there is one ultimately illuminating story about what goes on when people use words or when they display moral virtues is unjustified. Innumerable things are going on as we muddle through situations seeking truth and trying to do the right thing. The belief in some overarching story is a product of Platonism, a way of thinking we would do well to get over rather than something we need to articulate and explain.

Rorty is able to agree with Thomas Nagel, Charles Taylor, and others that we all have deep-seated intuitions that lead us to think that some of our core practices and beliefs need justification and clarification. But he is inclined to say about this, "So much the worse for our intuitions." People in earlier times had intuitions that told them that transubstantiation of the Holy Eucharist needed explanation. Today such an assumption merely looks quaint. As we have learned to live without such theological worries, Rorty suggests, future generations will learn to live without the idea that there is some big story that makes clear what we do and think. There are only local, little stories, and it is not at all clear why philosophers should be in charge of telling such stories rather than, say, sociologists, evolutionary biologists, or novelists.

On this account of the matter, it might seem that the difference between Rorty and his critics comes down to a difference of opinion about what philosophers can and cannot do after the demise of foundationalism. And this characterization of the issue might make it seem as if all that is at stake in the debate are jobs for future philosophers or turf wars among the disciplines. After all, one might ask, what difference does it make whether we call whatever replaces foundationalist philosophy "philosophy" or something else? In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty called this something else "edification" (*Bildung*). Though he drops this name for what comes after foundationalist philosophy in his later writings, he clearly believes that philosophers, being as well-read as the next academic, and armed with skills at defining terms and drawing distinctions, can be just as good as novelists and poets and sociologists at describing our lives and expanding our range of sympathetic identification with others.

But Rorty's critics will not be content with describing their disagreements with him as resting on a difference of opinion about the field called philosophy. For many of the criticisms aimed at Rorty arise from a deep sense that something important is getting lost in his philosophical (or post-Philosophical) minimalism.

The feeling that something is lost might be put bluntly by saying that Rorty's conception of what should come after the demise of traditional philosophy – the activity he used to call edification – is just too thin to do the job he wants it to do. We get a clearer idea of this sense of loss by looking at Jean Bethke Elshtain's essay in this volume. What Elshtain suggests is that the conception of life formulated in Rorty's philosophical vision is simply too watered down, too bleached out, to be able to make sense of the things people actually do. His minimalist account seems to make moral life into something shallow and trivial, with the result that it becomes unintelligible how people could be motivated to risk their lives for noble or worthy causes or, for that matter, could carry through on the loyalties and obligations of everyday life at all.

Consider, for example, what Rorty says about "final vocabularies" in *Contingency, Irony, Solidarity*. The claim there is that different fundamental orientations in life can be characterized in terms of people choosing or growing up into different final vocabularies, where these are considered to be the fundamental value words in terms of which they give expression to their aspirations and assessments. So people are found to use words like "decent," "noble," "smart," "loving," "shameful," "disgraceful," and so forth in expressing their bedrock explanations for what they do in life. To understand why someone would be willing to save Jews from the Nazis, according to this story, it is enough to see what final vocabulary that person employs. At the same time, however, as a liberal ironist, one must recognize that the final vocabulary the person speaks is, like one's own, merely contingent, a product of factors that could have been very different.

What Elsthain's remarks suggest, however, is that an account of this sort, far from enabling us to grasp the core of why people will risk everything to do what is right, actually bleaches out and deforms our understanding of the moral life, leaving unintelligible what motivations and commitments move people to action. From the standpoint of final-vocabulary descriptions of moral motivation, all that can be said about these people are the breezy, rather detached sociological sorts of observations Rorty tends to make: "These people use these words," "This person accepts this vocabulary." What is lost in such an account, it seems, is the ability to gain insight into the thick weave of moral concepts, deep commitments, and shared forms of life that make moral agency possible at all. Where we generally find a dense thicket of practices and heartfelt commitments definitive of our actual lives together, Rorty seems to see only sets of declarative sentences held for true by individuals but removed from the contexts of life that give them sense.

We may agree with Rorty that moral agency need not be anchored in a foundationalist theory of the self or human nature. But we might still hold that our understanding of moral life must be anchored in an understanding of life that is deep and rich enough to make sense of why people are sometimes willing to risk everything in order to do the right thing. Such an understanding seems to be lost in Rorty's story. Even more troubling, what risks being lost is the ability to understand *oneself* in a way that captures the sense of seriousness of moral commitments, and so the ability to *be* a moral agent of the sort that Elshtain (and Rorty) take as exemplary.

The point of this deeper line of criticism, then, is not that Rorty will force philosophers to rewrite their job descriptions. The point, is that given Rorty's minimalist view of our situation as agents, no one – not the philosopher, not the novelist, not the social scientist – will be able to make sense of the complex reality of moral life that makes moral agency possible. Heidegger famously said, "No one dies for mere values." Even more obviously, no one dies for a final vocabulary. When Rorty bleaches out the dimensions of life that underlie moral motivation, he not only makes it very hard to understand commitment and risk, he inadvertently makes it harder to be a morally committed person at all.

Notes

1. We are especially indebted to William Weaver's biographical essay on Richard Rorty forthcoming in the *Dictionary of Literary Biography* in a volume entitled *American Philosophers, 1950–2000* (Farmington Hills, MI: Gale Group). Weaver had the advantage of interviews with Rorty and access to his personal papers.
2. Jürgen Habermas, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Turn," in RHC, 32–3.
3. Willard V. O. Quine, "Two Dogmas of Empiricism," in his *From a Logical Point of View* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1953).
4. See Wilfrid Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind, with an Introduction by Richard Rorty and a Study Guide by Robert Brandom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997). The essay first appeared in *Minnesota Studies in the Philosophy of Science*, vol. 1, ed. Herbert Feigl and Michael Scriven in 1956, and was republished in Sellars's *Science, Perception and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1963).
5. Sellars, *Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind*, p. 87.
6. Ibid., p. 76.
7. Rorty claims that for all we know, the innovative concepts in the thought of Aristotle, St. Paul, and Newton could have been caused by "cosmic rays scrambling the fine structure of some crucial neurons" in their brains (CIS 17).

8. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd enlarged ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
9. For an excellent brief account of Kuhn, see Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), pp. 30–6.
10. Donald Davidson, "On the Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Association* 17 (1973–4): 5–20, reprinted in the collection of Davidson's essays, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984). All citations are from the 1984 collection.
11. Charles B. Guignon and David R. Hiley, "Biting the Bullet: Rorty on Private and Public Morality," in *Reading Rorty*, ed. Alan Malachowski (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990).
12. For example, Richard Rorty, "Freud and Moral Reflection," in *Pragmatism's Freud: The Moral Disposition of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Joseph H. Smith and William Kerrigan (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).
13. Richard Rorty, "Solidarity or Objectivity?" in *Post-Analytic Philosophy*, ed. John Rajchman and Cornel West (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), reprinted in ORT.
14. Michael J. Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).
15. John Rawls, "Justice as Fairness: Political Not Metaphysical," *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 14 (1985): 225–6.
16. Richard Rorty, "Trapped between Kant and Dewey: The Current Situation of Moral Philosophy," unpublished, August 1, 2000.
17. See, for example, Charles Guignon, "Saving the Differences: Gadamer and Rorty,", in *Proceedings of the 1982 Biannual Meeting of the Philosophy of Science Association*, vol. 2, ed. P. D. Asquith and T. Nickels (East Lansing, MI: Philosophy of Science Association, 1983); John Caputo, "The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind: The Case of Heidegger and Rorty," *The Review of Metaphysics* 36 (1983): 661–86; Richard Bernstein, "Philosophy in the Conversation of Mankind, "*The Review of Metaphysics* 33 (1980): 745–75; Nancy Fraser, "Solidarity or Singularity? Richard Rorty between Romanticism and Technology," in her *Unruly Practices* (Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press, 1989).
18. *The Intercollegiate Review* 35 (1999): 3–13. Raymond Boisvert called our attention to this fact.
19. George F. Will, "Still Waiting for Lefty," *Newsweek*, May 25, 1998, p. 86.
20. Simon Blackburn, "The Professor of Complacence," in *The New Republic*, 225 (August 20, 2001): 39–42.
21. David L. Hall, *Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), pp. 91–3.
22. Thomas S. Kuhn, "Concepts of Cause in the Development of Physics," in his *The Essential Tension: Selected Studies in Scientific Tradition and Change* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977).

23. We are indebted to Michael Gibbons for this way of formulating the issue.
24. William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* in *Writings, 1902–1910*, (New York: Literary Classics of the United States, Inc., 1987), p. 116.
25. John McDowell, *Mind and World*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1996), p. 150.
26. Ibid.
27. Ibid, p. 151.
28. Ibid., p. xi.

2 Rorty's Critique of Epistemology

GARY GUTTING

THE MODERN ORIGINS OF EPISTEMOLOGY

Rorty's critique of epistemology is based on his reading, primarily developed in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, of the history of modern philosophy. This reading begins with a sharp contrast between the ancient and the modern status of philosophy. For the ancients, philosophy was "queen of the sciences," first, crowning and synthesizing the special sciences and, second, providing a basis for the good human life. These two functions were closely connected because knowledge of nature – particularly of human nature – was regarded as the ground for knowledge of the good; our vision of the world and of our place in it was the basis for our knowledge of how to live. The modern period replaced the ancient sciences (e.g., Aristotelian physics and biology), of which philosophy had been the culmination and queen, with the new modern sciences of Galileo, Newton, Dalton, and (eventually) Darwin.

The triumph of these new sciences was quickly seen by many intellectuals – Hobbes and Descartes, for example – as the destruction of the ancient system of philosophy, which by their day had become the philosophy of the schools. They believed that the new science, interpreted realistically, undermined the metaphysical heart of scholastic philosophy. The new scientific world was one merely of inert matter and mechanistic forces, a world of, to use the old terminology, material and efficient but no formal or final causes. Then as now, this new view was most plausible for the external material world. It was less plausible for the phenomena that we have come to call mental. Descartes initiated the modern period's efforts to come to terms with this disparity by drawing the distinction between mind and body in a new way.

Before Descartes, philosophers had typically seen the mind–body distinction as one between reason and nonreason, thus including sense perception, for example, on the side of the body rather than of the mind. Descartes, in an effort to make the entire bodily realm the domain of the

new mechanistic science, needed a sense of the distinction that eliminated from our understanding of body anything that could not be explained by this new science. This led him to assign to the mind everything intentional and phenomenal (hence all "thoughts" in his maximally extended sense of all consciousness). While later modern philosophers might reject Descartes's dualism of two substances, mind and body, they accepted his understanding of the division between the mental and the physical as between what was conscious and what was not. Even those who denied one or the other term of the distinction (materialists and idealists) accepted Descartes's understanding of the categories.

For Rorty, Descartes is the "father of modern philosophy" in the sense that his sharp division between mind and body provided the basis for the distinctively modern view of the mind as the object of philosophical inquiry. Descartes's was a particularly attractive approach, since, as noted previously, the new mechanistic sciences seemed quite capable of providing an adequate account of matter but less capable of dealing with the mind. However, the full development of this new conception of philosophy was not achieved for over a century, with Kant's critical philosophy.

As Rorty presents it, Kant enters a philosophical world dominated by the problem of epistemology. Epistemology is based on two assumptions: first, Descartes's assumption that knowledge of the external world is a matter of having mental representations that accurately picture that world and, second, Locke's assumption that the accuracy of a representation depends on the manner of its causal production. The problems of epistemology arose because these assumptions, at least as they were understood by the standard empiricist and rationalist accounts of knowledge, allowed no way of guaranteeing the accuracy of our mental representations of extramental reality and, thus, no way of avoiding the skeptical conclusion that we are trapped behind a "veil of ideas." It was Kant's frustration with this failure that led to his Copernican Revolution. The two assumptions – truth as representation and causal origin as guarantee of accurate representation – continue in Kant's account, but in an inverted and transformed manner. Our ideas (e.g., of space, time, substance, causality) accurately represent the world not because they are causally produced by the world but because they themselves are necessary conditions of the mind's noncausal production ("constitution") of the world as an object of knowledge. Knowledge of this constitution and its conditions is unproblematic in view of Descartes's assumption of the mind's privileged access to itself.

The key to Kant's approach is his distinction between two types of mental representations: concepts and intuitions. He saw his predecessors

as either empiricists, who tried to reduce concepts (generalized ideas) to intuitions (immediate sense impressions), or rationalists, who tried to reduce intuitions to concepts. Both, he maintained, failed to realize that an experience of an object requires both conceptual and intuitive elements, the conceptual providing the framework of intelligibility without which the object could not be presented and the intuitive providing the content without which the framework would be merely an empty scheme. The answer to the defining question of epistemology, "How can our representations accurately represent objects?," was that the very meaning of "object" (at least in the crucial context of empirical knowledge) requires that an object be properly correlated with the mind's rules for forming representations of it.

Kant restored philosophy to an autonomous and privileged position in the domain of knowledge. In his view, every other type of knowledge presupposed the conceptual (analytic or synthetic a priori) truths to which philosophy alone had access. Moreover, only the conceptual truths of philosophy could be known with the maximal certainty of direct intellectual insight. Philosophy is no longer, as in ancient times, the *culmination* of human knowing. Rather, it is the *foundation* of human knowing, providing the ultimate justification of all epistemic claims and adjudicating conflicts between rival bodies of alleged knowledge.

Modern epistemology has taken many forms, and by no means are all of them good fits to the simple account Rorty most often has in mind. Frequently, his target is a naive foundationalism for which there is, strictly speaking, no knowledge apart from an absolutely certain basis provided by philosophical intuition and argument. Without such a basis, all knowledge, both commonsense and scientific, is said to crumble, and skepticism triumphs. Historians of modern philosophy are rightly dubious of Rorty's simplistic interpretation of thinkers such as Descartes, Hume, and Kant. It is not at all clear, for example, that any of these three thought that scientific knowledge had no epistemic standing without a philosophical vindication. Insofar as Rorty's critique is aimed specifically at naive foundationalism, it affects primarily certain forms of empiricism, particularly (and most important for Rorty) logical positivism.

But Rorty's history of modern philosophy has much wider relevance in its focus on the centrality of the epistemology of representations and the role such epistemology has played in defining a distinct and privileged place for philosophy as a cognitive authority.[1] At its most compelling, his critique of epistemology is a questioning of three central modern assumptions: (1) that truth is a matter of a special relationship of representation between mind and world; (2) that justification is a matter of special experiences that

normatively ground this special relationship; and (3) that philosophy is required because it alone can satisfactorily explicate the special relationship that defines truth and specify just what sorts of experiences justify our truth claims. Against (1), Rorty maintains that there is no interesting (nontrivial) theory of truth that we need or can supply; against (2) he maintains that justification has nothing to do with experiences but is merely a matter of intersubjective consensus. It follows that (3) is likewise false and that, therefore, philosophy, as it has been understood in the modern Western tradition, has no distinctive role to play in our efforts to know the world.

Critics have argued that Rorty's rejection of the project of modern philosophy is in effect a rejection of knowledge itself; that what he presents as a critique of epistemology is actually a self-destructive skepticism. The following sections examine this claim through reflection on Rorty's detailed views of justification and of truth.

JUSTIFICATION AND EPISTEMOLOGICAL BEHAVIORISM

To know something, I must have a belief and that belief must be justified. These are necessary (though, of course, not sufficient) conditions implicit in our commonsense notion of knowledge. Still keeping to the commonsense level, justification frequently means that I can say something on behalf of the belief that will pass muster among my peers. Thus: "It's raining in Chicago." "How do you know?" "I heard it on the radio." "Okay, we'll take an umbrella." Here my belief is a proposition that I justify by citing another proposition that my interlocutors accept and see as properly supporting my belief. If they don't accept it, then I cite other propositions until we reach agreement. Rorty's view – which he calls "epistemological behaviorism" – is that we need nothing beyond this commonsense model to serve as an account of epistemic justification. Justification, even in far more significant and complex cases, is just a matter of being able to give good reasons (put forward adequate supporting propositions) for the belief. Also, the norms specifying "good reasons" and "adequate support" are themselves based on the agreement of an epistemic community.

The alternative is to maintain that justification of a belief requires that it receive some further "inner authentication"; that there be some special *experience* (insight, awareness, perception) to justify my having the belief; that, in Rorty's terminology, I have certain "privileged representations." This, as we have just seen, is the view of classical modern epistemology, which has allowed for two kinds of experiential justification: via sensory

awareness or via conceptual insight. Rorty's epistemological behaviorism denies any justificatory role to either sort of experience. Unlike logical or metaphysical behaviorism, this position does not deny the existence of "inner episodes" or try to reduce them to objective descriptions of behavior. Rorty's epistemological behaviorism is perfectly happy to admit that there may be all manner of sensory and intellectual awarenesses (from raw feels, through ordinary sense perceptions, to mathematical "intuitions"). But it denies that any such episodes are involved in the justification of our beliefs. They may well have a great deal to do with the causal explanation of why we have these beliefs, but they are not reasons for having them.[2]

Epistemological behaviorism conflicts with the "empiricist" claim that beliefs such as "There is a tree outside the window" are justified by my sense experiences and with the "rationalist" claim that beliefs such as "All bachelors are unmarried" are justified by my awareness of meanings. Let us begin with the empiricist, who will say that, ultimately, the justification for "There is a tree outside the window" is my experience of seeing the tree. Can Rorty really deny so obvious a claim? He will, of course, admit that frequently the justification of this claim will involve appeal to a *proposition* such as "I see a tree outside the window." Surely, he must also agree that such an appeal is fruitless unless the proposition is true, that is, unless I have actually had the experience of seeing the tree. But, if so, doesn't the justification for "There is a tree outside the window" depend on the experience?

Here we need to recall that we are concerned only with justification, not truth. For me to be justified in believing that "I see a tree outside the window," it is not at all necessary that I actually have the experience of seeing a tree, only that I have good reason to believe that I see a tree, that is, that I believe propositions that support the proposition "I see a tree." This illustrates Rorty's key claim: justification is a matter of giving reasons, and what is a good reason never depends on whether or not I have had a certain sort of experience. As far as justification (reason-giving) goes, what matters is whether I believe I have had the experience (or, if this belief is challenged, whether I have good reason to believe I have had the experience). The objection to Rorty assumes that the mere fact that a proposition is true can be a reason for believing it is true. He denies this, maintaining that just because something exists in reality doesn't mean it exists in the space of reasons.

But the empiricist will still not be satisfied. According to epistemological behaviorism, knowledge requires justification, which requires an ability to cite reasons, which requires linguistic ability. But, the empiricist

will urge, this ignores the knowledge of those – for example, infants or the severely retarded – who do not have linguistic ability. In other words, there are surely instances of prelinguistic (or nonlinguistic) awareness that are knowledge. Rorty's response to this objection is based on Sellars's distinction between awareness-as-discriminative-behavior and awareness-as-knowledge.[3] Many entities without linguistic ability – from photoelectric cells and computers to frogs and babies – are able to respond to stimuli in systematically differentiated ways. In the case of at least some organisms – certainly babies – we have reason to think that this ability causally depends on the primitive form of awareness that philosophers call "raw feels." Thus, a baby feels hunger and cries for its bottle. Should we say that the baby knows it is hungry (its stomach is empty) – that is, believes it is hungry and is justified in its belief in virtue of its raw feeling of hunger? Well, does a photoelectric eye know that someone is approaching the door? Not in any literal sense; it merely has the mechanical ability to respond to such an approach by opening the door. It could not, for example, justify the claim that someone is approaching the door. What is the difference between the baby and the electric eye? Merely that the baby responds in virtue of a "feeling" and the electric eye doesn't. (We could invent an electronic gadget that monitored a baby's stomach secretions and emitted a crying sound whenever the baby itself cried. But we wouldn't say that the gadget literally knew that the baby was hungry.) But why should the mere fact of the baby's feeling make a difference?

The only answer supporting the empiricist would be that having the feeling justifies the claim that the baby is hungry, whereas whatever is going on in the electric eye does not justify the claim that someone is approaching the door. But what does it mean to say that the feeling of hunger justifies the claim that the baby is hungry? Only that someone who knew that the feeling was occurring could put this fact forward in support of the claim. So then the question is, "Does the baby know that it is feeling hungry?" And the answer is "no," since, by hypothesis, the baby is prelinguistic and therefore lacks propositional knowledge. In fact, the situation is the same for the electric eye as for the baby. Someone who knew about the electromagnetic processes going on in the eye could appeal to them to justify the claim that someone is approaching the door. But the electric eye can't do this, since it lacks propositional knowledge. The only difference between the two cases is that the infant's response depends on its awareness. But to think that this matters epistemically is to make the same empiricist mistake we encountered previously. It is to think that the mere fact of an experience's occurring can constitute a reason for believing a proposition.[4]

Consider next the rationalist's claim that our knowledge of necessary truths (e.g., of "All bachelors are unmarried") is a matter of our awareness of meanings. Rorty cites Quine's famous discussion in "Two Dogmas of Empiricism" as undermining the effort to distinguish a class of truths-in-virtue-of-meaning from a class of truths-based-on-experience. Certainly, to the extent that Quine shows that no such distinction can be drawn, the rationalist (or logical empiricist) claim we are examining becomes indefensible. However, even without Quine's critique, epistemological behaviorists can handle claims about insights into necessary truths the same way they handle claims about sense experiences. In both cases, the key point is that the mere occurrence of an experience (whether sensory or conceptual) has no justificatory force. At best, justification is supplied by a belief that such an experience has occurred. Thus, the case against rationalist conceptual insights is the same as that against empiricist sense experience.

The critic, however, may well think that the preceding clarifications merely display the precise nature of Rorty's skepticism. If justification is merely a matter of giving reasons that satisfy our peers, then justification is nothing more than a social practice, which then has no more authority than the society in which it is carried out. How can genuine knowledge be based simply on what seems right to some particular group?

JUSTIFICATION AS A SOCIAL PRACTICE

How can reason-giving be nothing more than a social practice? Couldn't I have perfectly good reasons for believing something that everyone else thought was false and unjustified? Why should enough recalcitrant Athenians be able to put Socrates in the wrong? Epistemological behaviorism seems to erase the boundary between objective knowledge and subjective opinion.

The charge that Rorty's view destroys the distinction between objectivity and subjectivity can take a number of forms. One version is that it entails a metaphysical idealism (indeed, a subjectivist form of idealism, which relativizes reality to different mental configurations). Thomas Kuhn, whose views on science Rorty sees himself as generalizing in his account of justification, opened himself to such a charge by saying that the adherents of different paradigms (systems of normal discourse) "live in different worlds."[5] Kuhn said this because he thought there was no way of giving a description of the world that would be shared by (and neutral between the conflicting claims of) rival paradigms. If this were so, then the paradigm,

which is surely in the ideal realm, would determine the world. Rorty, however, maintains that we can readily admit that for any two paradigms we can find a description of the world that is neutral between them. Incommensurability requires only that no such description be a basis for deciding the issues in dispute between the paradigms. We can, for example, always find some way of describing a sunset that will be acceptable to both Ptolemeans and Copernicans (thus: "the perceived distance between the horizon and the sun gradually decreases"). The sunset is an objective reality for adherents of each paradigm; their disagreement is only about how this reality is to be further interpreted and explained.

This move may avoid metaphysical idealism, but critics will still wonder how Rorty can preserve any meaningful epistemological distinction between objective knowledge and subjective belief. Scientists know that the earth moves relative to the sun; but for Kuhn and Rorty, doesn't this mean merely that all members of the relevant scientific community agree that the earth moves? It seems that group consensus – which in fact is no different from what Lakatos called "mob psychology" – has become the only standard of knowledge.

Coming to terms with this objection requires getting clear about the distinction between "objective" and "subjective." Building on Kuhn's comments, Rorty in effect distinguishes three cases. Sometimes subjective refers to what is a matter of individual preference and objective to what is generally accepted. In this sense, "Château Lafite is Bordeaux" is objective, whereas "Château Lafite 1959 is the best Bordeaux of its vintage" is subjective. Rorty and Kuhn obviously do not make all knowledge subjective in this sense. The consensus of a scientific, literary, or political community is not a matter of personal opinion. It is objective at least in the sense of being *inter*subjective. Sometimes subjective refers to what is a matter of judgment as opposed to what can be unequivocally demonstrated (e.g., proven algorithmically). Kuhnian consensus is subjective in this sense, but then so is virtually every form of knowledge available to us outside of the most rigorous mathematical demonstrations. (Indeed, even mathematical demonstrations involve ineliminable acts of judgment regarding, for example, the applicability of a general principle to a particular case.) So, for these first two cases, Kuhn and Rorty can respond to the charge of subjectivism with, respectively, "Not guilty" and "So what?"

The third sense of the distinction takes subjective to mean "how things appear to us" as opposed to "how things really are." This is surely the sense of subjective Rorty's critics have in mind. If knowledge is nothing more than group consensus, then it expresses only how things seem to us, which

may well not be how they really are. Rorty's response to this charge is that this formulation of the distinction is ambiguous. One meaning is quite acceptable but innocuous to his position. The other meaning, which would undermine his position, is incoherent.

The innocent version of the distinction understands "things as they appear to us" as "how things appear in first impressions, before serious inquiry" and contrasts this to "how things appear after the fullest possible scrutiny." Rorty's understanding of knowledge is obviously objective if the objection is understood in this way. But the critic may rather take the distinction as between "things as they are described by our most careful and thorough inquiries" and "things as they are just in themselves, entirely apart from how they are described by our inquiries." But, Rorty maintains, to accept this distinction is to endorse the classical modern view that we directly know only mental representations ("things as we describe them"), which may or may not match up with reality outside the mind ("things as they are in themselves"). Once, with Rorty, we reject this distinction, there is no sense to the third meaning of objectivity.

We may still suspect that Rorty is improperly reducing objectivity to intersubjectivity, ignoring the fact that an individual can be in the right in opposition to his entire society. But such Socrates-versus-the-Athenians objections miss the point by confusing a social practice with group consensus. Justification is social because it is linguistic and because we learn a language only in becoming part of a community. Belonging to a community means coming under the norms that constitute that community, but not every opinion shared by all or most members of a community expresses a communal norm. It is, in fact, quite possible for a single individual to be in accord with a community's norms when the rest of the community is not. For example, I could be the only person who pronounces my name correctly or the only person who knows that the twenty-first century did not begin until 2001. It may also happen that the norms of a community are not all mutually consistent, and an individual may be entitled to assert the claim of one norm against another that everyone else accepts. Of course, enough changes in the views and practices of the members of a community will eventually lead to changes in its norms, since norms have no basis outside of the community itself. But this does not mean that norms are changeable at the whim of a group, even if the group includes everyone. Even if we all say something different, we may not all be able to believe it or to reflect it in our practices.

Rorty himself does not always avoid confusion on this point. Consensus is closely tied to reason-giving in both origin and outcome. Like any social

practice, reason-giving proceeds from an intersubjective acceptance of a set of norms, and it tends toward agreement on claims that have been justified by the practice. Rorty tends to collapse these two points into the misleading claim that consensus is what justifies a proposition. But on his own account, this is true only in a very indirect sense. At some ultimate point, further demands for justification of the norms governing our reason-giving no longer make sense, and we can do no more than point out that these *are* the norms that we accept. But this acceptance is by no means an optional choice by individuals. It is the outcome of the deep-rooted and complex process whereby they have become reason-givers. At the other end, consensus is (at least in ideal cases) the outcome of successful reason-giving: the process of discussing the evidence, presenting arguments, and answering objections leads, when things go right, to widespread agreement on what to believe. So consensus about norms is the ultimate source of the practice of reason-giving, and consensus in specific beliefs is often the outcome of the practice.

None of this, however, implies that our beliefs are justified only to the extent that we agree on them. Rorty sometimes seems to think otherwise, as in the following passage from a response to Putnam:

> Suppose everybody in the community . . . thinks S must be a bit crazy [to assert p]. They think this even after patiently listening to S's defense of p, and after making sustained attempts to talk him out of it. Might S still be *warranted* in asserting p? Only if there were some way of determining warrant *sub specie aeternitatis*, some natural order of reasons that determines, quite apart from S's ability to justify p to those around him, whether he is *really* justified in holding p.[6]

Here Rorty ignores the fact that S might have good reasons to believe that everyone else in the community is ignorant of, misinterpreting, or simply incapable of understanding the relevant community norms appropriate for evaluating p. Perhaps, for example, the rest of the community has lost the ability to understand the millennial significance of the fact that there is no year zero. In such a case, S will be justified against everyone else – not necessarily *sub specie aeternitatis* but in light of his superior understanding of norms implicit in his community. In this same discussion, Rorty suggests that S has warrant for asserting p simply if "S was in a good position, given the interests and values of himself and his peers, to assert p."[7] This is correct, but it is consistent with the possibility that, on a particular issue at a particular time, S may be warranted in believing that he does not have any epistemic peers. In such a case, S is justified in asserting p against everyone else.

Justification by consensus occurs only in special cases. When astrophysicists accept the existence of black holes, their justification is a complicated body of evidence and arguments based on it, not the fact that they agree that black holes exist. Nonexperts who accept the results of astrophysics on authority may justify their belief in black holes by the consensus of astrophysicists. But this is a derivative sort of justification that does not define the nature of the practice.

Because of his confusion about consensus, Rorty often wrongly portrays it as a casual, readily alterable agreement, as when he says that everything we know is known only under "optional descriptions" (PMN 379) or that "man is always free to choose new descriptions" (PMN 362, n. 7). In fact, to take an obvious case, the main elements of our scientific picture of the world (atomic structure, evolutionary development) are deeply rooted and extremely unlikely to change. Any such change would require either profound alterations in our norms of reason-giving or entirely improbable changes in the evidence available. Even our firmest beliefs may well be contingent in the sense that they might turn out to be wrong. But Rorty tends to confuse this modest fallibilism with a wildly implausible decisionist (or voluntarist) view of knowledge. For many of our beliefs, learning that they are wrong and coming to give them up would be an extended, arduous, excruciating process.[8]

Epistemic decisionism is abetted by our tendency to think that "accepting norms" is a matter of acquiescing to explicitly formulated criteria that govern our practice of reason-giving. But, as Charles Taylor, among many others, has emphasized, a practice such as reason-giving will always derive from an implicit understanding that is only partially and imperfectly caught by explicit formulations. Appreciating this point is perhaps the best way to counter the tendency to decisionism.

Rorty's confusions in this area show up in his discussion of the (eventual) emergence of the sharp modern distinction between science and religion from the Galileo–Bellarmine dispute. Denying that there are "rational" or "objective" standards behind our acceptance of this distinction (PMN 331), Rorty attributes it to such things as "the Enlightenment's decision that Christianity was mostly just priestcraft" (PMN 329) and, more generally, to "three hundred years of rhetoric" in favor of the distinction (PMN 330). But in fact the distinction was – to use another, more felicitous phrase of Rorty's – "hammered out" through long years of lively and subtle argument, argument that eventually convinced almost everyone that there were good reasons for, say, excluding Scriptural citations from science. Of course, after a certain point, what was won by careful argumentation became part of

our unquestioned intellectual heritage. The heirs are easy with their legacy only because of their ancestors' hard work.

Rorty is rightly criticized for his insouciant tendency to assimilate justification to voluntary consensus, as though norms of belief depended on the majority vote at the next epistemic town meeting. But there is no need to formulate the view of reason-giving as a social practice in this decisionistic way. Admitting that justification is ultimately a matter of sharing a practice rather than, say, attaining self-evident insights does not make the routine results of ordinary epistemic deliberations a matter of arbitrary choice.[9] In his critique of Rorty, Thomas McCarthy has rightly maintained that " 'our' culture is shot through with transcultural notions of validity." As he says, our actual practices of justification "involve constructing arguments that claim to be universally valid," not appealing to our agreement on a given claim. "In general, it is not *because* we agree that we hold a claim to be valid; rather, we agree because we have grounds for granting its validity."[10] But a properly formulated epistemological behaviorism will have no quarrel with McCarthy here. Epistemological behaviorism is not a view about the content of the norms involved in our practice of justification, but only about the ultimate basis of these norms. Its claim is that, in the final analysis, there is nothing underlying these norms other than the practice that they define. This is not a contradiction of our practice, but merely a rejection of an indefensible philosophical interpretation of that practice. Properly understood, Rorty's pragmatic approach to justification is a coherent and plausible alternative to what representationalism has to offer.

THE PROBLEM OF TRUTH

There still remains the question of truth. Rorty has somewhat altered his views on this topic over the years. But there is one key point on which he has always insisted. No matter what else we say about truth (e.g., whether we define it as warranted assertability within a language or as correspondence with reality, or eschew any substantive definition and take it as a primitive), there is no way for us to know the truth other than the social practice of giving reasons. We have no reliable source of truth other than our ongoing conversation with one another. Perhaps we may or must understand truth as something beyond the best or ultimate outcome of that conversation. Even so, we have no trustworthy means of deciding what to accept as the truth other than what goes on in that conversation. For, as we have seen, "nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already

accept, and . . . there is no way to get outside our beliefs and our language so as to find some test other than coherence" (PMN 178). Given this, saying that a belief is true in any sense other than its being "justified to the hilt" (saying, for example, that it corresponds to the way reality is in itself) is to pay it an empty compliment. The most we can know is that it is justified.

The preceding line of thought sketches one major motivation for Rorty's eventual conclusion that we should abandon the effort to produce a serious philosophical theory of truth. Another motive is the 2,500 years of philosophizing failing to produce anything like a satisfactory theory. But is such an abandonment really possible, and just how should we understand it? To answer these questions, we need to reflect a bit on the modern debate about metaphysical realism (or, equivalently, the correspondence theory of truth).[11]

In this debate, the weapon of choice has often been a caricature of the opposing view. The case against metaphysical realism, for example, is unanswerable if the theory's proponent can be saddled with a simplistic commitment to the "thing-in-itself." Such a commitment is senseless if, for example, the thing-in-itself is regarded as cognitively inaccessible to our consciousness (which is only of "things-as-they-appear-to-us"). Then the realist would be saying that what we are aware of (e.g., our "ideas") are representations of something that we cannot in principle know about. Certainly, it makes no sense to say that we can *know* that this is the case.

But, as Charles Taylor maintains, this kind of absurdity does not show that there is no sense in which our knowledge "corresponds" to reality. Talk of knowledge of reality does not require the picture of representations that mirror an inaccessible thing-in-itself. We might, for example, claim that we are simply aware of things that are independent of us – not of ideas (or whatever) that represent what we are not aware of. We simply find ourselves "at grips with a world of independent things."[12]

Similarly, the opponents of metaphysical realism are readily defeated if we can saddle them with the claim that objects of knowledge cannot be causally independent of us – that, for example, the Big Bang could not exist except as an object of human thought. But, as Rorty rightly insists, the opponents of realism need not claim that there is nothing *causally* independent of us.[13] The question is not "Did the Big Bang occur before there were any human beings to experience it?" It obviously did. The question is rather whether the Big Bang, as we know it, has any features that are *representationally* independent of us. That is, do the categories we use to characterize it somehow mirror features it has entirely apart from our characterizations? It is this claim that the opponent of metaphysical realism questions.

So, both proponents and opponents of metaphysical realism will, if they are sensible, begin by agreeing that the notion of an inaccessible thing-in-itself is senseless and that there are things causally independent of us. As a result, they will agree that the object of knowledge lies between the two extremes of total independence of and total dependence on the knower. Given this, however, we may wonder what they have left to disagree about. It would seem that, in rejecting the extreme versions of each position, we have converged on what we can call the "scheme–content" view of knowledge. The "scheme" is the set of categories in terms of which the mind understands objects of knowledge; this constitutes the idealist moment in our view of knowledge. The "content" is the object as a determinate something entirely independent of the mind's categorical system; this constitutes the realist moment in our view of knowledge. If both sides of the realism debate accept the role of conceptual schemes (which seems entailed by the rejection of the thing-in-itself) and also accept an irreducible content organized by the schemes (which seems entailed by the acceptance of the causal independence of the object), what could remain in dispute?

As Rorty eventually realized, the answer to this question is: the very distinction between scheme and content. Particularly through the influence of Davidson, he has come to see that his critique of epistemology must include a firm rejection of this distinction, which Davidson has labeled the "third dogma of empiricism."[14] Unfortunately, Rorty's earlier discussions, particularly in PMN, do not always reflect this realization. In such discussions, he agreed that, to avoid metaphysical idealism, he needed to accept a world entirely independent of us that is the object of our knowledge. But, to avoid metaphysical realism, he insisted that the content of that knowledge comes from categories of the mind that do not correspond to any features of that world. From this standpoint, the "world" is epistemic prime matter, providing nothing but the brute resistance of things to our minds. Any structure, any properties we attribute to it, reflect nothing more than the consequences of the consensus of our epistemic community.

As a result, Rorty balked at speaking of truth and objectivity as characteristics of even our most favorable epistemic situations. He denounced, for example, "the absurdity of thinking that the vocabulary used by present science, morality, or whatever has some privileged attachment to reality which makes it *more* than just a further set of descriptions" (PMN 361). But such thinking is absurd only if the "privileged attachment to reality" is understood in terms of representationalist epistemology (e.g., by saying that the privilege derives from the fact that we can show that our scientific or moral representations match up with a reality of which we have no direct

knowledge). Why, we want to respond, can't the best results of our science, for example, be said to be privileged just because they are, in all likelihood, true?

Rorty has disavowed his earlier position as merely a linguistic version of transcendental idealism. It gave in to the temptation "to use Kantian form–matter metaphors," which presuppose a scheme–content distinction. In particular, "we are tempted to say that there were no objects before language shaped the raw material (a lot of *ding-an-sichy*, all-content-no-scheme stuff)." But such talk left Rorty open to the charge "of making the false causal claim that the invention of the term 'dinosaur' caused dinosaurs to come into existence."[15] Similarly, his effort to understand truth in terms of our agreement about a given vocabulary left him the unpleasant alternative of either finding an adequate response to the powerful standard objections against *defining* truth in terms of consensus or else simply trying to do without the concept of truth.

In later essays, Rorty sometimes endorses what seem like decisively realistic assertions, such as "common-sense physical entities objectively exist independently of the mental" ("Pragmatism, Davidson, and Truth," ORT 149)[16] and "if one follows Davidson [as Rorty says he does], ... one will feel in touch with reality *all the time*" (ibid., 145). But such assertions lose much of their force when we put them in the context of other passages in which Rorty seems to say that the specific characteristics of (the facts about) the "independent" world are entirely dependent on our cognitive attitudes. Speaking, for example, of such apparently "hard facts" as a piece of litmus paper's turning blue or a column of mercury's reaching a certain level in a tube, he says: "The hardness of fact in all these cases is simply the hardness of previous agreements within a community about the consequences of a certain event" ("Texts and Lumps," ORT 80). Rorty's language about the reality of the world has continued to be ambivalent.

To further our understanding of Rorty's views on truth and realism, it will be useful to focus on his debate with Charles Taylor on these issues.[17] Taylor focuses on Rorty's reluctance to admit that worldviews (including his own philosophical views) could be regarded as true or false, and argues effectively that Rorty's position shows a residual adherence to the modern epistemology he claims to reject. As Taylor puts it, although Rorty explicitly rejects the representationalist picture, "his conception of the alternatives still seems to be commanded by that view,"[18] since he assumes that the only possible meanings of truth and objectivity are those specified by that picture. This point is nicely illustrated by Rorty's otherwise puzzling endorsement of Sartre's view that "the notion of 'one right way of

describing and explaining reality' . . . is just the notion of having a way of describing and explaining *imposed* on us in that brute way in which stones impinge on our feet" (PMN 375). As Taylor puts it, Rorty seems to think that "a representation which is not made true by some independent reality might just as well not be considered a candidate for truth at all."[19]

In his response to Taylor, Rorty admits the accuracy of Taylor's account of his earlier views, and acknowledges that he should not have eschewed truth but only the construal of truth in terms of the adequacy of a scheme to its content. But, given this correction, he thinks he has an entirely persuasive case against the metaphysical realism involved in a correspondence theory of truth. His opening point, with which Taylor will agree, is that realism makes no sense if it requires positing a cognitively inaccessible thing-in-itself. But he maintains that for metaphysical realism, the only alternative to positing the thing-in-itself is to maintain that things with which we *are* in cognitive contact possess intrinsic features – that is, properties that they have quite apart from any ways in which we describe them. Talk of intrinsic features, however, assumes that we can draw a meaningful distinction between the independent content our descriptions are about and the conceptual schemata imposed by those descriptions. That is, it assumes a distinction between scheme and content. But Davidson has shown that no such distinction can be drawn. Hence, there is no sense to the notion of an intrinsic property, and we are back with the incoherent thing-in-itself as the only way of making sense of the metaphysical realism.

Taylor's response is that we simply "cannot do without" the scheme–content distinction. He agrees with Rorty's point that we cannot "distinguish the role of our describing activity . . . and the role of the rest of the universe, in accounting for the truth of our beliefs."[20] But, Taylor says, this would require dropping the scheme–content distinction only if making the distinction means that we have "to disaggregate and isolate somehow a component of pure precategorised reality, which could then somehow be compared or related to language."[21] This, he says, is no more plausible than the claim that there is no distinction between form and color because we can't isolate the one element from the other. Taylor cites what he regards as clear cases of the distinction. If yesterday there were twelve chairs in a room and today there are ten, then reality has changed, not our language for classifying it. But when Aristotle says the sun is a planet and we say it is a star, the reality has remained the same, and we have employed a new classification scheme. Not only is there a distinction between scheme and content; it is also clear that some schemes are better than others for dealing with the content they organize. This does not mean that any scheme can

be "compared to reality unframed by a scheme" or that all schemes can be ranked regarding adequacy against one another ("because some raise quite different questions"). "But when all this is said, some schemes can be ranked; and ranked because they permit us to grasp, or prevent us from grasping, features of reality, including causal features, which we recognise as being independent of us." "This," Taylor says, "is the nub of what I want to call realism."[22]

Taylor is right in the sense that once we have a certain description of reality as an unproblematic given (e.g., agree that there are twelve chairs in this room), then we can readily distinguish a change in reality from a mere change in descriptive scheme. But the issue between the realist and Rorty is whether the scheme–content distinction applies "all the way down" – that is, whether all our descriptions of the world must involve a distinguishable scheme and content. Taylor's examples say nothing on this issue. His debate with Rorty identifies the issue as a crux of their disagreement but fails to resolve it. Further progress requires discussion of the resources Davidson provides Rorty for an alternative to the scheme–content distinction.

On the other hand, Taylor is right in saying that we simply begin from a realist stance. We are, from the beginning, in cognitive contact with objects independent of us, not only knowing that there is such a world, but also knowing many specific things about it. However, this baseline knowledge of the world is simply a matter of knowing certain commonplaces, not of having any theoretical account of this knowledge – in terms, for example, of representations. Rorty may still be right that there is no prospect for our arriving at a substantive theoretical account of our knowledge.

In fact, I think he is right. Although we always start inquiry and reflection from baseline, humdrum truths, these are, of course, only privileged de facto. There is no reason in principle why they could not be criticized – analyzed, questioned, justified, or even eventually rejected. Such criticism is the business of philosophy. Philosophers have successfully criticized baseline truths about science, morality, religion, and politics. However, a couple of millennia of frustration should have taught us that there is no fruitful (or even coherent) way of criticizing baseline truths about truth itself. We can and must subscribe to all the commonplaces: we know truths, many truths are about the world, such truths tell us the way the world is, and so on. But whenever we try to get a critical perspective on these truths about truth, we wind up with dubious assumptions, misleading pictures, incoherent formulations. This view is not itself the conclusion of a philosophical perspective on truth, but merely a prudential judgment based on the historical record.

Accepting this sort of humdrum, philosophically unloaded sense of truth allows us to avoid the pitfalls of many of Rorty's formulations, which run aground by trying to avoid talk of our knowing truths about the world.[23] Without a forthright acceptance of humdrum realism, Rorty is tempted to replace truth with group consensus and hesitates to say that philosophical views opposed to his are wrong, maintaining only that he has offered preferable "alternative descriptions." Such equivocations leave him open to charges of incoherent relativism and skepticism. But these difficulties dissolve once we accept humdrum realism.[24]

Rorty can, therefore, escape skepticism by accepting the humdrum truths of common sense (we might even say, of sanity) that express the reality of our world and our everyday knowledge of it. Such realism is essential to avoid incoherence, but it is insufficient to support any deeper philosophical theories about truth or reality. Contemporary debates about realism have vacillated between self-refuting retreats from humdrum realism for the sake of avoiding theoretical excesses and efforts to parlay humdrum realism into a theoretical structure. Critics of metaphysical realism rightly attack its representationalist assumptions but wrongly think that their critique requires an idealistic rejection of mind-independent realities. Defenders rightly assert the humdrum truth of realism but falsely conclude that this establishes full-blooded metaphysical realism with its representationalist presuppositions. Both sides go wrong by insisting on a substantive philosophical account. On my reading of Rorty, we can firmly establish ourselves simply within the limits of humdrum realism, lapsing neither into incoherently skeptical antirealism nor into gratuitous theoretical explanations. Nature endows us with just enough epistemology and metaphysics, and we go badly wrong when we seek either more or less than this endowment.

Notes

1. Charles Taylor emphasizes, against Rorty, that representationalism is more central than foundationalism in modern thought. Cf. "Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophical Arguments* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995), pp. 2–3. Taylor ties representationalism to characteristic modern views not only in epistemology and philosophy of mind but also in ethics and politics.
2. This point is particularly important in assessing recent work in the philosophy of mind (by, for example, Fodor), which gives representations a central role in explaining the mechanisms by which knowledge occurs, but without offering a representationalist account of justification as a normative, epistemological concept. As I understand it, epistemological behaviorism has no objections to this sort of appeal to representations. For the same reason, I think Rorty should

have no difficulty accepting Michael Devitt's point that Rorty's critique of correspondence as an epistemological theory does not, in principle, exclude it as an element in a causal explanation of knowledge. See Devitt's *Realism and Truth*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991), ch. 11.

3. Cf. PMN 182, and Wilfrid Sellars, "Empiricism and the Philosophy of Mind," in *Science, Perception, and Reality* (London: Routledge, 1963), p. 169.
4. PMN 183–5, 188–90. Rorty notes two ways in which we can, without abandoning epistemological behaviorism, allow a sense in which the infant has knowledge of its hunger. First, it knows "what it is like to be hungry," where this simply means that it feels hungry and does not constitute knowledge in the sense of *justified* true belief. Second, we may ascribe propositional knowledge to the prelinguistic infant in *anticipation* of the linguistic abilities it will someday develop (and we may even make such ascriptions to "the more attractive-looking sort of animals" in virtue of our ability to *imagine* them speaking).
5. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 117.
6. "Putnam and the Relativist Menace," *The Journal of Philosophy* 90 (1993): 451 (TP 50).
7. Ibid.
8. For a similar critique in the context of Rorty's effort to appropriate the work of Heidegger and Gadamer, see John Caputo, "The Thought of Being and the Conversation of Mankind," *Review of Metaphysics* 36 (1983): 661–85.
9. For an excellent discussion of this point (and with particular reference to Rorty's treatment of the Galileo–Bellarmine case), see Richard Bernstein's classic review of PMN, "Philosophy and the Conversation of Mankind," *Review of Metaphysics* 33 (1980), reprinted in his *Philosophical Profiles* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), especially pp. 50–7.
10. Thomas McCarthy, "Philosophy and Social Practice: Richard Rorty's 'New Pragmatism,'" in *Ideals and Illusions* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), pp. 17, 19. This is a revised version of "Private Irony and Public Decency," *Critical Inquiry* 16 (1990): 355–70. (See also Rorty's response, "Truth and Freedom," in the same volume.)
11. Strictly speaking, metaphysical realism and the correspondence theory of truth are independent claims. (Michael Devitt has particularly emphasized this point in "What Has Truth to Do with Realism?", chapter 4 of his *Realism and Truth* [Oxford: Blackwell, 1991]. Marian David, to whom I am indebted for very helpful discussion on this topic, also makes the point in his *Correspondence and Disquotation* [Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994], p. 18, n. 2.) I could think that everything is mind-dependent (and so deny metaphysical realism in favor of metaphysical idealism) and still understand truth as correspondence (i.e., the adequate representation of objects by beliefs). Conversely, I could accept mind-independent realities but deny that knowing the truth about these realities is a matter of having beliefs that correctly represent them. The way to do this would be to say, with Frege, that the content of my belief *is* – not merely *represents* – an abstract state of affairs and that its truth consists in the instantiation of that

state of affairs. If, however, we reject both metaphysical idealism and Fregean Platonism, realism and correspondence become inextricably linked. For then the truth of a belief can consist neither in its idealistic coherence with other beliefs nor in its nonrepresentational correspondence to a fact that instantiates its abstract content. This leaves the non-Platonic metaphysical realist with no option but to understand the truth of a belief as its adequate representation of its object. Because contemporary debates about metaphysical realism typically assume a rejection of both idealism and Platonism, they do not distinguish realism from the correspondence theory of truth.

12. Charles Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," in Alan Malachowski (ed.), *Reading Rorty* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990), p. 270.
13. Rorty, "Taylor on Truth", in James Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), p. 22 (TP 86).
14. Donald Davidson, "The Very Idea of a Conceptual Scheme," in *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), p. 189.
15. Rorty, "Taylor on Truth," in Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, 26 (TP 90).
16. Rorty is quoting (with approval) from Michael Devitt, "Dummett's Anti-realism," *The Journal of Philosophy* 80 (1983): 73–99.
17. The debate was initiated by Taylor's "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," in Malachowski (ed.), *Reading Rorty*, 256–75. It continued with Rorty's reply, "Taylor on Truth," in Tully (ed.), *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism*, 20–36 (TP 84–97), and Taylor's response, "Reply to Rorty," in the same volume, 219–22.
18. "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition," p. 271
19. Ibid., p. 272.
20. "Taylor on Truth," p. 23 (TP 87).
21. "Reply to Rorty," p. 219.
22. "Reply to Rorty," p. 220.
23. The humdrum view of truth shares the spirit of a number of other recent views, including Arthur Fine's "natural ontological attitude" (cf. "The Natural Ontological Attitude" in J. Leplin [ed.], *Scientific Realism* [Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984]) and Paul Horwich's "minimal truth" in *Truth* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1990). Rorty often seems to endorse the humdrum view, for example, in the Introduction to CP and in "Realism and Anti-realism," in L. Nagl and R. Heinrich (eds.), *Wo Steht die Analytische Philosophie Heute?* (Vienna: Oldenbourg, 1986), pp. 103–15. In the latter discussion, he emphasizes the similarity of his view to that of Fine.
24. In a similar manner, Kai Nielsen defends Rorty against Jaegwon Kim's criticism by distinguishing the "common-sense" realism Rorty holds from the metaphysical realism that he rejects. See J. Kim, "Rorty on the Possibility of Philosophy," *The Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1980): 588–97; K. Nielsen, *After the Demise of Tradition: Rorty, Critical Theory, and the Fate of Philosophy* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1991), pp. 43–7.

3 Rorty on Knowledge and Truth

MICHAEL WILLIAMS

Richard Rorty is notorious for announcing – indeed, celebrating – the death of philosophy. Rorty has not always been happy with the label "death-of-philosophy theorist." As he sees it, the works of those writers we consider great philosophers are likely to be read as long as there are readers. The object of his critical attention is something narrower: philosophy as it is understood and practiced in mainstream Anglo-American philosophy departments. Philosophy of this kind is supposed to deal with a range of distinctively philosophical problems and thus to have a special subject matter. Familiar examples of philosophical problems are the nature of knowledge, the mind–body problem, and the question of whether moral values are objective. Philosophers also used to suppose that philosophy had not just distinctive problems but also special methods – for example, that philosophical inquiry was conceptual rather than empirical – though today this is an issue about which there is no consensus. In truth, the consensus on what problems are philosophical (or whether there is anything distinctive about the problems that get called "philosophical") is also far from complete. Such developments do not surprise Rorty, who thinks that "analytic philosophy" is more a way of picking out a sociological group than a description of an intellectually coherent movement. Rorty thinks that his account of the inner logic of the analytic movement in philosophy has been confirmed by events.

Rorty began his career looking himself like a paid-up member of the analytic movement. For example, he was an influential defender of eliminative materialism. But he has always been deeply involved with metaphilosophical questions. In the introduction to his anthology *The Linguistic Turn*, he questioned the then-popular view that, by centering philosophy on questions of language and meaning, analytic philosophy provides philosophers with new and more "scientific" methods for solving traditional philosophical problems.[1] This skeptical stance hints at the radical views for which he is best known.

Rorty's increasing skepticism about mainstream analytic philosophy was apparent in numerous essays that he published in the 1970s (collected in

Consequences of Pragmatism). Even so, his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* hit the profession like a bombshell. His argument provoked not just criticism but outrage. To put it no more strongly, he remains a controversial figure in mainstream philosophical circles.

In this essay, I shall do three things. First, I shall give an account of the argument of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, showing how that argument leads Rorty to identify with a version of pragmatism. I shall then suggest that, in his later writings, Rorty betrays an attraction to views that are seriously in tension with the pragmatism he officially espouses. I shall close with some speculations about the root causes of this bifurcation in his philosophical outlook.

AGAINST THE TRADITION

In putting forward his end-of-analytic-philosophy argument, Rorty presents himself as a "therapeutic" philosopher, the sort of philosopher who thinks that our canonical "problems of philosophy" are to be set aside rather than solved theoretically. But, while Rorty acknowledges debts to therapists like Wittgenstein and Austin, he differs from them in the emphasis he places on the historical origins of philosophical problems. For Rorty, philosophical problems are not perennial. They are not perennial even if they are pseudoproblems. Rather, our current "problems of philosophy" are artifacts of a historically contingent, hence optional, constellation of ideas. Prominent in this constellation are certain conceptions of knowledge, representation, and truth. The great virtue of the analytic movement is to have subjected these ideas to devastating criticism. In effect, by undermining its own most fundamental presuppositions, analytic philosophy has transcended and canceled itself.

To make his case, Rorty develops a historical-explanatory account of the course of philosophy from the seventeenth century to the present day. His starting point is the conventional view that modern philosophy begins with Descartes and is distinctive in that it takes the form of "epistemology" or the "theory of knowledge." Descartes's epistemological turn involves two moves: introducing methodological skepticism as the principal tool for investigating the foundations of knowledge and redefining "the mind" as that to which each of us has privileged access. These two moves interact in a critical way, for given Descartes's epistemic conception of mind, skepticism itself acquires a new and more radical form. Ancient skepticism revolves around the question of whether we can attain

certainty about the "real nature" of things; and its epistemological core is the problem of the regress of justification, especially as applied to the standard for distinguishing knowledge from opinion or truth from falsity (the problem of the criterion). The Cartesian revolution raised a dramatic new question: to what extent are our "ideas" accurate representations of "external" reality? Indeed, do we have any reason for believing that the "external" world – the world beyond our private representations – so much as exists?

Descartes is not doing pure epistemology, for he thinks that exploring the limits of skepticism leads to fundamental metaphysical insights (for example, about the nature of mind and matter). But Locke takes an important step toward a more austerely epistemological conception of the philosopher's task. Locke's aim is to determine the scope and limits of human knowledge by charting the powers of the mind. The mind in question is and must be the Cartesian mind, potentially transparent to itself: this is what saves Locke from involvement with "physical" or even experimental considerations. Nevertheless, while introspective, Locke's method remains empirical.

Both Cartesian rationalism and Lockean empiricism are gravely flawed, as is seen by Kant. As we just noted, Descartes's philosophical project is doubly foundational. Epistemologically, he wants to locate certainties that resist the most determined attempts at skeptical undermining. Metaphysically, he hopes that those certainties will include the basic commitments of his new physics (for example, the identification of matter with extension). But the epistemological and metaphysical components in his thought cancel each other. His new form of skepticism forces him to take a subjective turn, seeking certainty within the mind. This means that his metaphysical project amounts to an attempt to determine a priori, on the basis of our ideas alone, fundamental facts about the world. This is impossible. Rationalist metaphysics is an exercise in dogmatism.

As for Locke, though he helps himself to the Cartesian conception of mind, he is impatient with Cartesian skepticism. So, where Descartes feels the need to place the newly emerging physics on secure metaphysical and epistemological foundations, Locke conducts his exploration of the limits of human knowledge within a corpuscular-mechanical picture of the world, which he regards as the best (if not yet the only) game in town. This insouciant attitude to skepticism points to a deep flaw in Locke's "naturalistic" approach to epistemological questions: he thinks of normative questions about what we have a right to accept as simple empirical questions about what we are able (as a matter of fact) to find out.

Kant's "transcendental idealism" is supposed to offer a way of avoiding the errors of both rationalist dogmatism and empiricist naturalism. For Kant, all empirically knowable objects, "outer" as well as "inner," are subject to conditions inherent in our cognitive constitution. This means, Kant thinks, that we can have a priori knowledge of whatever facts necessarily belong to the world as we are able to conceive it. So, for example, it is a precondition of our having any awareness of an objective world that we see the world as subject to causal laws. According to Kant, such transcendental arguments secure our right to certain fundamental presuppositions of objective knowledge. However, he does not think that such arguments are available with respect to all matters of human concern. The existence of God, for example, is not an empirical issue. Such matters, because they lie outside the scope of the conditions of objective knowability, remain matters of judgment or faith.

For Rorty, Kant marks a second turning point. What Kant offers is an understanding of philosophy as a rigorous discipline distinct from both speculative metaphysics (or proto-science) and empirical psychology. With Kant, we get our first clear view of epistemology as a nonempirical discipline that determines the cognitive status of all other subjects: that is, whether or not they can be understood as aiming at objective knowledge. At the beginning of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty asks how "refuting the skeptic" ever got to be more than "the languid academic exercise of composing a reply to Sextus Empiricus?" (PMN 223). The development of philosophy-as-epistemology, from Descartes to Kant, provides the answer. Exploring a priori the limits of objective knowledge, the obverse of exploring the limits of skepticism, is a way of classifying forms of discourse or inquiry into those that are "rational," "scientific," or "cognitively significant," and those that are "emotive" or "merely expressive." Philosophy-as-epistemology becomes central to culture.

This account of the development of modern philosophy commits Rorty to an account of the linguistic turn in philosophy that is at odds with Michael Dummett's well-known view. For Dummett, Frege, the founder of analytic philosophy, is as much a revolutionary as Descartes.[2] Descartes makes epistemology the foundation of philosophy, thus transforming philosophy. Kant gives the Cartesian revolution approach its most sophisticated expression. He also perhaps points the way beyond it, by focusing attention on the conditions of judgment (and not just knowledge). But it is Frege who makes the decisive break, displacing epistemology from its foundational position, thus transforming philosophy once again. After Frege, the

foundation of philosophy becomes philosophy of language or "the theory of meaning." Seen in this light, analytic philosophy is sharply discontinuous with philosophy-as-epistemology.

Rorty's Frege makes no such radical break with the epistemological tradition. On the contrary, he is a member of the "back to Kant" movement: the most original member, perhaps, but a member for all that. By the end of the nineteenth century, philosophy was under threat from scientific naturalism in general and scientific psychology in particular. Frege's turn to logic and language is an attempt to rescue philosophy as a normative discipline, a discipline concerned with the validity and not just the origin of, say, our mathematical ideas. This attempt requires eliminating the Kantian tradition's last vestiges of psychologism. Pace Dummett, the analytic movement amounts to a strategy for continuing to pursue the epistemological questions that concern Kant and his predecessors, though in the idiom of language rather than that of "ideas." The method may have changed, but the goals remain the same: fixing the lines of demarcation between the a priori and the empirical or between the cognitively significant and the merely expressive, showing where we should and should not be "realists" about truth, and so on.[3]

A distinction that is absolutely essential to this neo-Kantian style of philosophizing is that between scheme and content. Accepting this distinction, we will see empirical knowledge as involving two cleanly separable components, concepts and intuitions, or as resulting from the cooperation of two faculties, understanding and sensibility. On this model, "mind" or "language" orders or interprets the factual elements "given" to consciousness. The task of the philosopher is to track the contributions of these two components, thus separating the a priori elements in our system of beliefs from the empirical. According to Rorty, the lesson of philosophy in the twentieth century is that no principled distinction between scheme and content can be drawn.

Sellars's attack on "the Myth of the Given," Quine's skepticism about the analytic–synthetic distinction, Wittgenstein's critique of ostensive definition and "private language," and Austin's sarcasm about "the ontology of the sensible manifold" all point to this conclusion. What unites these critics of the Kantian tradition is a kind of methodological behaviorism, an outlook made plausible by the linguistic turn itself. In their different ways, these critics insist that we examine how we actually use words, revise beliefs, evaluate theories, or conduct inquiries. Only on the basis of such evidence can we decide whether there is any payoff, theoretical or practical,

in partitioning our beliefs or statements into "true-by-virtue-of meaning-alone versus true-by-virtue-of-fact" or "purely observational versus theory-laden." They argue that there is not.

Rejecting the possibility of any principled scheme–content distinction leads to a picture of knowledge and meaning that is holistic, coherentist, and pragmatic. There is no position of cosmic exile from which the philosopher can pass judgment on the epistemic status of everyone else's claims or theories. Rather, inquiry is a process of constantly reweaving our web of belief under the impact of observation and in the light of multiple interests and criteria, both theoretical and practical. This holistic outlook puts an end to the projects of epistemological or metaphysical demarcation that philosophers want to keep alive, because it erases all the methodological distinctions – between the a priori and the a posteriori, the necessary and the contingent, fact and value, the sciences and the humanities, and so on – that such projects depend on. At this point, analytic philosophy transcends and cancels itself.

PRAGMATISM AND TRUTH

Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature is centrally concerned with the development of modern philosophy and with the fate, in our own times, of the conception of philosophy, philosophy-as-epistemology, to which the early modern period gave rise. But Rorty has a broader story to tell. The basic theme of this story is present in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* but is much more strongly emphasized in subsequent writings. It is the claim that the fundamental error of our philosophical tradition in its entirety is the notion that truth is correspondence with reality. The deep root of the quest for truth-as-correspondence is the urge to be guided by something greater than ourselves: the World, the True, or the Good. Thus, for Rorty's money, even today's hard-headed scientific realists evince an essentially *religious* attitude.

The quest for "ultimate reality" is as old as philosophy itself. Philosophy-as-epistemology is just its most recent incarnation. The quest is always associated with demarcational projects that partition matters of human concern into an upper and a lower division: knowledge versus opinion, nature versus convention, philosophy versus poetry. However, the holistic, broadly coherentist conception of inquiry common to Quine, Sellars, and Wittgenstein makes it difficult to see individual sentences or beliefs as "corresponding" to anything. Whether we look at inquiry from the standpoint of method or of truth, we find no room for philosophy.

Rorty's focus on truth reflects an increasing self-identification with pragmatism. Initially, his adoption of a broadly coherentist picture of justification and inquiry led him to follow Sellars and to sympathize with the Peircean suggestion that truth is ideal justification; assertability at the end of inquiry. But he soon deserted the Pragmatism of Pierce for that of James and Dewey, which is characterized by a radical antiessentialism with respect to the traditional objects of philosophical concern.[4] Rorty's pragmatist does not replace a correspondence conception of truth with an epistemic conception. Rather, he holds that truth (or rationality or goodness) is not the sort of thing that we can usefully theorize about. When James insists that we look at truth in action, and identifies the true with what is good in the way of belief, he is really saying that we should forget metaphysical accounts of the nature of truth and look at how we actually conduct inquiry.[5]

Where Quine and Sellars play perhaps the key roles in the argument of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, the indisputable hero of Rorty's later work (among philosophers coming out of the analytic tradition, at least) is Donald Davidson. Among contemporary philosophers, Rorty singles out Davidson as having done the most to advance the Pragmatist cause. Even in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty treats Quine and Sellars as important complements to each other. Quine, while decisively critical of the analytic–synthetic distinction, remains wedded to the idea that there is something right about empiricism. Sellars, while critical of empiricism, cannot quite get over the thought that philosophy deals with conceptual issues. Furthermore, both Quine and Sellars retain sympathy for demarcational projects. This is because both retain a commitment to the view that the natural sciences, especially physics, get at "hard facts" or "the ultimate nature of reality" in a way that the softer disciplines do not. According to Rorty, Davidson avoids all temptations to backslide. Not only does his work on truth and meaning reinforce both Sellars's rejection of "given" facts and Quine's repudiation of the analytic–synthetic distinction, it traces the connections between belief, truth, and meaning in a way that deprives these notions of all demarcational import. As a result, Davidson is wholly free of the lingering scientism that prevents Quine and Sellars from pursuing their arguments to the limit.

Another figure casting an increasingly lengthy shadow over Rorty's pragmatism is Thomas Kuhn. Rorty thinks that Kuhn's distinction between "normal" and "revolutionary" science invites wide application. In all areas of discourse, there are times when inquiry proceeds more or less normally, solving in agreed-upon ways commonly recognized problems formulated in a familiar vocabulary. But sometimes we can make progress only by

dropping old questions in favor of new ones or by changing the basic vocabulary that we use to formulate our questions and projects. Rorty thinks that his own pragmatist attack on traditional philosophy is an instance of just such an attempt at revolutionary change. While he remains convinced that analytic philosophy, culminating in the work of Davidson, fatally undermines its own presuppositions, he realizes that this is not something that can be strictly proved. Criticism of basic distinctions, however deep they go, can always be seen as invitations to produce better formulations. No research program as sophisticated as neo-Kantian philosophy in its late-twentieth-century manifestation finds itself so bereft of defensive resources that it is logically compelled to fold its tents and move on. But this is where the importance of diagnostic narratives makes itself felt once more. By showing just how long we have been spinning our wheels, they can make us sympathetic to the idea that it is time to try something new.[6]

Rorty's rejection of the correspondence or "realist" conception of truth is often thought to amount to an extreme form of linguistic idealism. If our beliefs do not answer to the world, truth is something we make up: the idea of objective truth goes by the board. Rorty thinks that the idea of "answering to the world" confuses causation with justification. In a way, the world does take a hand in regulating our beliefs. As Sellars in particular has made clear, we are trained in observation-reporting practices, which involve the causal triggering of reporting dispositions by external circumstances. But although the world plays a causal role in regulating our beliefs, it does not play a freestanding justifying role. This is because the situations that provoke observation reports do not demand to be described in any particular vocabulary. Nor do they determine the inferential or theoretical significance of the reports they provoke. What our interaction with the world does mean, however, is that we do not fully control the observations we make, with the result that our beliefs are always vulnerable to recalcitrant experiences.

Critics sometimes charge that by giving up on even a Piercean notion of truth, Rorty forfeits any conception of progress. Rorty replies that progress is measured from where we were – by reference to problems solved, anomalies removed, lines of inquiry opened up, and so on – and not by checking the distance between our current opinions and the End of Inquiry. We have no conception of what it would be for inquiry to have an end, no idea of "the Truth" as the Ideal Theory of Everything or the way that Nature itself would like to be described.[7]

Rorty has also been widely suspected of harboring views that, if not conventionally skeptical, are irrationalist and relativistic. He rejects both charges. His relaxed version of coherentism, he argues, while it entails that

justification is less algorithmic than many epistemologists would like, does not imply the radical conclusion that anyone can (rationally) think whatever he or she likes or that any system of beliefs is as good as any other. Our settled beliefs – those to which we currently see no viable alternatives – together with our involuntary observations and our theoretical and practical interests, function as severe constraints on what we can accept.

Rorty sometime describes his position as "ethnocentric."[8] But all he means (or ought to mean) by this is that, at any stage of inquiry, we can only work with whatever beliefs and theories and criteria we have on hand. In other words, we have to accept the irreducible contingency of our investigative and argumentative resources. Given this contingency, there are likely to be issues with respect to which, at any given time, not all people can find common ground. But this does not mean that some (or any) disputes reflect commitments that are in principle "incommensurable." We cannot predict the future of inquiry, and we never know how the dialectical situation will evolve. Rorty thinks that only disappointed foundationalists will equate his thoroughgoing fallibilism with skepticism, relativism, or irrationalism.

RORTY'S HUMEAN TURN

I turn now to another strain in Rorty's thought. In his middle period, as we have seen, Rorty repudiates the neo-Kantian version of empiricism that he takes to have dominated contemporary Anglophone philosophy. And increasingly, he does so in the name of Pragmatism. However, beginning with the essays collected as *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty's own thinking takes a turn back toward the very ideas that he earlier repudiated (and continues to repudiate). I can best bring this out by comparing Rorty's ideas with Hume's, paying special attention to Hume's distinctive take on philosophical skepticism.

For philosophers in the Cartesian tradition, thinking about skepticism is a way – perhaps *the* way – of gaining insight into the nature and foundations of human knowledge. Seen from this angle, skepticism exists to be overcome by philosophical theory. Hume, however, denies that skepticism can be overcome in any theoretically satisfying way. According to Hume, skepticism is "a malady, which can never be radically cured." In particular, investigating the foundations of knowledge is not only useless but counterproductive. This is because, according to Hume, skeptical doubt "arises naturally from a profound intense reflection on those subjects" and, in consequence, "always encreases, the farther we carry our reflections, whether in

opposition or conformity to it."[9] Fortunately however, skeptical argumentation, no matter how logically watertight, is practically ineffective. It is not wholly without practical effect in that reflection on the weakness of human understanding has a tendency to induce a modest, nondogmatic, epistemological attitude, which Hume calls "mitigated skepticism." But there is no question of anyone's becoming a radical skeptic. Belief in the existence of external objects, standing in stable causal relations, belongs to human nature. So, too, does the tendency to form inductive expectations concerning the future behavior of things around us. Such natural beliefs and inferential dispositions, because they are not based on argument, cannot be undermined by argument. Radically skeptical arguments may induce temporary amazement, and in extreme cases despair, but they never lead to enduring conviction.

Hume's response to skepticism is often called "naturalistic" because it stresses the causal-psychological basis of our fundamental beliefs and inferential dispositions. Natural belief defeats skepticism because natural belief is involuntary. Still, it is important to be clear that Hume does not take his naturalistic epistemology to be any kind of theoretical answer to the skeptic. So far as Hume can see, the skeptic's arguments are theoretically unassailable. Indeed, the fatal step is taken when we ask certain kinds of questions – philosophical questions – about the foundations of our most fundamental convictions. Once these questions are brought on stage, skepticism is waiting in the wings.

Hume's epistemological outlook is thus biperspectival. There are two perspectives, that of philosophy and that of common sense, which clash irreconcilably. Impressive as the skeptic's arguments are in the rarefied atmosphere of philosophical reflection, we are incapable of taking them seriously when we return to "common life." Accordingly, if we are sufficiently reflective, we will be skeptics in the study but, as a matter of psychological necessity, believers everwhere else. Still, the reflective urge is natural to some people, whose "sifting humor" causes them to tire of an unrelieved diet of everyday pursuits. Furthermore, just as common sense certainty is the standing condition of everyday life, skepticism is the natural outcome of philosophical reflection pursued to the limit. A skeptical outlook is therefore "unnatural" only in the sense that it is tightly bound to an unusual context of inquiry. In their proper places, skepticism and certainty both arise naturally. Both are context-bound, though bound to different contexts.

The contrast between Hume's two contexts – the study and common life – is worth exploring further. The business of the study is the pursuit

of truth about the most fundamental matters. This pursuit demands that we withdraw from all social interaction, set aside all practical concerns, turn our attention away from our surroundings, and suppress all emotions. Life in the study is thus solitary, theoretically oriented, reflective, and detached. Common life is the exact opposite. It is social, practical, perceptually responsive, and emotionally engaged. Thus, every aspect of common life works against taking skepticism seriously. But equally, precisely because the context of philosophical inquiry involves a complete withdrawal from the characteristic engagements and attitudes of everyday life, in our philosophical moments we can encounter skepticism as a profound and disturbing truth. It is therefore not surprising that the perspectives of philosophy and common life cannot be reconciled. The two perspectives are tied to wholly different – indeed incompatible – cognitive orientations.

Hume's account of skepticism leads him to identify three human types: the vulgar, the false philosophers, and the true philosophers. The vulgar, lacking philosophical curiosity, remain permanently in the natural attitude, untroubled by skeptical doubts. False philosophers try to meet the skeptic on his own ground and are thereby led to embrace elaborate and ultimately absurd metaphysical and epistemological systems. The true philosophers are (Humean) skeptics. They recognize the futility of trying to respond to the skeptic in a theoretical way: that is a game the skeptic always wins. But this recognition leaves them with something of a split personality: believers in the street, skeptics in the study. Since the outlooks of philosophy and common life cannot be reconciled, the fate of the true philosophers is to oscillate between them.

Hume's outlook is very much alive in philosophy today. It has found a powerful advocate in Thomas Nagel.[10] But one would not offhand expect it to appeal to Rorty. Nagel, after all, is Rorty's paradigm "intuitive realist," and the intuitive realist is the sworn enemy of pragmatism. Nevertheless, the outlook Rorty defends under the name of "irony" has a lot in common with what Hume and Nagel think of as skepticism. Indeed, Rortyan irony recapitulates point for point the structure of Humean skepticism.

Rorty's starting point is the observation that everyone subscribes to some ultimate set of commitments, articulated in terms of what Rorty calls a person's "final vocabulary." Thus:

> All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs and their lives. . . . I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary." It is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of

> these words, their user has no noncircular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity or a resort to force. (CIS 73)

Notice that in the very idea of a final vocabulary there is a strong suggestion of a traditional skeptical argument: a final vocabulary is one whose worth cannot be defended in a noncircular way. Since circular justification is worthless, commitments articulated with the aid of one's final vocabulary cannot be justified at all. In particular, they cannot be justified in the face of alternative final vocabularies. A vivid awareness of the groundlessness of one's ultimate commitments is constitutive of what Rorty calls "irony." An ironist meets three conditions:

> (1) She has radical and continuing doubts about [her] final vocabulary, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies . . .; (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. (CIS 73)

Simply put, an ironist is a skeptic with respect to her own (and everyone else's) final vocabulary.

According to Rorty, the opposite of irony is common sense, "for that is the watchword of those who unselfconsciously describe everything important in terms of the final vocabulary to which they and those around them are habituated" (CIS 74). However, attachment to common sense comes in two forms. "Nonintellectuals," as Rorty calls them, are simply untroubled by questions about the status of their ultimate commitments. By contrast, "metaphysicians," aware of the possibility of a skeptical/ironic stance, think that common sense needs philosophical defense. They therefore devote themselves to two tasks. One is to free common sense from apparent internal conflicts (e.g., by showing how apparently conflicting intuitions about our moral duties can be reconciled). But coherence is not enough. On the deepest level, what metaphysicians need to show is that our current final vocabulary gets things right: that it is the correct vocabulary for saying how the world really is, the vocabulary that cuts Nature at the joints. Thus, the metaphysicians are comfortable not only with "first order" common sense but with a commonsense, prepragmatic conception of truth, with an epistemology to match. As Rorty puts it:

> The metaphysician is still attached to common sense, in that he does not question the platitudes which encapsulate the use of a given final vocabulary, and in particular the platitude that there is a single permanent reality to be

> found behind the temporary appearances. . . . [M]etaphysicians believe that there are, out there in the world, real essences which it is our duty to discover and which are disposed to assist in their own discovery. (CIS 74–5)

Rorty's metaphysician is a metaphysical realist.

We see right away that Rorty, uncannily echoing Hume, divides the world into three parties. Nonintellectuals, who go about their business untroubled by questions about the status of their basic beliefs and values, correspond to Hume's vulgar. Metaphysicians, intent on rescuing the common sense of their day from skeptical undermining, continue the work of Hume's false philosophers. The ironists have accepted that no such rescue job is possible. They are Hume's true philosophers, the skeptics.

How does an ironist live, given her supposed radical and continuing doubts? Since Rorty is by this stage less interested in traditional epistemological problems, such as the external world and induction, than in the value commitments and identity-conferring categories that shape a person's sense of who she is, his attitude to this question tends to provoke charges of relativism rather than of straightforward skepticism. Even so, his response is strikingly Humean.

According to Hume, anyone who has tried to refute extreme skepticism has "disputed without an antagonist." Similarly Rorty: if relativism is "the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as any other," then "No one holds this view. Except for the occasional co-operative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good" (CP 166). As "historicists" (CIS 74), ironists recognize that everyone inherits a final vocabulary that provides the basis for moral and political choices. This is not to say that we all move in lockstep: we have our idiosyncracies, though these result not from insights into ultimate truths not vouchsafed our fellows, but from what Rorty (quoting Philip Larkin) calls "the blind impress all our behavings bear." (Rorty's historicism is tempered by his regard for Freud.) But whether we look at where we embody the prejudices of out time and place or at the peculiar personal twists we give them, the point is the Humean one that lacking a disposition to make judgments is not an option. Ultimate commitments, though they may lack a foundation in reason, are not the result of arbitrary choices because they are not the result of choice at all.

Is there a tension here? If we are bound to have a final vocabulary, what becomes of our ironist's doubts? Consider Rorty himself, a self-described and committed "bourgeois liberal" for whom "cruelty is the worst thing."

Does Rorty have doubts about avoiding cruelty? It seems not. So what has become of his irony? Having gone this far down the Humean path, Rorty has no choice but to fall in with Hume's biperspectival solution to the conflict between philosophy and common life. Just as Hume finds skepticism in the study and certainty everywhere else, Rorty contrasts "private irony" with "liberal hope." In our active, public lives, we cannot be ironists, nor would it be desirable for us to try to be. But in our private, reflective moments we can contemplate the fragility and contingency of even the language in which we express our most heartfelt commitments.

This Humean turn, clearly discernible in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, is a shaping influence on Rorty's later thought. It brings other neo-Humean (or neopositivist) moves in its train. One of the most obvious is a tendency to take a sentimentalist view of values. Thus, for Rorty, the important instruments of moral change are not moral-political treatises, but novels (or perhaps journalistic exposés) that bring home to us the cruelty of our institutions: novels that make us feel the sufferings of the oppressed. In undermining the legitimacy of slavery, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* does more than *The Groundwork of the Metaphysic of Morals.*

It is surprising to find Rorty flirting with a neo-Humean outlook. This outlook involves finding a kind of truth in skepticism. But skepticism is something we are supposed to have put aside, having come to see it as an artifact of ideas about knowledge and truth that we would be better off without.

To be sure, there are differences between Rorty and Hume. Most evidently, where Hume deals with very general skeptical arguments about knowledge of the external world or the validity of inductive inference, Rorty is concerned with the ethico-political commitments that shape a person's life. But this shift of focus from the theoretical to the practical, far from easing the tension, creates new strains.

For Hume, skepticism's resistance to theoretical refutation does not matter since its influence will always be contained by the practical character of common life. But practical commitments are the focus of Rortyan irony. So the question arises: if a person really were an ironist, really were afflicted with "radical and continuing" doubts about her final vocabulary, is there any reason to suppose that the influence of these doubts could be confined to the study? For Hume, the question is not so pressing: no one can do anything without taking for granted the existence of a common world, expectations as to the general course of events, and various goals and preferences. But it is not obvious that, to live at all, one has to have the sorts of self-conscious ethico-political commitments that are formulated

with the aid of final vocabularies. Moreover, even if a person does have them, why suppose that his attachment to them will not be weakened by radical and continuing doubts? Rorty holds that, in our philosophical moments, we can be ironists even with respect to our deepest values. What keeps this skeptical irony securely private? Why doesn't such skepticism lead to cynicism, to a lack of commitment, to a life of self-involvement? Why doesn't private irony undermine liberal hope? Rorty himself betrays a hint of disquiet here, expressing the hope that, ideally, nonintellectuals would not be ironists. Strictly, this hope is redundant: only intellectuals can be ironists, since only intellectuals do the sort of reading that induces irony. What Rorty is really saying, I suspect, is that, ideally, society would not be composed entirely of ironist intellectuals; and the reason for not wanting this is that irony threatens the commitment that Rorty takes to be essential to making the world a kinder, gentler place.

Another sign of strain is this: even in confining us to the study, Rorty seems to be in two minds about the stance we take toward our final vocabularies. On the one hand, he tells us that reflection on the contingency of such vocabularies leads us to a detached historicism. We see our favorite words as things we owe to our time and place rather than to Nature or Truth. Any idiosyncracies in our outlook we understand to be the result of various blind impresses. But the study is also the site of self-invention, the place where we try to figure out what sort of person to be. Rorty argues that, faced with the question of what sort of person to be, intellectuals used to turn to religion; later they turned to philosophy; and now they turn to literature.[11] The "post-Philosophical culture" that Rorty celebrates is a "literary" culture in the sense that people concerned with self-invention (intellectuals, according to Rorty) seek guidance from models found in imaginative writing rather than from conclusions adduced by philosophical argumentation. On this account, the study is no longer a place for glum, passive reflection on the groundlessness of it all, but a place for active deliberation, for comparing and evaluating different kinds of lives. As Rorty himself says, such deliberation is not a matter of arbitrary choice. But neither can we engage in it while seeing ourselves simply as victims of circumstance.

Something has gone wrong.

FROM FALLIBILISM TO SKEPTICISM

I said that the neo-Humean outlook involves finding a kind of truth in skepticism. As a pragmatist, Rorty should never claim to find any such thing,

even in the study. Recall his response to the charge that he is a relativist. He says that if relativism is "the view that every belief on a certain topic, or perhaps about any topic, is as good as any other," then "No one holds this view. Except for the occasional co-operative freshman, one cannot find anybody who says that two incompatible opinions on an important topic are equally good" (CP 166). What he means by this, and what he ought to mean, is not that no one says this in the street, though intellectuals say it in the study. What he does and should mean is that no one does or should say this sort of thing anywhere, unless tricked into saying it by proponents of bad epistemological ideas.

I have argued that Rorty's irony is skepticism under another name. But there are grades of skepticism. A mild form of skepticism is the view that nothing is absolutely certain, that (given enough stage-setting) anything is revisable; that even the most deeply entrenched views can be revised or abandoned. Let us call this mild form of skepticism "fallibilism." A much more severe form of skepticism is radical skepticism. According to radical skepticism, it is not just that nothing is absolutely certain: rather, with respect to a given subject matter, there is not the slightest reason for believing one thing rather than another. Epistemically speaking, we might as well believe anything or nothing. The distinction between fallibilism and radical skepticism is crucially important for a philosopher like Rorty. This is because, while fallibilism is an essential part of pragmatism, radical skepticism is rooted in the very epistemological ideas that pragmatists reject. However, it seems to me that Rorty fails to keep the distinction clearly in view.

Examining Rorty's account of irony more closely, we see that he says different things about how the ironic stance is achieved.

In the first instance, the irony is the direct result of exposure to views different from one's own. Through being "impressed by other vocabularies, taken as final by people or books she has encountered," the ironist is led to "radical and continuing doubts about the vocabulary she is currently using" (CIS 73). There is an echo here of ancient Pyrrhonian skepticism, which depends on a method of using incompatible but equally plausible views to paralyze the capacity for judgment. But mere exposure to other views is surely too slender a basis for radical and continuing doubts. Being aware of alternative views does not amount to being impressed by them. Recall once more what Rorty says about relativism: that no one finds every view on any topic of importance equally appealing. I doubt that, even in the study, Rorty finds the vocabulary of de Maistre ("the priest and the executioner") as impressive as that of Mill ("experiments in living"). If irony depended on

the availability of equally impressive alternative vocabularies, the ironist's doubts would be sporadic rather than continuing. And since truly equal impressiveness is unlikely, they would typically not be radical either. The realization that intelligent people can hold views different from one's own can induce a degree of modesty. That is, it can make one a fallibilist. Radical skepticism, however, is not yet in view.

Rorty gives a second account of the genesis of irony. In this account, ironists proceed more theoretically. Awareness of diversity makes them "historicists and nominalists." Being "always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change," they are "always aware of the fragility and contingency of their final vocabularies" (CIS 74). Again, however, it is hard to see why this recognition should lead to more than fallibilism. Rorty gives the ironist's reasoning a more skeptical cast only by helping himself to an unearned connection between contingency and fragility. The rise of modern science is presumably contingent – it wasn't foreordained. Does that make the enterprise of scientific research fragile? Does it make premodern physics equally impressive?

Looking more closely, I think we can see that the appeal to diversity and historical contingency is just a softening-up maneuver. The real basis of irony is a fully general skeptical argument – the venerable "Agrippan" argument – smuggled in through the definition of final vocabulary. One's final vocabulary comprises the terms used to express one's ultimate commitments: commitments that one cannot justify in a noncircular way. An infinite regress of justification being impossible, all attempts at justification come to an end. This means that eventually one either goes around in a circle or acknowledges one's basic assumptions for what they are. Without a doubt, this argument offers a route to radical skepticism. But it depends on a foundationalist picture of justification, which Rorty generally repudiates.

Now we might wonder whether it is fair to saddle Rorty with the Agrippan (regress) argument. As we have already seen, he does not espouse any very general form of skepticism. But we must go carefully here. Rorty is certainly hostile to skepticism, but the form of skepticism that has commanded his attention is Cartesian skepticism, for which the original and paradigmatic problem is that concerning our knowledge of the external world. This problem is indeed plausibly traced to the picture of mind as the Mirror of Nature. But the regress problem is another matter. Could Rorty be sympathetic to skepticism in this form while remaining critical of the Cartesian variant?

No. Although he has tended to focus on Cartesian skepticism, his response to the skeptic has wide implications. In Rorty's eyes, traditional

skeptical problems take belief and meaning for granted. The skeptic presupposes that the contents of our beliefs and experiences could be just what they are, even if all (or most) of our beliefs were false. This is the situation we would be in if we were the victims of Descartes's Evil Deceiver and there were no external world or at least no world anything like the one we take ourselves to inhabit. But Rorty takes Davidson to have shown that belief, truth, and meaning are interrelated in ways that call the skeptic's presupposition into question. As a methodological behaviorist, Rorty holds that the ability to have thoughts and to hold beliefs (at least in the full sense in which human beings hold beliefs) requires mastering a language; and no one has mastered a language unless he gets a lot of things right. Someone who claims to doubt the truth of "$2 + 3 = 5$" isn't being hypercautious: he simply hasn't learned his numbers, hasn't learned to count. It would be absurd to say, with respect to such a platitude, "I see what you mean; I'm just not sure that I agree." Massive agreement is a precondition of meaningful disagreement. We have no option but to see an enormous amount of what we and everyone else believes as true. This is so even if "everyone else" includes the Ominiscient Interpreter, a being with only true beliefs. This means that, if we are to have thoughts at all, most of our beliefs must be actually true.[12]

This is not the place to evaluate this line of thought. The point is that Rorty not only accepts it wholeheartedly, he thinks that it says pretty much all that needs to be said in reply to the skeptic, Cartesian or Agrippan. This means that his own skepticism – his irony – is necessarily more restricted. Well, the reply will be, so it is: its target is the words belonging to our various final vocabularies. This is no help. A consequence of the relaxed epistemic holism of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* is that there is no essential difference between the way we argue about morals and politics and the way we argue about "factual" matters. Metaphysically speaking, Rorty has no concept of truth that would let him draw such a line, even if he wanted to. And looking at things from an epistemological angle – the only worthwhile angle for a pragmatist – all we ever do is reweave the web of belief as best we know how in the light of whatever considerations we deem to be relevant. While much reweaving is routine adjustment, sometimes more radical steps are required. Nothing is immune from revision. As a pragmatist, Rorty should have no truck with the language of "finality."

To be sure, situations can always arise that reveal differences of opinion that are deep and apparently irresolvable. But the sort of holist Rorty generally claims to be should treat such irresolvability as always relative to our current argumentative resources, which are in constant flux. If we see

no way to resolve a dispute, maybe we should look for one. We may find one or we may not. It depends on ingenuity and luck. But whether a dispute can be resolved (or creatively transcended) is a thoroughly contingent affair. It offers no reason to think that there is a theoretically interesting, epistemically based partition of our commitments into those that involve elements of a final vocabulary and those that do not. For a holist, there is no such thing as a commitment that is ultimate in the sense that it *can* only be defended in a circular way, for there is no way of saying once and for all what our dialectical resources may turn out to comprise. Recognizing the contingency of our dialectical situation is the antidote to the virus of finality, and thus the cure for the skeptical diseases it induces. Contingency is the friend of fallibilism but the sworn enemy of skepticism: that is, of irony. As we have seen, this is Rorty's own insight. That he loses track of it is the most ironic result of all.

Notes

1. Richard Rorty (ed.), *The Linguistic Turn* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976; 2nd enlarged ed. 1992).
2. Michael Dummett, *Frege: Philosophy of Language* (London: Duckworth, 1973), ch. 19. See also Dummett, *The Origins of Analytic Philosophy* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
3. For Rorty's attitude toward Dummett's attempt to make "realism versus anti-realism" the central question for philosophy, see CP xxvi–xxviii.
4. See Rorty, "Pragmatism, Davidson and Truth," in E. Lepore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), reprinted in Rorty, ORT; references are to this edition. Rorty writes (p. 130, n. 10) that he was persuaded of the untenability of the Peircean conception of truth by my claim that "we have no idea of what it would be for a theory to be ideally complete and comprehensive or of what it would be for inquiry to have an end." I make this claim in "Coherence, Justification and Truth," *Review of Metaphysics* 34 (1980): 243–72.
5. Perhaps because neither approach to truth makes our understanding of truth the key to traditional epistemological or metaphysical problems, Rorty pays scant attention to the distinction between Davidson's view that the concept of truth, while of considerable explanatory significance in the theory of meaning, must be taken as primitive and the "deflationary" view that truth talk is only an expressive convenience. Indeed, he often treats Davidson's view as a form of deflationism, a suggestion that Davidson emphatically (though perhaps not entirely convincingly) repudiates. For a discussion of Davidson and deflationism, see my "Meaning and Deflationary Truth," *Journal of Philosophy* (1999) 96: 545–64.
6. For Rorty's take on the importance of Kuhn's work, see "Thomas Kuhn, Rocks and the Laws of Physics" in Rorty, *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Penguin, 1999).

7. For Rorty's ways of dealing with the charge that pragmatism undermines the idea of progress, whether in science or politics, see his rejoinders to Wright, Putnam, Taylor, and others in TP.
8. See "Solidarity or Objectivity" in ORT.
9. David Hume, *A Treatise of Human Nature*, 2nd ed., ed. L. A. Selby Bigge, revised by P. H. Nidditch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1978). Quotations, p. 218.
10. It is the central theme of Nagel's *The View from Nowhere* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1986). For a general discussion of Humean biperspectivalism in contemporary philosophy, see my *Unnatural Doubts* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992; 2nd ed. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), ch. 1.
11. Rorty, lecture at Janos Pannonius University, Pecs, Hungary, June 2000.
12. See Donald Davidson, "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge," in Davidson, *Subjective, Intersubjective, Objective* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001).

4 From Realism or Antirealism to Science as Solidarity

JOSEPH ROUSE

> There is nothing wrong with science, there is only something wrong with the attempt to divinize it, the attempt characteristic of realistic philosophy. (ORT 34)

The pragmatist tradition, with which Richard Rorty actively aligns himself, has long been closely affiliated with the sciences. Pragmatists such as John Dewey or Willard van Orman Quine have understood themselves to be philosophical naturalists, where "naturalism" is defined as the view that philosophy is continuous with, or even a part of, a scientific understanding of the world. The significance of such a proposed assimilation of philosophy to science depends, however, upon the specific conception of science and scientific understanding that philosophy is supposed to emulate. An important and controversial aspect of Rorty's own contribution to pragmatism has been his reformulation of the terms in which we should understand the sciences and the scientific culture that the pragmatists endorse.

Rorty's conception of science, along with his view of the relations of science to philosophy and to culture more generally, has evolved in conversation with philosophical debates about scientific realism, and about a broader conception of scientific "objectivity" that scientific realism exemplifies. Part of the difficulty of getting a handle on these arguments, and on Rorty's own position, is that the term "realism" has been fraught with ambiguity. Sometimes it has been used simply to assert continuity between the familiar objects of our everyday surroundings and the strange and often unobservable objects postulated within scientific theories (electrons and black holes are just as real as tables and chairs). Sometimes it has been used to say that *only* the objects that function within scientific theories are real (e.g., that beliefs and desires are merely part of "folk psychology," which neuroscience will replace by talking about patterns of brain activity; or even that tables and chairs might be illusory remnants of folk physics, to be replaced by talk of quantum fields). Alternatively, it has been used to distinguish the natural objects whose existence is independent of human beings and their

concepts and practices from objects that are inextricably part of a human social world (e.g., institutions, practices, roles, or meanings). Perhaps the most clearly articulated philosophical use of the term is the claim that science aims, and often succeeds, at developing theories that are *true* in the specific philosophical sense of a correspondence between the content of linguistic expressions and the "way the world is" independent of human concepts or practices. Yet as Rorty himself has noted, the significance of even this last sense of "realism" depends upon which of several different "antirealist" doctrines are the focus of the realist's ire.[1]

Rorty's criticisms of scientific realism are not merely aimed at one or more specific philosophical doctrines. More fundamentally, he objects to an underlying yearning for "objectivity" that motivates both the persistent search for a philosophically viable realism and some of the familiar alternatives to realism. Rorty thinks that the quest for objectivity (or reality) reflects an unwillingness to settle for the best beliefs and reasons that we fallible human beings can muster with our best efforts. Instead, realists and others seeking objectivity want some stronger guarantee that we are *really* on the right path: our theories and methods are not just the best we can do, they are also objectively valid or correspond to reality independent of human interests. Like moralists seeking natural, rational, or divine authority for their recommendations, philosophers of science have looked beyond mere human reasoning for some transcendent grounds for the authority of science. Science, as realists conceive it, aims for and supposedly attains something greater (and more reliable) than do other, all-too-human activities. Rorty believes that such transcendent grounds for our beliefs and practices are both unattainable and uncalled for. Instead, he urges that respect for and reliance upon the sciences be detached from an urge for transcendence. To that end, he asks that we reconceive the sciences as aiming at solidarity with a human community rather than at objectivity or reality. Scientific communities should be admired for their constitutive moral virtues (at least relative to other communities) rather than for their supposedly rational methods. We should certainly appreciate and utilize the enhanced capacities for prediction and control of our surroundings that the sciences often provide, but we need not think that such capacities signify anything more than an ability to fulfill those particular human interests that depend upon reliable interaction with our surroundings.

My discussion of Rorty's conception of science falls into three sections. The first section considers Rorty's interpretation and criticisms of scientific realism and other philosophies of science that he thinks still seek objectivity as a way of transcending our all-too-human limitations. The second section

takes up his alternative conceptions of science as seeking solidarity within the ongoing "conversation" in which human beings develop vocabularies for understanding and coping with themselves and the world. The final section considers whether Rorty's constructive reconception of science succeeds in surpassing the philosophical conceptualizations that he takes to embody a mistaken attempt to transcend the contingencies of history and social practices.

REALISM AND THE QUEST FOR SCIENTIFIC OBJECTIVITY

An influential recent anthology in the philosophy of science holds that there is a consensus among philosophers of science that "three distinct alternative general approaches – scientific realism, neo-Kantian constructivism, and post-positivist empiricism – [are] the major competitors" as contemporary accounts of science.[2] Rorty's arguments against science-as-objective are aimed at all three of these approaches, so it is not surprising that he frames his objections around the very idea of a "philosophy of science."

> One of the principal reasons for the development of a subarea within philosophy called "philosophy of science" was the belief that 'science' (or at least, 'natural science') named a natural kind, an area of culture which could be demarcated by one or both of two features: a special method, or a special relation to reality. (ORT 46)

Each of the three competitive approaches identified in the philosophy of science anthology referred to previously, indeed fits within Rorty's schema. Typically, scientific realists argue that the sciences at their best have a special relation to reality (articulated in terms of reference and truth), while antirealists (empiricists and "constructivists") have looked instead to differing conceptions of method.[3] These appeals to reality or methodology are intended to serve at least three functions: to articulate crucial differences in kind between the (natural) sciences and other cultural practices, to understand the distinctive outcomes attributable to those differences, and to legitimate the distinctive authority that accrues to scientific claims as a result.

Rorty initially criticizes an assumption he takes to underlie realist and antirealist philosophies of science alike, namely, that scientific theories are attempts to "represent" the world. According to the standard representationalist conceptions, scientific theories propose a specific description or model of what some aspect of the world is composed of and how these

components characteristically interact. Thus, the kinetic theory of gases represents gases as composed of discrete molecules traveling at varying velocities, colliding with one another and with the walls of any surrounding container; the observable macroscopic properties of the gas (e.g., its temperature and pressure) are to be explained by the average kinetic energy of the molecules that compose it. Similarly, one part of molecular genetics represents the chromosomes of eukaryotic cells as containing sequentially ordered molecules of DNA, some of whose sequences of constituent chemical bases serve as templates for the intracellular construction of corresponding sequences of bases in shorter RNA molecules, which serve in turn as templates for the sequential assembly of chains of amino acids into proteins; the specific proteins present in those cells are thereby explained by the sequential order of the DNA in the cell's chromosomes.

If you were to ask scientists why we ought to believe these theories, their answers would typically appeal to specific experimental or observational evidence, particular explanatory capacities and conceptual economies of the theories themselves, and the manifest failure of any presently conceived alternative theory to account for this evidence in other terms. Philosophers who think of scientific knowledge as representation cannot simply accept these local, highly specific reasons at face value, however. The reasons scientists give are typically couched in terms of the vocabularies and methodological assumptions characteristic of the theories and the disciplinary practices in which they are employed.[4] If it turned out that these theoretical vocabularies and methodological assumptions were seriously flawed, that should also cast doubt upon the patterns of reasoning that employ them to justify the theoretical representations themselves. So representationalist philosophers of science see their task as providing a more general account of the difference between successful and unsuccessful theories (where "theories" are conceived as including their associated methods, instruments, conceptualizations, and patterns of reasoning).

The difference between realists and antirealists is due to their overall strategies for understanding and accounting for the difference between successful and unsuccessful theoretical representation. Realists typically argue that the crucial difference is a matter of whether the terms of a theory successfully match up with real kinds of objects or processes that occur *in the world*, such that the claims the theory makes about those objects are at least approximately true. For them, what matters is that molecules and electromagnetic fields actually exist and behave in much the way current theories represent them as behaving, whereas other proposed entities such as phlogiston, bodily humours, or vital entelechies do not exist. Antirealists, acutely

aware that we have no independent access to what really exists apart from our scientific theories and practices, instead look to some *internal* feature of scientific practices or their human practitioners to account for the difference between successful and unsuccessful representation. Typically, then, antirealists make less ambitious claims for what successful ("objective") theoretical representation amounts to: it is empirically adequate, rationally warranted, or based upon a consensus of the scientific community rather than true in the robust sense of corresponding to a mind-independent world.

Philosophers of science have developed many different interpretations of realism and many variants of empiricism, instrumentalism, social constructivism, and other antirealist approaches; they often believe that the subtle differences among these variants are crucial to their success or failure. Rorty's objections do not depend primarily upon the specific differences among their many versions or even upon the more general differences between realist and antirealist strategies. He hopes to challenge realists' and antirealists' shared commitment to a representationalist conception of theory, which is needed to confer significance upon their different accounts of successful representation. For example, in response to the worry that his criticisms of realism would give aid and comfort to instrumentalist versions of antirealism, Rorty rejoins that "we pragmatists try to distinguish ourselves from instrumentalists not by arguing against their answers, but against their questions" (ORT 52). I believe that we cannot avoid looking at these various answers, however, because Rorty's arguments against realists' and antirealists' questions turn on the supposed futility of trying to answer them. To see why this is so, I turn first to his criticism of the most widely discussed strategy for defending scientific realism.

To understand this strategy for defending scientific realism, we must first recognize the untenability of any direct argument for realism. Realists claim that the objects postulated in the best scientific theories correspond to kinds of objects whose existence is independent of human practices and capacities, and that the postulated behavior of those objects at least approximately corresponds to the ways those independently existing objects actually behave. If we had direct access to what the world is really like independent of what our theories say about it, we could then readily assess the extent of their correspondence to one another. But, of course, we have no such direct access to the world – that is why the problem supposedly arises in the first place. Any argument for scientific realism must therefore be indirect.

The most influential such indirect argument for a robust scientific realism takes the form of an "argument to the best explanation" modeled on

such arguments in the sciences themselves. Arguments to the best explanation begin with some phenomenon already known to exist, and postulate some other phenomenon whose existence would explain why the known phenomenon occurs in just the way that it does. If no other explanation is available for this phenomenon, or if the other possible explanations are not adequate, the argument goes, then we are justified in accepting the existence of the theoretically postulated phenomenon. Thus, in the examples mentioned earlier, we supposedly accept the kinetic theory as the best explanation for the observed behavior of gases, and we similarly accept theories about the genetic code as the best explanation for a wide range of phenomena ranging from hereditary transmission of traits to intracellular protein synthesis. But what do such arguments have to do with scientific realism?

Realists claim that there is another striking phenomenon that is very much in need of explanation, for which scientific realism provides the only plausible or acceptable account. Scientists investigate the world using concepts and methods that are substantially dependent upon the theories that they accept, and yet the results of those investigations are highly reliable in practice. Lights normally go on when we flip the right switch, bridges don't fall down, antibiotics cure infections, and so forth. Moreover, such reliability tends to increase over time through more refined development and application of theory. It would be very surprising, perhaps even miraculous, realists tell us, if highly theory-dependent methods achieved such extensive instrumental success using false theories, especially theories whose terms for object kinds did not correspond to real kinds of objects in nature. Hence, they conclude, the best – and perhaps only – adequate explanation of the widespread instrumental success of theory-dependent methods in science is scientific realism.

Rorty criticizes this line of argument at multiple levels. He first criticizes its underlying presumption that there is some clear, well-defined pattern of inference denoted by "arguments to the best explanation," which is both distinctive to science and assessable in general.

> Almost everybody who tries to resolve, rather than dissolve, the issue of realism versus instrumentalism takes for granted that we can find something like an "inferential principle" which can be called ["argument to the best explanation"] and which is more prevalent in modern science than in, say, Homeric theology or transcendental philosophy. . . . Postulating things you can't see to explain things you can see seems no more specific to those activities normally called "science" than is *modus ponens*. (ORT 53)

Unless such a distinctive pattern of scientific inference can be identified and shown to be generally successful, however, the argument for realism cannot get off the ground.[5]

Rorty then argues that this strategy for defending realism substitutes hand waving for an argument. We are supposed to accept scientific realism because the argument for it is of the same kind that we routinely accept in the sciences themselves. Scientists normally offer much more substantially developed arguments than scientific realists provide, however. Familiar scientific explanations typically give richly detailed understandings of the causal mechanisms that are postulated as the best explanation for various phenomena (that is a crucial part of what makes them good explanations). No one has a comparably detailed causal account of how scientists' talk about electrons or genes is reliably connected to the successful applications of scientific theories and methods. Thus, Rorty concludes:

> If realists are going to do any explaining that is not of the [vacuous] "dormitive power" sort they are going to have to describe two bits of mechanism and show how they interlock. They are going to have to isolate some reliability-inducing methods which are not shared with the rest of culture and then isolate some features of the world which gear in with those methods, . . . exhibited in sufficiently fine detail so that we can see just how they mesh. (ORT 55)

Rorty finally calls attention to one other crucial presumption of this argument for realism that may be difficult to defend. Why should we think that what suffices to explain some aspect of the world *to us* has anything to do with how the world really is apart from our concerns? The standards of explanatory success may have as much to do with what we, the explainers, are like as with the world to be explained. If, as Rorty believes, explaining is a thoroughly human, situated practice, then there is no reason to think that *any* explanation of the success of scientific methods should point toward an objective truth about reality.

> From a Wittgensteinian or Davidsonian or Deweyan angle, there is no such thing as "the best explanation" of anything; there is just the explanation that best suits the purpose of some explainer. Explanation is, as Davidson says, always under a description, and alternative descriptions of the same causal process are useful for different purposes. There is no description which is somehow "closer" to the causal transactions being explained than the others. (ORT 60)

This problem afflicts both sides of the realist's purported explanation of the success of science. It is not just that the theories invoked to explain the instrumental success of science answer to our all-too-human interests in explanation. The same is true of the pattern of instrumental success that the realist hopes to explain. These successes can only provide prediction and control in specific respects, which are valued because of their relation to particular human aspirations. Any explanation of those successes will still reflect the interests they satisfy. Thus, Rorty asks:

> Why should we think that explanations offered for [the purpose of prediction and control] are the "best" explanations? Why should we think that the tools which make possible the attainment of these particular human purposes are less "merely" human than those which make possible the attainment of beauty or justice? What is the relation between facilitating prediction and control and being "nonperspectival" or "mind-independent"? (ORT 58)

Rorty's conclusion from these kinds of arguments reiterates his more general arguments against correspondence theories of truth. Rorty accepts the straightforward, deflationary sense of truth in which to say *of* a sentence "*p*" that it is true says no more, and no less, than to say *p*. The context-specific arguments that scientists provide for their claims often give good reason to believe that they are true in this sense. But Rorty thinks that to say that scientific claims are true in the realist's stronger sense of correspondence to a mind-independent structure of the world ("really true," perhaps uttered accompanied by a resounding thump of the table) is to pay science a compliment that is both vacuous and impossible to vindicate. It is vacuous, because the reasons that can be mustered for claiming that theories are "really true" are the same ones that led to the assertion of the theories in the first place, and their deployment a second time confers no added authority. It is impossible to vindicate, because the aspiration underlying the realist argument is that one can remove oneself from the particular historical nexus of beliefs, reasons, and purposes that provide concrete standards of justification in order to ask what would be good reasons and true beliefs apart from any set of purposes and accepted patterns of beliefs and reasons. Bas van Fraassen once highlighted the quasi-theological aspirations of scientific realism by showing how the arguments for realism closely paralleled traditional arguments for the existence of God.[6] Rorty likewise sees the realist quest for a vindication of scientific objectivity and truth to be a last undesirable vestige of a theological impulse, "a legacy of an age in which the world was seen as the creation of a being who had a language of his own" (CIS 5).

Although Rorty devotes most of his discussion of the philosophy of science to criticisms of scientific realism, he also objects to the familiar versions of antirealism. Antirealists seek to vindicate the objectivity of scientific representations not by showing their connection to a world that transcends human practices, interests, and capacities, but by identifying some distinctively human feature of science that serves comparable ends. Whether these features have to do with our sensory capacities (empiricism), our interests in prediction and control (instrumentalism), or our norms of justification, rationality, or progress (historical metamethodologies and "internal realisms"), they aim to show that science achieves some end that transcends *particular* historical contingencies without transcending human concerns and interests altogether. Despite Rorty's lack of sustained attention to particular versions of antirealism, the locus of his objections to them is clear.

First and foremost, Rorty objects to antirealists' conception of theories as representations and to their aspiration to determine a general criterion for representational adequacy. Rorty would find antirealists' praise for the empirical adequacy, rational warrant, or progressive development of scientific theories to be just as vacuous as realists' claims that theories are (really) true. He would recognize no warrant for these general claims that goes beyond the more specific arguments for particular claims within the sciences. Rorty's expressed sympathy with Arthur Fine's "Natural Ontological Attitude" as a rejection of both realism and antirealism might plausibly be taken to endorse Fine's specific arguments against empiricist and "truth-mongering" antirealisms,[7] which suggest that many of these positions cannot even be coherently formulated (their conceptions of rational warrant or the empirical basis of science are supposedly determined by procedures whose application requires that these conceptions *already* be in place). And finally, ironically, antirealist positions are unacceptably conservative and backward-looking. They elevate some particular aspect of scientific work (e.g., observational capacities, justification practices, or patterns of theory change) into the characteristic mark of scientific objectivity or rationality. Since the resulting norms of objectivity or rationality are supposed to be the basis upon which other changes in the sciences are to be assessed, the aspects of scientific work that define these norms must be exempt from subsequent articulation and development. Antirealists recognize that the future course of scientific work will likely alter our currently accepted beliefs and practices,[8] but if they allow that the features of science that define its objectivity are also subject to change, then they must recognize either that contemporary scientific work is less objective than they claimed or

that the subsequent scientific work that revised these features of science is regressive and unacceptable.

If we accept that the arguments for realist and antirealist construals of scientific objectivity fail, what conclusions would follow? Rorty does not think that scientific claims themselves are in any way undermined by these failures, because he does not think that the sciences *need* philosophical legitimation as objective. Nor is the success of the sciences thereby rendered miraculous or inexplicable. What explains the successes of science, to the extent that they need explaining, are the relevant scientific theories themselves in their particulars. Why do the lights go on when we flip the switch? The answer is to be provided by electromagnetic theory, not by scientific realism. If we ask why we should believe electromagnetic theory, there is no better answer than the specific reasons that emerge from the detailed history of scientific practice and reasoning in this field. Rorty is content with simply explaining why these beliefs, rather than others, are actual. "[That] sort of explanation is provided by intellectual history, including the history of science, . . . [which] stays on a 'perspectival' level, the level of beliefs and desires succeeding one another and interacting with one another over the course of time" (ORT 55). We can accept the outcome of such interactions, while freeing ourselves from the remnants of theological, supernatural, and superhistorical conceptions of their authority.

What is undermined by the failure of realist and antirealist arguments is the idea that natural science as such is different in kind from other human enterprises. This occurs not because the natural sciences and the social sciences, or the sciences and the humanities or arts, really are the same kind of activity. Their differences are many, but so are the differences among the sciences themselves. We no longer need to discern common features among paleontology, cell biology, and high-energy physics that would differentiate them collectively from similarly common features among social psychology, comparative politics, or microeconomics. Nor do we need to differentiate the whole lot from philosophy, history, and literature. By the same token, doubts about the adequacy of particular theories in, for example, welfare economics, sociology, or evolutionary psychology cannot be removed by assurances that these disciplines satisfy the latest philosophical criteria for scientific objectivity. Nor can such philosophical arguments about objectivity settle questions about the safety and desirability of radioactive waste disposal or genetically altered foods. In all such cases, there is no substitute for detailed reflection upon what is at issue and what is at stake, and what specific reasons can be marshaled as relevant considerations in that context.

SCIENCE AS SOLIDARITY

Having rejected any attempt to demarcate the sciences as objectively grounded, Rorty goes on to propose some different terms in which we may talk about and praise the sciences. Such an alternative vocabulary would serve several useful roles. First, it would help remove the temptation to think of the sciences as getting human beings in touch with something transcendent to and less transient than their mundane concerns. As the quest for objectivity and transcendence informs most of the familiar ways of thinking and talking about science, such an alternative vocabulary would be useful.[9] Second, and most important, Rorty wants to praise and endorse the sciences, despite his criticism of the familiar ways of doing so. However fuzzy their boundaries and mutual similarities, the sciences are an important component of the "postmodern bourgeois liberal" culture that he admires and would like to strengthen ("Postmodernist Bourgeois Liberalism," ORT 197–202). Finally, as we shall see, the invention of new vocabularies for talking about ourselves and the world is something that Rorty thinks is valuable in its own right. Indeed, the sciences' ability to articulate such novel ways of thinking and talking are part of what Rorty admires in them.

In this section, I shall highlight three aspects of the sciences that Rorty finds deserving of praise and endorsement and discuss the terms in which he proposes to offer such praise. The first is familiar: Rorty admires the instrumental reliability often provided by the natural sciences, the very same capacities for prediction and control that realists and antirealists saw as in need of their distinctive philosophical explanations. The second, which figures most prominently in Rorty's recent discussions of science, concerns the ways in which scientists frequently conduct themselves in their work. Rorty suggests that we substitute for familiar discussions of scientific method an inclination to praise the sciences for their frequently exhibited moral virtues and for their contribution to human solidarity. Finally, in terms more frequently applied to the humanities and the arts, Rorty values the sciences for their contributions of novel vocabularies that enable human beings to "reinvent themselves." None of these features are unique to the sciences, and none can serve as defining characteristics (although prediction and control come close for Rorty), but they all show how the sciences should matter to postmodern bourgeois liberals.

Rorty thinks it incontrovertible that the sciences have greatly enhanced the predictability and manipulability of human beings' environment. These achievements have by and large reduced human suffering and freed human

beings for devotion to other ends, even though not all of their consequences have been beneficial. Indeed, the association between science and technological control (with all its benefits and dangers) is ubiquitous enough that for many purposes, including some of Rorty's own, the two can be simply identified:

> Baconians will call a cultural achievement "science" only if they can trace some technological advance, some increase in our ability to predict and control, back to that advance. . . . This pragmatic view that science is whatever gives us this particular sort of power will be welcome if one has developed doubts about traditional philosophical inquiries into scientific method and into the relation of science to reality. . . . Despite [its] fuzziness, [this Baconian way of defining science] is [also] probably the one most frequently employed by deans, bureaucrats, philanthropoids, and the lay public. (ORT 47)

Rorty's aspiration to praise the technological achievements of the sciences, while disconnecting that praise from the suggestion that such achievements can be explained by a distinctively scientific method or relation to reality, might then seem to amount to an instrumentalist antirealism. Rorty's admiration for the applicability of scientific understanding nevertheless differs from that of instrumentalists in two ways. Because he offers no independent way of identifying scientific practices apart from their technological consequences (e.g., as theoretical representations or as experimental methods), his suggestion is not another effort to legitimate those predetermined practices, but only a partly revisionary suggestion for how to delimit the use of the term "science" for some purposes (on such a conception, "mortuary science" is a perfectly appropriate phrase, whereas a term other than science would likely have to be found for some high-level theory in physics that has no straightforward applications). Second, although technological applicability is then criterial for science for some purposes, there are other contexts in which a different extension of the term is called for and different virtues are to be emphasized.

Among those other contexts are precisely the ones that call attention to what realists and antirealists have identified as "scientific reasoning" or "scientific method," but that Rorty would prefer to redescribe in rather different terms.

> Pragmatists would like to replace the desire for objectivity – the desire to be in touch with a reality which is more than some community with which we identify ourselves – with the desire for solidarity with that community.

> They think that the habits of relying upon persuasion rather than force, of respect for the opinions of colleagues, of curiosity and eagerness for new data and ideas, are the *only* virtues scientists have. They do not think that there is an intellectual virtue called 'rationality' over and above these moral virtues. (ORT 39)

On this conception, what is to be admired in the intellectual work of the sciences is the consistency of their aspiration to and the frequency of their achievement of "unforced agreement" among themselves. There is indeed more to be said about how such agreement is achieved, but Rorty thinks that is to be found more in the institutions and social practices of science than in any distinctively cognitive capacities or activities of individual scientists. On Rorty's view, we should

> praise the institutions in which [scientists] have developed and within which they work, and use these as models for the rest of culture. For these institutions give concreteness and detail to the idea of "unforced agreement," . . . and flesh out the idea of a "free and open encounter" – the sort of encounter in which truth cannot fail to win. To say that truth will win in such an encounter is not to make a metaphysical claim about the connection between human reason and the nature of things. It is merely to say that the best way to find out what to believe is to listen to as many suggestions and arguments as you can. (ORT 39)

Of course, the idea that the sciences provide a model for a liberal democratic community that substitutes dialogue for force is not original with Rorty.[10] Usually, however, the deliberative practices of scientific communities have been cited as by-products of their commitment to rationality and empirical accountability rather than as constitutive institutional (rather than cognitive) virtues.[11] Rorty asks that we focus upon the moral/practical/political terms of solidarity and responsibility to the community as the characteristic features that commend the sciences to us in place of any distinctive cognitive methods or rational norms.

Such emphasis upon the advantages of open intellectual encounters offers none of the assurance that realists and antirealists typically seek by characterizing the sciences in terms of the reliability of arguments to the best explanation. Nor does it offer the epistemic advantages of empirical accountability or scientific rationality or progress. For there is no guarantee that we will continue to find better beliefs in this way; perhaps "human creativity will dry up" or perhaps, as a contingent matter, it will turn out that the possibilities for revealing exploration of nature have been pretty

much exhausted, in which case "the best way to find out what to believe" won't find out very much more (PMN 351). But he might well say under those circumstances that a community whose mutual solidarity embraces an open-ended commitment toward arriving at unforced agreement would be worth having in any case.

Rorty thinks it highly unlikely that there are limits to human creativity, of course, and he looks to science as exemplary in just this respect. Such continuing effectiveness of the sciences in proposing new ways to talk and think about the world, however, would offer no aid and comfort to realists and other seekers of scientific objectivity. For Rorty does not see the possibilities for novel redescription of the world to be convergent upon some ultimate end that would vindicate the objectivity of science. Instead, he sees them as exemplifying the openness and instability of human purposes and the undesirability of achieving closure to scientific knowledge.

An important theme Rorty emphasizes is the historically contingent divide between those domains in which people have developed fairly stable and reliable ways of talking and coping, and those in which they are casting about for alternative vocabularies and practices. In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty generalized Kuhn's distinction between "normal" and "revolutionary" science to that effect. Systematic philosophical conceptions of meaning and knowledge have some plausible application within domains of normal discourse and practice, where there are well-established norms of correct and incorrect use and relatively few phenomena that trouble the familiar categories. Systematic epistemology and semantics, however, have no place in those domains where discursive norms are unsettled. In those settings, there is no substitute for open-minded and imaginative conversation, without prior commitment to "rational" norms of adjudication. Nostalgia over the absence of such settled criteria is also out of place here. Rorty thinks that "a talent for speaking differently, rather than for arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change," and he shares with the romantics a visionary appreciation for how "changing languages and other social practices may produce human beings of a sort that never before existed" (CIS 7). Inventing vocabularies, reweaving webs of belief, and the consequent redescriptive remaking of ourselves are among the human possibilities that Rorty most enthusiastically celebrates.

The romantics often opposed the innovative genius of poetry and revolutionary politics to the supposedly stultifying rationality of science. Rorty agrees that, more characteristically,

> we think of poets and painters as using some faculty other than "reason" in their work because, by their own confession, they are not sure of what

> they want to do before they have done it. They make up new standards of achievements as they go along. . . . The scientist, [by contrast], knowing in advance what would count as disconfirming his hypothesis and prepared to abandon that hypothesis as a result of the unfavorable outcome of a single experiment, seems a truly heroic example [of rationality]. (ORT 36)

But the sciences have also frequently been the source of dramatically new ways of talking and acting, and Rorty thinks our image of science would be drastically incomplete without recognizing and celebrating their more imaginative and inventive moments. He is happy to recognize and appreciate the ineluctably metaphorical character of theoretical innovation in science. Rorty only objects to those philosophers who would domesticate scientific and other metaphors by arguing that these are "cognitive" achievements, which should be acknowledged as expressing symbolic meanings or even metaphorical truths.[12] We should

> see metaphors on the model of unfamiliar events in the natural world – *causes* of changing beliefs and desires – rather than on the model of *representations* of unfamiliar worlds, worlds which are 'symbolic' rather than 'natural'. . . . The metaphors which make possible novel scientific theories [are likewise] causes of our ability to know more about the world, rather than expressions of such knowledge. (ORT 163)

Metaphors (even scientific metaphors like "genetic code," "chaotic behavior," or "tectonic plates") are first introduced as "unfamiliar noises" rather than symbolic cognitions. The best of them have their world-changing effects not because they latch on to something inherently meaningful, but because other speakers happen to pick up on them and thereby forge new ways of talking and acting of which they are a part. Such metaphors then eventually become domesticated elements of normalized theories, but Rorty strenuously objects to projecting this rationalized fate back into their original invocation.

Rorty thus refuses to differentiate his commitment to science from his larger commitment to the liberal democratic cultures alongside which the sciences have primarily developed and flourished. Rorty sides with those strains in pragmatism that "attempt to level down the natural sciences to an *epistemological* par with art, religion, and politics" rather than those that would "raise the rest of culture to the epistemological level of the natural sciences" (ORT 63; emphasis added). He would complement that emphasis, however, by also encouraging art, religion, and politics to aspire to the civility and community solidarity he finds more adequately realized in the institutionalized practices of natural science.

SURPASSING RORTY?

Rorty's talk of science as solidarity rather than objectivity, of theoretical innovation as more akin to poetry than calculation, and of scientific capacities of prediction and control as indicating the serpentine tracks of human interests rather than the luminosity of a transcendent natural reality can be startling when juxtaposed to more familiar philosophical discussions of science. Yet Rorty would readily recognize that he can no more vault out of traditional ways of thinking and talking than can anyone else. In this final section, I consider whether Rorty might still owe too deep a debt to the representationalist, objectivist philosophies of science that he strives to replace. In particular, I want to ask whether Rorty's talk of community "solidarity," and of science as a form of "conversation" that can be identified by its "vocabulary," pays insufficient attention to the material practices of scientific manipulation and experimentation. Rorty's conception too sharply isolates scientific talk from the many other things scientists do to make sense of the world. He thereby draws too sharp a divide between the social, normative interactions among scientists and the material, causal interactions between scientists and their apparatus and objects of inquiry.

To see the point of my concerns, we should remind ourselves of the direction in which Rorty's critique of the representationalist tradition has aimed to move us. Rorty has objected to the *dualism* underlying both realist and antirealist representationalisms (a "dualism" is a distinction drawn so as to render unintelligible the relations between the items being distinguished[13]). Realists sharply distinguish the theory-dependent field of human understanding and practice from the way the world is, completely independent of the categories and aims with which we interpret it. The initial separation must be sharp, so as to valorize the distinctive success of the sciences in overcoming this divide and achieving an objective understanding that transcends our merely subjective categories and interests. Moreover, even this success does not overcome the world's transcendence of mere human categorization; for the success of the sciences supposedly results not in the direct presence of real natural kinds, but only in their indirect manifestation through the merely instrumental success of theory-dependent methods. Antirealists agree with realists' initial characterization of the fundamental divide between us and the world as it "really" is, disagreeing only with the latter's claim that the gap can be bridged even indirectly. Antirealists seek the marks of objectivity entirely *within* the human side of a fundamental divide between subject and object, knower and known.

In opposition to all of these positions, Rorty objects to any effort to distinguish the objective from the subjective, the transcendent from the immanent, or the true from the merely justified. He likewise objects to efforts to distinguish the methods and aims of the human sciences, which might be thought to interpret an immanent world of human meanings and practices, from the natural sciences as aspiring to understand and account for nonhuman nature.

When Rorty characterizes the achievements of the sciences in terms of (social) solidarity with other human inquirers, however, he seems to fall back onto the familiar dualistic terms invoked by representationalist theories. Why should the virtues of the sciences be limited to the ways in which they relate to other scientists, and not also incorporate the ways in which they interact with their instruments, other research materials, and objects of inquiry? Why place the morally relevant divide precisely at the traditional boundaries between human society and nonhuman nature? The force of this question may be heightened if we situate Rorty's talk of social solidarity within the history of the representationalist tradition. Theories of *mental* representation presented two classic questions of transcendence concerning how a mind could ever have knowledge of either the "external world" or of other minds. To speak of solidarity within a community of human knowers is to bring other minds across the divide to the knower's side, but it still seems to make common cause with representationalists in leaving the material world alien to one's conception of scientific knowing.

Rorty might plausibly retort that it makes a relevant difference that he has shifted the issue from epistemic justification to moral responsiveness and responsibility. In the latter context, it might be perfectly appropriate to distinguish our relations with other people from our interactions with electrons or cells. Scientific understanding requires many kinds of interaction with our material surroundings, but it does not normally involve relations of conversation, mutual understanding, and agreement or disagreement. To speak of "science as solidarity" as Rorty does is merely to locate the distinctive *virtues* of scientists in their discursive practices of assertion and justification as distinct from their material practices of experimental manipulation. That is not to deny that material practice is important in science; as we have seen, Rorty identifies the sciences' achievement of more reliable control over our surroundings as a crucial part of their success. Yet he insists that prediction and control are to be admired as contributions to thoroughly human purposes, and he would undoubtedly add that the criteria that distinguish success and failure in this respect are defined in relation to these socially defined purposes by discursive norms of justification.

There are, however, a number of reasons for questioning the adequacy of this response. First, it would be very odd for a pragmatist like Rorty to decide *in advance* that our moral responsibilities and solidarities in scientific practice are limited to human beings. That is especially odd nowadays when this issue has been actively disputed by animal rights activists, on the one hand, and by defenders of a broader ecological responsibility in science, on the other hand. My point is not that either line of criticism is necessarily correct, but only that Rorty's account of scientists' domain of moral accountability may rule out these criticisms on the basis of predetermined philosophical criteria, which would be a very odd stance for a pragmatist.[14]

A more fundamental criticism arises when we think about how Rorty has characterized the relation between capacities for prediction and control, and the practices of belief formation and justification that he commends under the heading of science-as-solidarity. Two aspects of that characterization concern me. First, Rorty writes as if the prediction and control achieved by the sciences is a massive univocal achievement that can be appropriately described in a general and abstract way. Second, he writes as if the relation between this achievement and the ways in which we talk about and understand the world scientifically is merely instrumental. The widespread achievement of such prediction and control within the natural sciences, he suggests, occurs partly because their objects are the kinds of things people are interested in predicting and controlling, and more fundamentally because of the historical coincidence that their "vocabularies" contingently turned out to be more suitable for those purposes than other vocabularies (ORT 40; CP 191–5). Rorty talks in these ways to counter objectivist claims that physical objects or sensory experiences provide a body of linguistically unarticulated "objective evidence" to which those practices are accountable. Instead, he argues, "we have to see sentences as connected with other sentences *rather than* with the world" and the confidence we have in the natural sciences as "a matter of conversation between persons *rather than* a matter of interaction with a nonhuman reality" (PMN 372, 157; emphases added).

The problem is that these contrasts are misplaced. Rorty is wrong to see the only alternative to objectivism in terms of conversation, social solidarity, and the achievement of unforced agreement among persons. To talk about the sciences solely in terms of their *intralinguistic* coherence, and the *social* practices and institutions that enable its consensual achievement, is to overlook the significance of the specific ways in which the sciences are material practices. Rorty is correct to say that the practices through which

utterances are connected to their publicly accessible surroundings are not a justificatory encounter between already "interanimated" sentences and something *alien* to language and social norms. He has nevertheless retained from the representationalist tradition the underlying conception of inferential relations among sentences and causal relations among things as alien to one another. Causal interaction with unfamiliar objects or unfamiliar noises (i.e., metaphors) can (causally) *prompt* new sentences, he argues, but they cannot *belong* to networks of meaning and understanding. Rorty thereby hopes to avoid the objectivist claim that causal relations with things can *justify* some of these inferential networks from the "outside."

There is, however, a different way to challenge the realist's claim that causal interaction with the world can provide an external vindication of some of our theories. Rorty overlooks the possibility that scientists' material interactions with apparatus and objects are too integral to scientific discourse to provide it with the kind of external, objective justification that realists seek. The practices that connect utterances to their circumstances are not justifications of independently meaningful utterances, but instead are already part of the articulation of those utterances *as* meaningful sentences (and simultaneously of those surroundings as intelligible objects and processes). On such an account, the development of a science involves new ways of talking and new ways of encountering and dealing with its objects, articulated together. For example, modern cell biology emerged through the simultaneous development of new instrumental practices (e.g., using the ultracentrifuge and the electron microscope), in the course of which new subcellular objects (mitochondria, ribosomes, Golgi bodies) became manifest in *concert* with new ways of talking about and dealing with them.[15] Rorty himself noticed this connection between novel talk and novel phenomena when he pointed out that metaphors work in much the same way as "anomalous non-linguistic phenomena like platypuses and pulsars," but he drew the wrong inference from it (ORT 167). He concluded that platypuses and pulsars

> do not (literally) *tell* us anything, but they do make us notice things and start looking around for analogies and similarities. They do not have cognitive content, but they are responsible for a lot of cognitions. For if they had not turned up, we should not have been moved to formulate and deploy certain sentences which do have such content. As with platypuses, so with metaphors. (ORT 167)

Rorty thereby maintains a sharp distinction between contentful language and the world at the cost of relocating novel ("metaphorical") utterances

from the former to the latter. I urge a different conclusion: neither meaningful sentences or theories nor articulated objects can be manifest except through their ongoing mutual interrelations. Contra Rorty, both newly manifested phenomena and new ways of talking can be *telling*, but only because, even in their novelty, they already belong to larger patterns of material and discursive practices. Practical interactions with our material surroundings are not external to our discursive practices but indispensable components of them.

This point explains why the capacities for prediction and control that emerged with many of the natural sciences are not *merely* contingent and not only the result of a prior *interest* in controlling aspects of our physical surroundings. To understand the predictive capacities of a science, it is not enough to characterize either some general characteristic of its objects (e.g., as physical, nonintentional, causally interconnected) or the purposes for which the science is developed; there is no substitute for an historical accounting of the detailed ways in which patterns of talk and other interactions were worked out together. One needs to talk seriously about laboratories, the creation of phenomena, and the transformations of the world that result from the extension and adaptation of laboratory phenomena before one has any conceptual handle on scientific predictions.[16] Rorty's general, undifferentiated references to prediction and control thus need to be replaced by a more finely-grained description of a complex, multifaceted, subtle, localized, and sometimes jury-rigged network of practical capacities. Such descriptions would show that these developments are not independent of discursive and conceptual practices and hence provide the latter with no independent warrant. On the other hand, they would also cohere with the recognition that we generally value not prediction and control per se, but rather a discursively articulated prediction and control that thereby yield understanding.

Overcoming this residual divide between language and the world would accommodate within Rorty's pragmatism what is perhaps the deepest insight of Thomas Kuhn's philosophy of science. Instead of distinguishing vocabularies and theories from the objects or causal processes they described, Kuhn talked about "paradigms – accepted examples of actual scientific practice which include law, theory, application and instrumentation together."[17] He argued that these simultaneously material and discursive practices are more basic to scientific research than the theories, empirical evidence, or causal processes that philosophers try to extract from them, and that scientific work normally consists of "articulating" these examples theoretically and experimentally rather than justifying them.

What should we conclude from these criticisms of Rorty's constructive discussions of science? I suggest they are best read as extending and consolidating Rorty's pragmatism rather than objecting to it. My criticisms do not undercut Rorty's objections to conceiving of scientific theories as representations, and to realist or antirealist accounts of such representation as objective. Indeed, these arguments suggest another, complementary objection to scientific realism. Rorty argues that we can never get outside our language, experience, or methods to assess how well they correspond to a transcendent reality. My line of argument suggests that the "near" side of realists' supposed correspondence relation is just as problematic. We should not think of our web of belief as itself intelligible apart from ongoing patterns of causal interaction with our surroundings (good Davidsonian that he is, Rorty recognizes that utterances are only interpretable as part of a larger pattern of action in a shared set of circumstances). To that extent, the Quinean metaphor of a "web of belief" might better be replaced by that of a "field of possible action" or a "meaningfully configured world."

Rorty characterizes his (and Davidson's) pragmatism as "an account of how the marks and noises made by certain organisms hang together in a coherent pattern, which can be fitted into our overall account of the interaction between these organisms and their environment" (ORT 10). The point of my criticisms is that these marks and noises do not form a coherent pattern by themselves, but only as part of that larger pattern of practical engagement with the surrounding world. Rorty has already argued forcefully that scientific understanding cannot be disaggregated into distinct components of meaning and fact, fact and value, or linguistic scheme and experiential content. My arguments suggest that we also cannot usefully divide human interaction with the environing world into distinct components of social solidarity and material practice, unforced agreement and prediction and control, inferential norms and causal effects, or (familiar) meanings and (unfamiliar) noises. In giving up the quest for objectivity, we do not lose the world, but instead rediscover that it has been there all along.

Notes

1. ORT, 49. "Antirealism" is not a single doctrine, but an umbrella term for a family of views that define the aspirations of science in terms of specific human capacities or interests. The significance of such views depends upon which capacities or interests are given prominence for a philosophy of science and how the goals of science are supposed to be fixed by those capacities or interests. Empiricist antirealists define the goals of science as accounting for those features of the

world that are observable by human beings rather than as discovering the truth about unobservable entities. Instrumentalist antirealists (sometimes called "pragmatists," although not all who call themselves pragmatists are instrumentalists) understand science as aspiring to more reliable prediction and control of ourselves and our environment. Social constructivist antirealists understand science as determined by the specific, historically contingent interests and goals of the communities in which it is undertaken. Note that these views differ dramatically in the universality of the goals they attribute to science. Empiricists treat the goals of science as universal to the extent that human beings have fairly similar sensory capacities. The goals attributed by instrumentalists include some that are relatively universal (because human beings have some common needs for survival) and some that vary with the purposes of particular historical communities. Social constructivists may regard the goals of science to be completely dependent upon the interests of a particular community.

2. Richard Boyd, Philip Gasper, and J. D. Trout, *The Philosophy of Science* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), p. xiii.
3. For empiricists such as Bas van Fraassen or Clark Glymour, the distinctive feature of science is its constitutive accountability to empirical observation. Constructivists in the Boyd anthology's sense are more varied. They (Thomas Kuhn, Larry Laudan, Helen Longino, or Philip Kitcher might be among the paradigm cases) typically deny that there is a scientific method in general, because scientific methods are too closely tied to historically particular, field-specific theoretical schemes, but most then seek to identify some *meta*methodological basis for choosing among such schemes, often on the basis of the historical record. Another group of constructivists, more often sociologists than philosophers, have argued that there is no such metamethodological basis of evaluation and that scientific beliefs can best be explained through the social histories of their communities. These "social constructivists" still fit within Rorty's schema to the extent that they think that the distinctive authority of the sciences within modern societies *needs* such objective justification but cannot acquire it.
4. There has been a substantial consensus among philosophers that has resulted from the extensive criticism of the logical empiricist tradition of the 1960s and 1970s to the effect that theoretical vocabularies, methodological assumptions, instruments, and the practices and skills required to use them, as well as procedures for the interpretation and analysis of data, come together as a more or less tightly linked package whose components cannot provide fully independent justification for one another (Frederick Suppe [ed.], *The Structure of Scientific Theories* [Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1977] canonically marks the formation of that consensus). More recent work emphasizing the autonomy of experiment from theory or the "disunity" of science does not do so in ways that might restore the hope for independent, objective justification of one component of scientific practice on the basis of others. On the autonomy of experiment, see Ian Hacking, *Representing and Intervening: Introductory Topics in the Philosophy of Natural Science* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press,1983), and "The Self-Vindication of the Laboratory Sciences" in Andrew Pickering (ed.), *Science as Practice and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), pp. 29–64. A good introduction

to discussions of disunity is Peter Galison and David Stump (ed.), *The Disunity of Science: Boundaries, Contexts, and Power* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1996).

5. Arthur Fine, whose stance against both realism and the various antirealisms Rorty mostly endorses, also notes another problem with the phenomenon that the realist hopes to explain. In trumpeting the successes of science in using methods dependent upon its current theories to improve those very theories, realists are providing only a partial history.

   > The history of science shows well enough how [modifying a theory in its less-confirmed parts on the basis of its better-confirmed parts] succeeds only now and again, and fails for the most part.... The idea that by extending what is approximately true one is likely to bring new approximate truth is a chimera.... The problem for the realist is how to explain the *occasional* success of a strategy that *usually fails*. (Arthur Fine, *The Shaky Game: Einstein, Realism and the Quantum Theory* [Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986], p. 119).

   Yet Rorty points out that Fine's principal argument against realism may concede too much. Fine begins with the claim that what is at issue between realists and instrumentalists is whether the appropriate conclusion to draw from an argument to the best explanation is that the explanatory account is *true*, or only that it has some lesser degree of warrant. Realists cannot then appeal to an argument to the best explanation for the truth of realism without begging the question against the antirealist. But Rorty objects to the beginning point that Fine shares with realists and antirealists: that there is a general form of inference, argument to the best explanation, whose appropriate conclusion can be assessed in a general way at all.

6. Bas Van Fraassen, *The Scientific Image* (Oxford: Oxford University Press,1980), ch. 7.
7. Fine, *The Shaky Game*, ch. 8.
8. Indeed, one of the most prominent antirealist arguments (Larry Laudan, "A Confutation of Convergent Realism," *Philosophy of Science* 48 [1981]: 19–48) is that scientific realism is committed to an historically mistaken conservatism about the continuity of scientific methods, standards, and ontologies over time.
9. Rorty does not think that linguistic reform can by itself insure against backsliding into these familiar conceptions, however. The introduction of new terminology cannot reliably compel the inferences we endorse or prohibit those we reject, for the introduction of the terms cannot determine their subsequent use.
10. Among those who have prominently defended science as a model for the conduct of liberal democracy are Robert Merton, *The Sociology of Science: Theoretical and Empirical Investigations* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1973), Karl Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations: The Growth of Scientific Knowledge* (New York: Basic Books, 1962), and James Conant, *On Understanding Science: An Historical Approach* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1947). Paul Feyerabend, *Science in a Free Society* (London: New Left Books, 1978) prominently argues the reverse.

11. Note, however, that Steven Shapin and Simon Schaffer, in *Leviathan and the Air Pump* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1986) interpret the new experimental philosophy of Boyle and the Royal Society precisely as organized around the political problem of how to reach unforced agreement among a community of "gentlemen," defining the appropriate objects of natural philosophy ("matters of fact") as those aspects of the world about which such unforced agreement can be obtained, and the membership of the community itself in terms of the reliability of their commitment to abide by appropriate procedures for reaching such agreement.
12. ORT 162. Rorty sees this way of talking about metaphor as a residual sign that "philosophers still tend to take 'cognition' as the highest compliment we can pay to discourse," which is itself a vestige of the "concern to raise the rest of discourse to the level of science."
13. Robert Brandom, *Making It Explicit: Reasoning, Representing, and Discursive Practice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 1994), p. 615.
14. For a more extensive discussion of how a theory about the accountability of scientific practices might thus objectionably discount specific lines of political criticism, in this case directed at Charles Taylor in his disagreements with Rorty over relations between the natural and human sciences, see Joseph Rouse, "Interpretation in Natural and Human Science," in David Hiley, James Bohman, and Richard Shusterman (ed.), *The Interpretive Turn: Philosophy, Science, Culture* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), pp. 42–56.
15. For thoughtful discussions of this example, see William Bechtel, "Integrating Sciences by Creating New Disciplines: The Case of Cell Biology," *Biology and Philosophy* 8 (1993): 277–99, and Hans-Jörg Rheinberger, "From Microsomes to Ribosomes: 'Strategies' of 'Representation' 1935–1955," *Journal of the History of Biology* 28 (1995): 49–89.
16. On the creation of phenomena in laboratories, see Hacking, *Representing and Intervening*, ch. 13. On the extension of such phenomena outside the laboratory, see Joseph Rouse, *Knowledge and Power: Toward a Political Philosophy of Science* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), chs. 4, 7.
17. Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), p. 10.

5 Rorty's Democratic Hermeneutics

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In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutics serves Rorty as an antidote to epistemology. As Rorty characterizes epistemology, it is supposed to provide an overarching framework for all contributions to knowledge that can count as genuine. Epistemology functions as a cultural overseer; its task is to adjudicate the grounds, or identify the lack of grounds, for all claims to knowledge. Hermeneutics, in contrast, functions more as a mediator, and its task is to promote the sorts of conversations in which disagreements between claims might be overcome. Of course, epistemology is also interested in overcoming disagreements. Yet, it understands the hope of doing so as a "token of the existence of common ground which, perhaps unbeknown to the speakers, unites them in a common rationality" (PMN 318). Hermeneutics, as Rorty understands it, conceives of the same hope as functioning without preexisting grounds. The hope of agreement is rather the hope that we can come to understand one another, that we can pick up each other's language and use it to reconsider or even revise our understanding of the world and ourselves.

In Rorty's analysis, hermeneutics replaces the goal of grounding cognition with that of *Bildung*, or edification. Epistemologically oriented philosophy supposes that it can and must discover the foundations upon which true sentences are possible. The concept of *Bildung*, in contrast, signifies an interest in exploring different possible sentences, particularly those that might become true of us. Indeed, in Rorty's description, it expresses the idea that "redescribing ourselves is the most important thing we can do" (PMN 358–9). This distinction that Rorty draws between epistemology and hermeneutics differs from the traditional distinction between epistemology as an inquiry into the grounds of science and hermeneutics as the ground of the *Geisteswissenschaften*. Instead, for Rorty, the distinction between epistemology and hermeneutics is closer to the distinction between normal and abnormal science. Normal science about either nature or society is possible where inquirers agree on a fixed set of norms for what counts as a good explanation or a good question and what counts as a relevant contribution to

the inquiry. Abnormal science is the state in which inquirers are no longer, or not yet, sure of an agreed-upon set of conventions and thus have no preconceived ideas about what should count as a contribution to the inquiry. Epistemology, in Rorty's view, is simply the investigation of the rules of normal science. The merit of hermeneutics is that it tries to understand the contributions of abnormal science, of inquiries that do not fit within the rules of normal science, whether social or natural. "At certain periods," Rorty writes,

> it has been as easy to determine which critics have a "just perception" of the value of a poem as it is to determine which experimenters are capable of making accurate observations and precise measurements. At other periods – for example, the transitions between the "archeological strata" which Foucault discerns in the recent intellectual history of Europe – it may be as difficult to know which scientists are actually offering reasonable explanations as it is to know which painters are destined for immortality. (PMN 322).

At first glance, Rorty's use of Gadamer's hermeneutics seems implausible at best. Whereas Rorty connects the concept *Bildung* to the exploration of abnormal science and to the forging of new descriptions generally, Gadamer defines *Bildung* with Herder as "rising up to humanity through culture"[1] and with Hegel as "rising to the universal."[2] Moreover, Rorty defines Gadamer's conception of effective-historical consciousness (*wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewusstsein*) as "the sort of consciousness of the past which changes us," claiming that it characterizes "an attitude interested not so much in what is out there in the world, or what happened in history, as in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses" (PMN 359). In contrast, Gadamer insists that "history does not belong to us; we belong to it." And he continues:

> Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life. That is why the prejudices (*Vorurteile*) of the individual far more than his judgments (*Urteile*) constitute the historical reality of his being.[3]

Thus, while Rorty appears to be interested in change, Gadamer focuses on the bonds of family, society, and state as well as the weight of history and prejudice. What, then, is Rorty getting at in his recourse to hermeneutics?

The apparent implausibility in Rorty's appeal to hermeneutics is even more striking when we move from epistemological to political concerns. Whereas Rorty derives from hermeneutics a novel form of democratic liberalism, Gadamer's hermeneutics stresses our debts to authority and tradition. So what are we to make of Rorty's interest in hermeneutics? In this essay, I want to argue that, despite appearances, Rorty's use of Gadamer's work shows just how important to democratic theory it is. At the same time, I want to claim that Rorty does not go far enough, that hermeneutics is even more suited to reflection on liberal democracy than Rorty suggests. I shall begin by looking at Gadamer's account of effective-historical consciousness to show how it is suited to Rorty's concerns and then turn to Rorty's own reflections on the future of the United States.

EFFECTIVE-HISTORICAL CONSCIOUSNESS

Gadamer uses the idea of effective-historical consciousness in two ways. In one sense, it refers to a consciousness or understanding that is produced or effected by history. Effective-historical consciousness takes up Martin Heidegger's account of "thrownness" and uses it to characterize the human situation of being always already a participant in historical traditions.[4] We grow up in a tradition or set of traditions, according to Gadamer, ones that possess their own vocabularies, practices, problematics, and recognized modes of action. As a result, our understanding of the natural and social world we live in, as well as of ourselves as individuals and as members of a group, is an understanding that takes place in a certain language and is shaped by a certain history. That we understand ourselves as blacks, whites, or Latinas, for instance, is a consequence of a particular set of experiences, a set that includes the slave trade, immigration policy, and the struggles of specific groups for rights and recognition. That we understand the natural world as a disenchanted one in Weber's sense is equally the consequence of historical developments in science and technology. To be a member of a specific culture at a specific time means that our attempts to understand ourselves and our world always proceed on the basis of an understanding that has developed through the historical experiences and traditions of understanding we have inherited from the history in which we are immersed.

To the extent that our understanding of the world is one effected and affected in this way, we are prejudiced in the sense that we already possess an orientation toward, and language for, that which we are trying to understand. At work here is what Heidegger calls the "fore-structure of

understanding" and what Gadamer calls our "horizon":[5] we are always situated in a tradition of language and practice that gives us a frame of reference for that which we are trying to understand, whether it is an object in the empirical world, a text, another language, or ourselves. Indeed, without this frame of reference, without the expectations and anticipations of meaning it includes, we would have no point of reference for processing that which we encounter. For Gadamer, prejudices are simply prejudgments or projections of meaning that offer at least a provisional framework for understanding. They allow us to project a preliminary account of the meaning of that which we are trying to understand on the basis of presumptions that arise from previous understandings – our own and those of the tradition to which we belong. Such a projected or "prejudiced" understanding marks the place of the hermeneutic circle: it no longer functions merely as a method for acquiring knowledge of a text, as it did for Schleiermacher and the hermeneutic tradition. Rather, it indicates a condition of all understanding: we understand on the basis of assumptions we already have, and we make assumptions on the basis of the understanding we already possess.

Gadamer uses the idea of effective-historical consciousness in a second way, to signal an awareness of the effect of being historically situated. Effective-historical consciousness in this second sense is not only influenced by history but also is conscious that it is so. To be sure, Gadamer insists that the force of effective history does not depend upon this awareness of it. Nor do we achieve any reprieve from that force by tracing a history of effects on us. Instead, history is effective even in relation to the attempt to trace its effects and can, consequently, never become fully transparent. The attempt to understand our history is an attempt to understand the history that has made us who we are from the position of being already constituted by it. As Gadamer puts the point:

> All self-knowledge arises from what is historically pregiven, what with Hegel we call "substance," because it underlies all subjective intentions and actions, and hence both prescribes and limits every possibility for understanding any tradition whatsoever in its historical alterity. This almost defines the aim of philosophical hermeneutics: its task is to retrace the path of Hegel's phenomenology of mind until we discover in all that is subjective the substantiality that determines it.[6]

Yet, if the aim of hermeneutics is to retrace Hegel's phenomenology of mind to find the effects of historical substance on a subject that cannot, for that reason, be self-determining or self-transparent in the way Hegel

assumes, the use Rorty makes of Gadamer's consciousness of effective history seems bizarre. That to which effective-historical consciousness points seems not to be the "the sort of consciousness of the past which changes us," but, instead, the sort of consciousness that gives the past its due. Moreover, effective historical consciousness does not characterize "an attitude interested . . . in what we can get out of nature and history for our own uses" as much as it characterizes an attitude that is aware of how little our uses are our own.

Nevertheless, in the sense that effective-historical consciousness defines an awareness of historical influence, it has a further consequence. If we are conscious of our debt to the past, if we recognize that we are produced by a particular history and that our understanding of the world and ourselves is constituted within a particular vocabulary and frame of reference, then we can no longer equate that understanding with objective knowledge. Instead, we are aware that any understanding, whether of states of affairs, the "book of nature," moral universals, or our own history, is conditioned by the set of assumptions into which it is "thrown." Consciousness of effective history is consciousness that any understanding we acquire or possess is relative to a particular set of questions and to a particular vocabulary. It is a particular grasp of those facets of a subject matter that appear from a particular point of view, under the scrutiny of particular, historically effected concerns attached to particular, historically effected interests. Consciousness of effective history is aware, then, that all of our knowledge is the product of particular prejudices, including that epistemological theory that purports to ground our knowledge. But if we are conscious of being prejudiced and concede that our understanding always diverges from objective knowledge, then we can be open to revising it. We can be open to the possibility that we might change our ways of thinking about the world, our situation, and ourselves.

Rorty's appeal to Gadamer's hermeneutics thus turns out to be instructive. Precisely because we are historically situated and historically effected, as Gadamer emphasizes, we must be suspicious of all epistemology and, moreover, open to ways in which we might revise our understanding of our situation and ourselves in the way Rorty stresses. If we are conscious of effective history, then we are conscious that our understanding is just that: a particular understanding of meaning from the perspective of a particular horizon of interpretation. Hence, if consciousness of effective history for Rorty is "the sort of consciousness of the past which changes us," this definition is shorthand for the idea that once we acknowledge the historically effected and horizonal character of our understanding, we can no longer be

dogmatic about it or insist on its objectivity. Instead, we must open ourselves to the possibility of other horizons of understanding.

A similar insight follows from the way in which Rorty employs the idea of *Bildung*. While Gadamer associates *Bildung* with cultivation toward the universal or humanity, he conceives of neither of these end states in an ahistorical way. For if our knowledge is historically rooted and developed, then so too is our conception of the universal and humanity. Hence, Gadamer suggests that the universal is simply the standpoint of possible others. *Bildung* is the process in which one emerges from particularistic points of view by encountering alien practices, other cultures, and one's own historical past. Further, it proceeds only insofar as one immerses oneself in that which is other and then is able to integrate that otherness into oneself. For Gadamer, if one is to become *gebildete* (cultivated or edified), one must get out of oneself as far as possible. To be sure, one cannot simply dispense with one's historical embeddedness. Yet, when one recognizes that one is historically embedded and that one's knowledge is therefore limited, one can begin the process of cultivation. Referring to Hegel, Gadamer understands this process in terms of a practical and a theoretical *Bildung*. In practical *Bildung*, one puts oneself into an object and recognizes oneself in this other being; in theoretical *Bildung*, one learns "to affirm what is different from oneself and to find viewpoints through which one can grasp the thing, 'the objective thing in its freedom' without selfish interest."[7]

Both *Bildung* and a consciousness of effective history, then, lead from an awareness of the consequences of being situated in history to efforts to educate or edify oneself in other perspectives for thinking and acting. In Rorty's formulation, a hermeneutic attempt to understand abnormal contributions to inquiry necessarily approaches them from within a particular frame of reference. Indeed, if hermeneutics is to serve as a mediator between discourses, then it must translate between them, or translate an abnormal discourse into terms that can show its sense to a specific group of inquirers. For Rorty, "the fact that hermeneutics inevitably takes some norm for granted makes it, so far forth, 'Whiggish' " (PMN 321). Indeed, Rorty even thinks that hermeneutics is "parasitic" on at least the possibility of epistemology and, further, that edifying discourses are "reactive" against epistemology (PMN 366). Attempts at edification *de novo*, that is, without so stable a frame of reference that epistemological inquiries into its rules are possible, lead to madness "in the most literal and terrifying sense" (PMN 366). At the same time, the virtues of edification include insight into the parochial nature of any given reference frame and the impetus the insight provides for efforts to expand that frame. "Insofar as

[hermeneutics] proceeds nonreductively," Rorty claims, "and in the hope of picking up a new angle on things, it can transcend its own Whiggishness" (PMN 321).

But *how* can we proceed nonreductively and transcend our own Whiggishness? How do we begin the process of edification? If we are bound to our history, it does not seem possible that we can gain access to other horizons for understanding, since we shall simply understand them from the perspective of our own. Despite the worries of some commentators that Gadamer was unable to edify himself out of the perspective on Germany's historical situation occasioned by its own "selfish interest," indeed, despite the concern that his own selfish interest led him to opportunistic interpretations under both Nazi and Soviet regimes,[8] this question is one to which Gadamer devotes some part of *Truth and Method* and that Rorty considers as well. The problem, as both see it, is not so much that we will be intentionally dogmatic, but that we will be unable to distinguish between being open to alternative understandings of the world or ourselves and interpreting those very understandings in terms of the prejudices we already possess. If we are historically situated, and if we therefore project meanings on that which we are trying to understand on the basis of assumptions and expectations historically bequeathed to us, how can we learn to appropriate other perspectives in their very difference from our own? Hermeneutics, it appears, requires a way of blocking what Rorty calls "our monomaniacal desire to subsume everything to our own needs"[9] or of marking the difference between imposing an understanding that derives only from our own history and traditions and one that also derives from our history and traditions but can nonetheless grasp alternatives.

Gadamer considers this problem with regard to the interpretation of texts. The danger is that we may understand them in terms of our own fore-meanings and fail to grasp the extent to which the texts differ from these fore-meanings. Three conditions, he suggests, must hold if this danger is to be avoided. First, we must be prepared for a text to tell us something. That is, we must be open to the possibility that a text can inform us in new ways and teach us what we do not already know. Hence, Gadamer claims that a "hermeneutically trained consciousness must be, from the start, sensitive to a text's alterity."[10] Such sensitivity cannot involve simply ignoring or eradicating one's prejudices or historical situation. Rather, it must be able to separate what is "other" from ourselves or to acknowledge, as Gadamer puts the point, "that what another person tells me, whether in conversation, letter, book, or whatever, is generally supposed to be his own and not my opinion."[11]

Gadamer's second condition for openness to what is different looks to the hermeneutic tradition's notion of the hermeneutic circle of whole and part. We inevitably project meanings in the attempt to understand on the basis of assumptions and expectations we already have. Nevertheless, if we are to distinguish between projections that illuminate difference and those that simply impose a parochial understanding, we must be able to test our projections of meaning. In terms of what are we to test them? Since we are embedded in our existing history, its vocabulary, and their prejudices, our only means of testing our projections is through our other interpretations of other parts of the same text. It may be the case that we cannot escape our understanding, but we can compare it to itself. This circumstance means that we must presume that the text composes a unity of meaning and that, if our interpretation of one of its parts conflicts with our interpretation of another, we must revise one or the other in order to be consistent. Consequently, Gadamer claims that "only what really constitutes a unity of meaning is intelligible."[12] Only the assumption that the text composes a unity of meaning allows us to test an understanding of one part of the text against another and to reject one or the other, or both, if they are inconsistent.

The third condition of understanding that Gadamer suggests emphasizes content. If we are to distinguish between parochial and illuminating projections of meaning, we must presume not only that a text composes a unity of meaning so that we can test our understandings of its individual parts against one another. We must also, Gadamer thinks, assume that it is or could be true. Just as we must consider a text to compose a unity of meaning to create a means of testing our interpretation of one part of a text against another, we must also presume that we can learn from a text, that it knows something different and more satisfying than what we already believe. For this reason, we must give the text at least a provisional benefit of the doubt. By taking it to be different from and truer than what we already believe, we are forced to recognize and reconsider what we previously thought. As Gadamer puts the point:

> The whole value of hermeneutical experience – like the significance of history for human knowledge in general – . . . consist[s] in the fact that here we are not simply filing things in pigeonholes but that what we encounter in a tradition says something to us. Understanding, then, does not consist in a technical virtuosity of "understanding" everything written. Rather, it is a genuine experience (*Erfahrung*) – i.e., an encounter with something that asserts itself as truth.[13]

These conditions for understanding do not offer criteria for a correct or uniquely appropriate understanding. Rather, they draw out the consequences of our historical condition. Because we are historically situated, our understanding is prejudiced rather than objective; we cannot test it against the real world or the actual text, since we have access to that world and text only through our prejudiced understanding. Hence, if we are interested in distinguishing those projections of meaning that impose meanings on the text and those that illuminate it, we must anticipate that the text is an intelligible whole; that its meaning is its own, not ours; and that it can be illuminating for us, that it can teach us the narrowness of our previous conceptions or teach us to affirm them with all the more strength. In either case, its "truth" serves as a backdrop against which to reveal our prejudices to us and to reconsider them in its light.

A similar account of the conditions of understanding emerges from Rorty's own view of textual interpretation inasmuch as he insists that interpreters must check their interpretations against the text conceived of as a coherent whole.[14] A Gadamerian account also emerges from his criticism of what he calls "knowingness." Knowing critics give up both the criticism of works of literature and the exhibition of any enthusiasm for them. They replace both with a kind of professional competence and intellectual sophistication that "knows" the theoretical framework or pigeonhole within which to fit a work of literature but is immune to any capacity it has to edify or illuminate. In contrast, Rorty attributes to nonknowing critics an openness to being taught, and even awed and transformed. To adopt the stance of knowingness is to erode what Gadamer calls the Socratic *docta ignorantia*, or the knowing that one does not know, that makes understanding possible. Thus, Rorty writes:

> If it is to have inspirational value, a work must be allowed to recontextualize much of what you previously thought you knew; it cannot, at least at first, be recontextualized by what you already believe. Just as you cannot be swept off your feet by another human being at the same time that you recognize him or her as a good specimen of a certain type, so you cannot simultaneously be inspired by a work and be knowing about it. ("The Inspirational Value of Great Works," AOC 133)

But by which literature should we be inspired? Does this analysis ultimately not confirm Rorty's naïveté in appealing to Gadamer? Which literature or art should we let inspire and transform us? *Atlas Shrugged* or *The Grapes of Wrath*? *Triumph of the Will* or *Schindler's List*? In which directions

shall we allow transformation? In contrast to the question of how openness is possible, these questions are ones for which neither Rorty nor Gadamer shows much concern. Gadamer claims that "in understanding we are drawn into an event of truth and arrive, as it were, too late if we want to know what we are supposed to believe."[15] For his part, Rorty considers the issue dead. In order to see why, I want to turn to his consideration of politics, where his focus remains the same as his focus in epistemology: namely, the barriers to change and development erected by fixed grounds and allegedly universal standards.

HERMENEUTICS AND POLITICS

In the political case, Rorty's points of reference are Walt Whitman and John Dewey, specifically Whitman's claim that "the United States themselves are essentially the greatest poem"[16] and Dewey's proposition that "democracy is the only form of moral and social faith which does not 'rest upon the idea that experience must be subjected at some point or other to some form of external control: to some 'authority' alleged to exist outside the processes of experience.' "[17] In Whitman's view, the poetical nature of the United States lay in its commitment to a process of self-creation without a guaranteed teleology. "Whereas Marx and Spenser claimed to know what was bound to happen," Rorty writes, "Whitman . . . denied such knowledge in order to make room for pure, joyous hope" (AOC 23). Similarly, Dewey looks to a form of philosophy that dispenses with attempts at justification. Valid claims of truth and rightness are not justified as correspondence to objective reality or expressions of God's will. They refer, instead, to a historicist and fallibilistic conception, to what Rorty calls "expressions of satisfaction at having found a solution to a problem: a problem which may someday seem obsolete, and a satisfaction which may someday seem misplaced" (AOC 28). Likewise, democratic institutions are not justified as the expression of rationality or the application of moral principles. Rather, they express the idea that citizens need not regard as authoritative anything other than a "free consensus between as diverse a variety of citizens as can possibly be produced" (AOC 30).

Thus, what Rorty, following James Baldwin, calls "achieving our country" means forging a moral identity that is determined by no authority outside of ourselves, just as getting on in the natural or social world requires forgoing the authority of epistemology. We achieve our country, instead, insofar as we follow through on the promises and opportunities its

character and history make available to us. We achieve it ourselves as our future. Nonetheless, it is our country we achieve, a future made possible on the basis of options opened up by its past. For Rorty, our future country is classless and casteless, and contains as much personal liberty for each person as is consistent with the similar liberty of all the others. Yet, he admits that one might adopt Elijah Mohammed's view instead and see the ultimate achievement of the United States as the creation of the racist sanctuary it has always been – the racist society its character and history have made of it. One might trace a line in American history from the Pullman strike to Marcus Garvey, the General Motors strike of 1936, the Montgomery bus boycotts, the *Brown v. Board of Education* decision, the closing of university campuses after the bombing of Cambodia, and the Stonewall riots. Equally plausibly, however, one might reconstruct the line through the drawn-out massacre of the Native Americans, the institutions of slavery and segregation, the demotion of former citizens of Mexico to second-class citizens of the United States, the war in Vietnam, discrimination against gays and lesbians, and so on. Which country, then, are we, and which should we be trying to achieve?

Rorty thinks there can be no point to giving reasons for one answer over the other. Instead, he insists, "Nobody knows what it would be like to try to be objective when attempting to decide what one's country really is, what its history really means, any more than when answering the question of who one really is oneself, what one's individual past really adds up to" (AOC 11). Indeed, while he argues that a "free consensus between as diverse a variety of citizens as can possibly be produced" precludes class and caste divisions, he denies the need to ground this understanding of our possibilities. "All that can be said in its defense," he writes, "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." Indeed, appealing to Dewey and Whitman, he continues, "To those who want a demonstration that less suffering and greater diversity should be the overriding aims of political endeavor, Dewey and Whitman have nothing to say" (AOC 30).

Dewey, Whitman, and Rorty have nothing to say because saying something requires that we take refuge in the very constraints that Rorty thinks it is the merit of hermeneutics to have rejected. We possess interpretations of who we are or what our country is capable of becoming; in our social and political activities, we promote these interpretations against different visions of who we are or what country we might therefore achieve. For Baldwin

and Rorty, the country we might achieve is one that involves less suffering and the greater flourishing of an increased number of "larger, fuller, more imaginative and daring individuals." For the Nazis, achieving their country involved exterminating deviants from the Aryan race. Rorty views Nazis as thugs, but not because they misinterpreted their country's salient traditions or because they were inspired by misinterpretations of them. Rather, to the extent that hermeneutics is open to alternative accounts, it also opens itself up to the risk of becoming inspired and edified by any of them. If we are to be open to edification, we cannot limit in advance the accounts by which we might be inspired and the persons or countries we might become. The Nazis achieved their country no less than Baldwin and Rorty hope we can achieve ours.

Hermeneutics thus aligns itself with radically democratic politics, since it denies that we can find security or grounding for our particular interpretation of what achieving our country involves. In particular, it denies that we can look to ahistorical notions of human rights, which serve only to limit in advance the options available for our future. Instead, Rorty sees politics in Whitmanesque terms as the hope for a "full play for human nature to expand itself in numberless and even conflicting directions" (AOC 24). In a democracy, we compete and argue with one another. No preestablished boundaries limit this contest. Instead, Rorty and Whitman invoke the Hegelian idea of "progressive evolution" in which "everybody gets played off against everybody else" (AOC 25). If we should fail to achieve our country or if a different country is achieved from the one to which we ourselves aspire, the failure here is not a mistake in correctly understanding who we are but a failure to make our account of who we are one that inspires others and ourselves to establish it for the future.

Still, is this call to interpretive arms all that hermeneutics allows? Or does Rorty's concern to erase external props for, and limits to, the full play for human nature allow him to overlook a constraint within hermeneutics itself? Rorty connects liberalism to "maximal room for individual variation" and thinks that maximal room is "facilitated by a consensus that there is no source of authority other than the free agreement of human beings."[18] Here, however, Rorty misses an opportunity within our hermeneutic situation that his own appeal to hermeneutics illuminates. The use Rorty makes of Gadamer suggests that because we are thrown into a history and a vocabulary, neither of which we can escape without losing our framework of understanding, we can revise and reconsider that framework only through a process of *Bildung* that involves examining our assumptions from within, in terms of what we understand of and from others. But, what Rorty does

not say is that this circumstance means that *Bildung* or edification relies on these others – on the existence of other cultural and historical frames of reference, other horizons, and other interpretations. Consequently, interpretations that threaten this existence also threaten their own capacities for self-reflection and education. The persistence of alternative understandings is a condition of *Bildung*. Hence, hermeneutics offers us reasons to be suspicious of those interpretations the content of which does not allow for the expression of some or all others. By advocating a narrowing of the range of interpretations, they advocate the elimination of part of the basis for their own development.

Of course, those who possess such interpretations of who we are and should be may want precisely to avoid such edification. The result is the kind of knowingness and pigeonholing that Rorty and Gadamer think is the antithesis of *Bildung*. Rather than allowing for the possibility that one might be educated by alternative understandings, one knows the theoretical slot into which to insert them and remains unaffected and unchanged by them. One might argue that such interpretations do not seek to eliminate *all* other interpretations and that, by retaining some, they retain a basis for their own edification. One insight of hermeneutics, however, on Rorty's own account, is its recognition that we cannot tell in advance which perspectives are going to edify us. For this reason, it would seem that hermeneutics requires the fullest range of perspectives possible and, perhaps ironically, it has to be wary precisely of those that would seek to restrict this range. What Rorty misses in his zeal to eliminate all boundaries is that hermeneutics itself requires a skepticism about some interpretations, namely, those that require or lead to the elimination of others, and it requires this skepticism in order to enhance the expression of all those others.

This conclusion may seem implausibly self-referential. If we urge skepticism about those interpretations that advocate or lead to the silencing of others, are we not also urging skepticism about ourselves? If we are wary of those anti-Semitic interpretations of German history that advocate a Germany without Jewish voices, and if we are suspicious of those racist interpretations of who we are as Americans that urge a United States without diverse voices, are we not silencing Nazis and white supremacists? Ought we not, then, to be skeptical about our own skepticism? Skepticism, however, is not the same as silencing. Hermeneutics provides internal standards for reading and listening, standards that extend beyond the need for coherence and completeness in one's interpretation to include openness. The relevant question is not whom we shall allow to speak but how we shall listen both openly and critically. We do not ask whether white supremacists should be

allowed to speak but, rather, whom they would silence and from whom they would therefore prevent us from learning.

What other sorts of interpretation are vulnerable to this question? Interpretations of our aspirations toward equality that simply ignore the interpretations of equality by women and minorities serve as one example. Thus, when the Supreme Court decided in 1896 in *Plessy v. Ferguson* that it could ignore the understanding that African Americans voiced of Jim Crow laws, its own "knowingness" gave good reasons to suspect its account. We might also employ standards of coherence, completeness, and openness in the current debate over pornography in the United States. We can allow pornographers the expression of their views of women while recognizing that these views would educate us to ridicule, undermine, and, to this extent, silence the expressions of women.[19] Even more criticism is justified with regard to the social and historical interpretations that contributed to or sought to justify German, Tutsi, or Serbian genocide. Aside from the horrific visions of society these acts involve, because they also silence voices and restrict the range of interpretations, they endanger the possibilities of edification and change.

To be sure, edification and change can no longer appeal to progress toward truth. For this very reason, however, they must hold out for the fullest possible range of interpretations of meaning and, hence, they give reasons to limit that range in advance to interpretations that can remain open, in a nonnaïve way, to the interpretations of others. These reasons remain linked to an interest in *Bildung*, to an interest in learning and considering ourselves through new lenses. Hence, they do not provide a philosophical foundation for tolerance or openness, a foundation that Rorty dismisses. At the same time, openness to the open interpretations of others provides a way of directing the course of our inspirations without falling prey to either knowingness or naïveté.

Nor does this conclusion show that those who proceed dogmatically are irrational. "These bad people are no less rational, no less clear-headed, no more prejudiced," Rorty insists, "than we good people who respect Otherness."[20] Nonetheless, it does suggest that if one proceeds hermeneutically rather than dogmatically, the consequences are not only democratic, in the sense that one's openness to options for edification cannot be limited in advance, but liberal as well, in the sense that the continued existence of options for edification leads to a suspicion of those interpretations that advocate or lead to the silencing of others. Rorty distinguishes Whitman's full play for human nature from contemporary multiculturalism, at least to the extent that the latter is concerned with preserving distinct cultures

and forms of life against incursions from other cultures and forms of life. Progressive evolution requires, instead, "a poetic *agon*, in which jarring dialectical discords would be resolved in previously unheard harmonies" (AOC 24–5). But these harmonies can be distinguished from silencings in which the content of certain interpretations requires or advocates obliterating the voice of another. To the extent that hermeneutics provides grounds for criticizing these silencings, it provides justifiable parameters for progressive evolution, parameters that give us some control over the directions of our inspirations and reasons to insist on staying critically open ourselves.

I would like to suggest more: namely, that the course of our inspirations would be enriched not only by mutual, if critical, openness, but also by "previously unheard harmonies" or mutual accommodation. In Rorty's view, a source for worry in contemporary ideas of the value of multiculturalism is its interest in preserving distinct cultures for their own sake. Such an interest assumes not only that all cultures are worth preserving but also that they need not hermeneutically reflect upon themselves, that they need not be engaged in a kind of cultural *Bildung*. Conversely, if we take up a democratic form of *Bildung* and if we conceive of it in hermeneutic terms, then we shall expect the argument and competition among different understandings of ourselves and our country to which Whitman points. But this argument and competition are of a particular kind. Because "nobody knows what it would be like to try to be objective when attempting to decide what one's country really is, what its history really means," our competition over the best way of understanding it cannot be one in which we take self-righteous positions. Once we recognize that our own account of what our country is and what its history means is no less an interpretation than any other account, we can also acknowledge that our debates over who we are and what our future should be are interpretive debates. They are not debates in which we can prove each other wrong but rather debates in which we can try to show the significance of some feature of our history or society that we think the alternative interpretation overlooks or to which it gives insufficient importance. Political debates of this kind are close to literary debates. We want others to understand what we understand of the "text" of our mutual life. Perhaps more importantly, we want to understand what they understand, to see what they may have seen that we may have missed. The result is often the kind of synthesis of views that Whitman and Rorty attribute to Hegel and that becomes the basis for new competitions and yet newer syntheses.

Thus, we might argue for possible syntheses or integrations in Americans' different understandings of the practices in which we engage

together and the principles to which we mutually adhere. In debates over abortion, affirmative action, pornography, and surrogate mothering, for example, we can integrate each other's understandings in new syntheses: in understandings of the dignity of human life in which each side of the abortion debate learns to respect the individual autonomy and care for others that the other side emphasizes; in understandings of our principle of equality that incorporate both aspirations for neutrality with regard to race, ethnicity, and gender and aspirations for the participation of all in the practices and institutions of our country; in understandings of the principle of free speech that are wary of the way both pornographers and women can be silenced; and in accounts of motherhood and family that allow for new and expanded forms.[21] Rorty looks to a similar synthesis of the concerns of the old and new left.

What happens, he asks, if we reinterpret the progressive left from the perspective of the end of the Cold War and the final discrediting of the Communist regimes of Eastern Europe? From the point of view of theorists such as Christopher Lasch and C. Wright Mills, the progressive left was coopted by liberalism. Moreover, it was doomed by its anticommunism and unable to face up to the character of the United States that was revealed by its engagement in the Vietnam War. Rorty argues, conversely, that the left's anticommunism was entirely justified by the brutality of Communist regimes and, further, that it was entirely consistent with its patriotism, redistributionist economics, and pragmatism. For the progressive left, the greatest risk to American democracy was the split between rich and poor. This split, however, was not to be averted by a centralized economy but rather by a "cooperative commonwealth in which none would be deprived of his or her dignity as an American citizen by 'laboring without any hope of reward in this world' "(AOC 49). The means to overcome this risk remained the institutions of constitutional democracy: "a cooperative commonwealth could be created by electing the right politicians and passing the right laws" (AOC 54–5).

What Rorty calls the "cultural left," in contrast, is no longer interested in the redistribution of wealth, electing the right politicians, or passing laws. Its ancestor is the New Left of the 1960s and, in place of selfishness or the growing disparity between rich and poor, it takes the crucial issue in the United States to be humiliation on the basis of race, ethnicity, gender, and sexual orientation. "This cultural left thinks more about stigma than about money," Rorty says, "more about deep and hidden psychosexual motivations than about shallow and evident greed" (AOC 77). This left sees the history of the United States in a way more in line with Elijah Muhammad than

with either Dewey or Whitman. For it, the United States is a sadistic, racist society that requires a new consciousness rather than new laws. The cultural left has no reforms to propose, according to Rorty. Through a kind of collective consciousness-raising, it has made it more difficult to ignore or allow the humiliation previous generations routinely inflicted on women, minorities, and gays and lesbians. At the same time, economic inequality has only increased. Furthermore, Rorty thinks that the cultural left's identity politics is problematic if our need for recognition as women, African Americans, Latinos, and the like means that we give up on our common identity as American citizens. Pride in one's gender, race, ethnicity, or sexuality is a reasonable reaction to eons of discrimination. At work here is what K. Anthony Appiah calls the "move from negative to positive scripts," an appropriation of the identity for which one has been denigrated as a positive ascription for which one demands recognition.[22] Yet, "insofar as this pride prevents someone from also taking pride in being an American citizen, from thinking of his or her country as capable of reform, or from being able to join with straights or whites in reformist initiatives, it is a political disaster" (AOC 100).

Suppose we were to think in hermeneutic ways about a synthesis of progressive and cultural lefts. Rorty thinks the progressive left should recognize the debt Americans owe to the New Left's opposition to the war in Vietnam and to its outrage at continuing racism within the United States. In addition, he thinks we have all learned from the cultural left's sensitivity to sexism, homophobia, and sadism in general. At the same time, he thinks the New Left's anti-Americanism and anti-anticommunism, as well as the cultural left's Nietzschean nihilism, all need edification by a reconsideration of the history of the American labor movement and the progressive left. Hence, he thinks the cultural left should recognize the debt Americans owe to that left for reforms in working conditions, for developments in social welfare, for victories of political legislation, and, most of all, for its unfailing faith in America. If we were to combine sensitivity to sadism with a commitment to the piecemeal political reform necessary to eliminate huge disparities in wealth, income, educational opportunity, and living conditions, then Rorty thinks we could finally achieve our country. "Maybe together we can help bring our country closer to the goal that matters most," he writes, "the classless society."[23]

This goal requires no ideals outside those of hermeneutic conversation itself, which also offers no guarantees. The current, somewhat frayed, synthesis between social and economic conservatives might continue to dominate interpretations of our past and future, as it will, Rorty thinks, as

long as the cultural left fails to recombine with the progressive left. Still, he also suggests that the future is made by those who show up, by those who commit themselves to considering democratically and together who we are and who we can become. If we add to this analysis a commitment to no constraints other than the constraint of openness internal to hermeneutics itself, then we can embrace new identities and new forms of relationship with confidence in their continuing allegiance to the liberal democracy we have sometimes been.

Notes

1. Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, 2nd rev. ed., trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (New York: Continuum Publishing Company, 1994), p. 10.
2. Ibid., p. 12.
3. Ibid., p. 276, German added.
4. See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, trans, John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), Sections 37 and 38.
5. See *Being and Time*, Section 32, and *Truth and Method*, p. 302.
6. *Truth and Method*, p. 302.
7. Ibid., p. 14.
8. See, for example, my *Gadamer: Hermeneutics, Tradition and Reason* (Cambridge, MA, and Stanford, CA: Polity Press and Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 71–2.
9. Richard Rorty, "The Pragmatist's Progress: Umberto Eco on Interpretation," in PSH 136.
10. *Truth and Method*, p. 269.
11. Ibid., p. 268.
12. Ibid., p. 294.
13. Ibid., p. 489.
14. Admittedly, Rorty gives his view with less pomp: "So we pragmatists can view the imperative to check your interpretation against the text as a coherent whole simply as a reminder that, if you want to make your interpretation of a book sound plausible, you cannot just gloss one of two lines or scenes. You have to say something about what most of the other lines or scenes are doing there" ("The Pragmatist's Progress," PSH 136).
15. *Truth and Method*, p. 490.
16. Cited in AOC 22.
17. Cited in AOC 29.
18. "Globalization, the Politics of Identity and Social Hope" in PSH 237.
19. See my *Legitimate Differences: Interpretation in the Abortion Controversy and Other Public Debates* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999), ch. 5.

20. "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in TP 180.
21. See *Legitimate Differences*.
22. See K. Anthony Appiah, "Race, Culture, Identity: Misunderstood Connections," in K. A. Appiah and A. Gutmann, *Color Consciousness: The Political Morality of Race* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), p. 76.
23. See "Back to Class Politics" in PSH 261.

6 Rorty's Inspirational Liberalism

RICHARD J. BERNSTEIN

In his recent writings, Richard Rorty has interspersed autobiographical reflections in order to situate himself and explain where he is "coming from." If we want to grasp how Rorty thinks about liberalism, his patriotic identification with the democratic aspirations of America, and his projection of liberal utopia, then it is essential to understand his life experiences and the narrative that he tells about the vicissitudes of Leftist thought in America. In *Achieving Our Country*, Rorty pauses to explain what it was like to be "a red diaper anticommunist baby" and to become a "teenage Cold War liberal." His parents were loyal fellow travelers of the Communist Party until 1932 (the year after Rorty was born). They broke sharply with the party when they realized the extent to which it was directed by Moscow. But Rorty's parents (and many relatives and friends) always thought of themselves as Left intellectuals who were associated with a variety of anticommunist socialist and radical democratic causes. So Rorty grew up in a political atmosphere in which there was a great concern with social justice. Most of the people who wrote for Leftist journals at the time (many of whom visited his home) "had no doubt that America was a great, noble, and progressive country in which justice would eventually triumph. By 'justice' they all meant pretty much the same thing – decent wages and working conditions, and the end of racial prejudice" (AOC 59). The young Rorty was steeped in a progressive, reformist, radically liberal political ambiance. His maternal grandfather was the Social Gospel theologian Walter Rauschenbusch, who preached against "the servants of Mammon . . . who drain their fellow men for gain, . . . who have made us ashamed of our dear country by their defilements . . . [and]who have cloaked their extortion with the gospel of Christ" (AOC 59). Growing up during the Great Depression, the burning issues of the day were working for decent wages and shorter working hours, alleviating the misery of the poor, strengthening unions, increasing the government's responsibility for unemployment compensation, and instituting social welfare programs (including Social Security). Many of Rorty's relatives helped to write or administer progressive New Deal legislation. And for the circle of relatives and

friends in which he grew up, the great villain, the most serious threat to liberal reformist American democracy, was Stalin and his communist "thugs." Rorty has always been proud of his Leftist (anticommunist) legacy. At a time when it was unfashionable to be an anticommunist Leftist, when it was thought that all fervent anticommunists were conservatives or reactionaries, Rorty held to his Leftist reformist liberal commitments and his anticommunism. He certainly doesn't want to gloss over the violence, the racial hatred, the hypocrisy, and the unrestrained greed that have marked much of American history. But for him, Leftist leanings are not at all incompatible with a sense of patriotism and pride in the promise of the story of the displacement of a "discredited older Left" by the New Left that was told by Christopher Lasch in *The Agony of the American Left*. He thinks it is a disaster that this influential narrative of the alleged failure and "sellout" of reformist intellectuals is still taken as authoritative.

Sometimes Rorty traces his democratic reformist legacy back to Thomas Jefferson, but in *Achieving Our Country* he singles out Walt Whitman and John Dewey as the poet and prophet of a progressive liberal democratic society – "a classless and casteless society" – "the sort of society that American Leftists have spent the twentieth century trying to construct" (AOC 30). It makes perfect sense, given the progressive, reformist environment in which Rorty was nurtured, that his great hero is John Dewey. What Rorty most deeply responds to in Dewey is his conviction that human agency can always make a difference in bringing about a more humane and just society. The achievement of the promise of democracy was always Dewey's central concern. Rorty (like Dewey) is scornful of fashionable professions of pessimism and cynicism. And Dewey (like Rorty) combined the sharpest criticism of the failures of America to live up to its professed ideals with pride in the democratic promise of America. The task for a democratic Left is to try to foster specific projects of liberal reform. "Real politics" (which Rorty contrasts with "Cultural Politics") doesn't give up on what New Leftists once called the "system." A Leftist politics should work toward instituting the types of legislation and social policies that can really make a difference in ameliorating human misery and should strive to lessen the gap between the rich and the poor – a politics that would discourage the wanton greed of the superrich.

Now when Rorty speaks of liberalism, it is this image of progressive, reformist politics that is always the background informing what he cherishes and wants to foster. What is most needed today is not "theorizing" or "problematics," but a return to the tradition of reformist Leftist liberal politics in which intellectuals and workers join together to effect social change.

"Return" is not quite accurate, because Rorty isn't backward-looking. He is calling for a new alliance of progressive intellectuals and workers to deal with the horrendous problems of racism, economic inequality, and poverty that still confront our country. There once was a time in the Progressive Era and during the height of the New Deal when the Left effectively acted as a goad and a conscience for the country – and this is the model of the type of Leftist politics that Rorty hopes to see arise again. It is something of a scandal that "conservatives" have been so effective in distorting the meaning of "liberal" that politicians shy away from calling themselves liberals. It is an even greater scandal that the Democratic Party has abandoned its own progressive, reformist, liberal program.

But why has this happened? How are we to account for what Rorty calls the "Eclipse of the Reformist Left" (a phrase that echoes John Dewey's "The Eclipse of the Public")? In part, Rorty is convinced that academic intellectuals must bear some of the responsibility for this demise. A crucial turning point has been the unfortunate legacy of the 1960s. Rorty is certainly not one of those (like so many neoconservatives and reactionaries) who attribute all our current ills to the excess of the New Left. The civil rights movement of the early 1960s was one of the great achievements of Leftist liberal politics in the twentieth century – a movement that eventually led to the passing of civil rights legislation in the United States. Rorty has never wavered in his condemnation of the Vietnam War. "America," he tells us, "will always owe an enormous amount to the rage which rumbled through the country between 1964 and 1972. We do not know what our country would be like today, had that rage not been felt. But we can be pretty certain that it would be a much worse place than it is" (AOC 68).

He also praises the cultural achievements of the feminist, gay, and lesbian movements, as well as the growing sensitivity to racism. But the heirs of the Old Left and the heirs of the New Left have never been reconciled. We should not harp on the failures of the reformist Left and the New Left, but rather "all of us should take pride in a country whose historians will someday honor the achievements of both of these Lefts" (AOC 71). Nevertheless, what has come to replace the older reformist Left and the New Left is what Rorty labels a "Cultural Left." And from his perspective, this has been nothing less than a disaster. "The heirs of the New Left and the Sixties have created, within the academy, a cultural Left. Many members of this Left specialize in what they call the 'policies of difference' or 'of identity' or 'of recognition.' This cultural Left thinks more about stigma than money, more about deep and hidden psychosexual motivations than about shallow

and evident greed" (AOC 77). What is distressing about this new cultural Left is not its concern with the pernicious forms of racism, sexism, and homophobia, but its almost total blindness to the economic issues of class. Rorty wants to shout at his Leftist academic colleagues: "Hey, Stupid, it's the economy." He accuses the cultural Left of giving up on specific programs of political and legislative reform, of failing to reach out and ally itself with workers and the poor. The cultural Left is more concerned with what the sixties called "naming the system" than with reforming bad laws. It is convinced that "real politics" in the United States is so corrupt and phony, so beneath contempt that it doesn't want to dirty its hands with real political action. The "postmodern cultural Left" spends more energy fighting over what texts should be included in literature courses than it does in dealing with the economic problems of the homeless or creating decent housing and jobs.

Rorty concedes that one positive result of the cultural Left has been making college graduates much more aware of the forms of sexual, homophobic, and racial humiliation. "The American academy has done as much to overcome sadism during the last thirty years as it did to overcome selfishness in the previous seventy" (AOC 82). Nevertheless, there is a dark side to this success. "During the same period in which socially accepted sadism has steadily diminished, economic inequality and economic insecurity have steadily increased" (AOC 83). Rorty calls for a reaffirmation of democratic liberal reform. But the truth is that Rorty is much more effective in ridiculing the cultural Left than he is in coming up with feasible practical alternatives. If the situation is as bad as Rorty describes it, then his "positive" suggestions to get the present cultural Left to transform itself, and to open relations with the residue of the old reformist Left, are quite feeble. "I have two suggestions about how to effect this transition. The first is that the Left should put a moratorium on theory. It should try to kick its philosophy habit. The second is that the Left should try to mobilize what remains of our pride in being Americans" (AOC 91–2).

I believe that the preceding is a fair portrait of Rorty's Leftist liberal political convictions, his criticism of the cultural Left, and his hopes for the future. But there is a strange irony (for someone who thinks of himself as a liberal ironist) in this portrait. Rorty's political allegiances were virtually unknown until the 1980s. Using the distinction that he makes in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* between the "private" and the "public," we might even say that his political views were relatively private – those of a private citizen. His *public* persona was that of a professional philosopher

who, initially attracted to metaphysics and the history of philosophy, had been converted to analytic philosophy. Subsequently, in his controversial but influential book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979), he devastatingly criticized the excess and pretensions of analytic philosophy and modern epistemology. There were a few vague hints about Rorty's political leanings in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, but nothing like the explicit acknowledgments that he made in his writings of the 1980s and the 1990s. There is another irony. Because Rorty wrote favorably about such continental thinkers as Nietzsche, Sartre, Heidegger, Derrida, and Lyotard, he has been taken to be one of those "postmodern" thinkers who became so important for the cultural Left. Rorty himself was horrified by this turn. He was shocked that his anticommunism was mistaken as an endorsement for conservatives and neoconservatives. This misreading of his intentions was a stimulus for a much more forthright and explicit statement of his political liberal allegiances.

In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty sought to set the record straight. He argued that we can read philosophers like Derrida, Nietzsche, and Heidegger for our own private enjoyment. We should read them the way we read a good novel – for sheer pleasure. We can all be ironists in the privacy of our own libraries. But it is an illusion to think that such thinkers were of any use whatsoever in thinking about our public political lives. If one wants to read philosophers who might help us think about politics and social justice, it is better to turn to John Stuart Mill, Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas. Rorty's forte as a philosopher has always been his metaphilosophical critiques – pointing out the foibles, illusions, and self-deceptions of philosophers in their self-understanding of what they are doing. He has been especially critical of the attempts by philosophers to *rationally justify* their positions (including their political position) by appealing to foundations. So in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty criticizes what he calls "liberal metaphysicians." Liberal metaphysicians (which includes most contemporary liberal philosophers except Rorty) are those who think they can justify their basic claims about justice, rights, and liberty. What is wrong with liberal metaphysicians is not their liberalism but their metaphilosophy, their conviction that they can support their claims by appeals to noncircular arguments that are well-grounded and based upon solid foundations. In contrast, the figure that he wants to defend is the "liberal ironist." This is the person who knows that her "final vocabulary" – the words human beings "employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives" (CIS 73) – cannot itself be justified by any appeal to more ultimate rational foundations. The ironist knows that there are always alternatives and does

not think that somehow her final vocabulary "is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself" (CIS 73).

Now to many critics of Rorty, this championing of the liberal ironist – when unmasked – is nothing more than unabashed "bad" nihilistic relativism. Rorty has been battling this criticism for more than twenty years. He is convinced that the charge of relativism is a "bugbear." He claims that the accusation that he is some sort of bad relativist is made by those who still hold to the belief that there are (or ought to be) solid theoretical rational foundations. We would all be better off if we simply dropped all talk of "relativism," "objectivism," "realism," and so on, if we gave up on the idea that deep down in all human beings there is some real essence that can serve to justify our liberal convictions. Rorty's deepest philosophic antagonism is toward what he sometimes calls "Platonism" and at other times "Kantianism." By this he means the "set of philosophical distinctions (appearance–reality, matter–mind, made–found, sensible–intellectual, etc.)" (PSH xii) that have for so long obsessed philosophers. Ever since the publication of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Rorty has been urging his fellow philosophers to drop these distinctions and to bring about a post-philosophical culture where we can turn our attention to the discussion of our social hopes rather than knowing what is really "out there." In his most recent collection of articles, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, he writes: "Most of what I have written in the last decade consists of attempts to tie my social hopes – hopes for a global, cosmopolitan, democratic, egalitarian, classless, casteless society – with my antagonism towards Platonism. These attempts have been encouraged by the thought that the same antagonism lay behind many of the writings of my principal philosophical hero, John Dewey" (PSH xii). Rorty unabashedly defends the appropriateness of rhetoric and what he calls "redescription" in order to make his liberal convictions as attractive as possible. Given his liberal reformist convictions, it makes eminently good sense that he endorses Judith Shklar's definition of a liberal as someone who thinks that cruelty is the worst thing we do. He is also in basic agreement with Avishai Margalit, who argues that a *decent* society is one that seeks to eliminate (or at least minimize) *institutional* humiliation.

Although Rorty – when he wants to – can be a match for almost any sophisticated philosopher in thinking up ingenious arguments, he denigrates the privileged role that argument has been given in analytic philosophy. But he pays a heavy price in his impatience with argumentation and detailed explication – and this shows up in his own defense and articulation of liberalism. He admires the care, detail, and finesse of Rawls and Habermas in articulating and defending their own liberal convictions. The power of

Rawls's theory of justice and Habermas's discourse ethics is to be found in the details – in carefully working out their projects. Each of them (in different ways) seeks to treat the variety of complex issues concerning rights, law, civil disobedience, constitutions, and so on in working out his theory of justice. But if one turns to Rorty's discussion of them, this is rarely what concerns him. He is more interested in their metaphilosophical positions. He praises Rawls because he thinks that in the course of his development during the past thirty years, Rawls (like Dewey) has become less Kantian – and more explicitly historicist.

This fits well with Rorty's own historicist bias. The emergence of liberal societies in the West is a happy accident – a historical contingency. Rorty rejects all grand narratives that suggest that there is an inevitability or a destiny in the eventual triumph of liberal freedom. He keeps criticizing Habermas (whom he greatly admires as a public democratic intellectual) because he still – according to Rorty – has a hankering for something like Kantian foundations and universal validity claims. Whenever Habermas talks about context-transcendent universal norms, Rorty pulls out his "critical" knife. He sharpens his polemic against this unnecessary vestige of Platonism and Kantianism. He is deeply suspicious about anything that even *looks* like a "theory" or a "rational justification," and he elaborates his own redescriptions with broad, sweeping brush strokes. Although he frequently speaks about a commitment to social justice, he rarely spells out what precisely he means – except for a few general catchy phrases.

Philosophers tend to think that there are important and consequential differences in the liberal positions advocated by J. S. Mill, Isaiah Berlin, John Rawls, and Jürgen Habermas. But Rorty thinks that, as *liberals*, they are all more or less saying pretty much the same thing. He goes even further. At one point in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he impatiently declares:

> Indeed, my hunch is that Western social and political thought may have had the last conceptual revolution it needs. J. S. Mill's suggestion that governments devote themselves to optimizing the balance between leaving people's private lives alone and preventing suffering seems to me pretty much the last word. Discoveries about who is being made to suffer can be left to the workings of a free press, free universities, and enlightening public opinion. (CIS 63)

The passage is revealing for several reasons. He claims that we don't need more *theoretical* work about the nature and basis of liberalism – the kind of theoretical work that preoccupies political liberal philosophers and legal theorists. We should focus on how to improve the institutions that already

exist in liberal societies. If we ask Rorty questions like "What really counts as cruelty and humiliation?", "Are there criteria for determining what are acceptable and unacceptable forms of humiliation?", "What are we to do about protecting free speech even when it protects the type of hate speech that humiliates?" and "How are we to decide hard cases where there are serious conflicts?" Rorty grows restless and impatient. He thinks it is not that these are unimportant questions, but they tempt us to think that we ought to be able to give them *philosophical* answers. This is the kind of "theorizing" that isn't helpful for coping, and it is distracting. He is perfectly forthright about his skepticism that *any* sort of theory can help us to justify liberal convictions or can help us resolve real moral dilemmas.

> For liberal ironists, there is no answer to the question "Why not be cruel?" – no noncircular theoretical backup for the belief that cruelty is horrible. Nor is there an answer to the question "How do you decide when to struggle against injustice and when you devote yourself to private projects and self-creation?" This question strikes liberal ironists as just as hopeless as the questions "Is it right to deliver n innocents over to be tortured to save the lives of $m \times n$ other innocents? If so, what are the correct values of n and m?" or the question "When may one favor members of one's family, or one's community, over other, randomly chosen, human beings?" Anybody who thinks that there are well grounded theoretical answers to this sort of question – algorithms for resolving moral dilemmas of this sort – is still, in his heart, a theologian or metaphysician. He believes in an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities. (CIS xv)

Powerful novels (like Charles Dickens's) and muckraking journalism (like Upton Sinclair's) are far more effective in getting people to do something about horrendous social injustices than the academic tracts of philosophers and those infatuated with "theorizing." There once was a time when the work of liberal metaphysicians and theorists was important, especially when liberalism was a novelty and liberal societies were just coming into existence. But that time has long passed. The primary problem now is one of motivation and implementation – to get political coalitions together that are dedicated to reforming institutions, laws, and policies. Rorty is very sympathetic to a view that he attributes to Hegel and Dewey – "that universal moral principles [are] useful only insofar as they [are] the outgrowth of the historical development of a particular society – a society whose institutions [give] content to the otherwise empty shell of principle" (PSH xxxi). He admires the liberal political theorist Michael Walzer because he argues that

"we should not think of the customs and institutions of particular societies as accidental accretions around a common core of universal moral rationality, the transcendental moral law. Rather, we should think of the thick set of customs and institutions as prior, as what commands moral allegiance" (PSH xxxi). So instead of better and more sophisticated liberal and democratic *theory*, the right sorts of novels, muckraking journalism, and op-ed articles may accomplish more to strengthen and improve liberal institutions than endless academic tracts of political philosophers. This fits in with another of Rorty's deepest convictions. Liberal societies depend on a sense of solidarity with and sympathy for one's fellow human beings. It makes little sense to speak about universal sympathy, for this is frequently quite empty. Moral and liberal progress involves enlarging our sense of sympathy for suffering human beings and those who are institutionally humiliated. This is accomplished by the literary skills of novelists and the reporting skills of journalists who are able to arouse our sense of *injustice*, our indignation at outrageous forms of humiliation. Rorty's understanding of human sympathy and solidarity helps clarify another controversial feature of his thinking. He has been deliberately provocative in labeling his position "ethnocentric." But in doing so, he wants to call attention to the fact that solidarity begins "at home" – that it is typically a local phenomenon that can only gradually be extended. Moral progress comes about when our sense of solidarity, our sympathy with those who are institutionally humiliated, is extended and deepened. So Rorty's ethnocentrism, his localism, his concern to start with building up a new American pride is not incompatible with the social hope for achieving a global cosmopolitan liberal utopia.

I said earlier that as a liberal, Rorty is primarily concerned with issues of motivation and implementation. One might ask: what role can intellectuals play in this process? There is no mystery about Rorty's sympathies. His ideal is someone like Herbert Croly, a leading liberal intellectual of the Progressive movement. Croly's *The Promise of American Life* "is filled with the same national pride that filled [Walt Whitman's] *Democratic Vistas*, but Corly makes an important distinction that Whitman rarely made: that between America before and after the coming of industrial capitalism" (AOC 46). Corly recognized that "immiseration would occur whenever the capitalists became able to maintain a reserve army of unemployed, and thus to pay starvation wages to those they hire" (AOC 46–7). Rorty totally endorses both the tone and the content of Croly's claim that "So long as the great majority of the poor in any country are inert and laboring without any hope in this world, the whole associated life of that community rests on an equivocal foundation. Its moral and social order is tied to an economic

system which starves and mutilates the great majority of the population, and under such conditions its religion necessarily becomes a spiritual drug, administered for the purpose of subduing the popular discontent and relieving the popular misery" (quoted in AOC 47). And Rorty hopes that there will be a revival of this type of liberal reformist commitment, that the cultural Left will wake up and grow weary of its obsession with theorizing – that they will join with the workers and the vestiges of the reformist Left to form a revitalized Left dedicated to effective liberal reform. Why does Rorty harp on the issue of national pride and patriotism at a time when these seem so unfashionable, at least among academic intellectuals? Because he is convinced that "a nation cannot reform itself unless it takes pride in itself – unless it has an identity, rejoices in it, reflects upon it and tries to live up to it." Rorty knows that "such pride sometimes takes the form of arrogant, bellicose nationalism. But it often takes the form of yearning to live up to the nation's professed ideals" (PSH 253). The call to his fellow academic intellectuals to take pride in their country, to dedicate themselves to "Achieving our Country," to achieve the democratic promise of America, is a *necessary* condition for the possibility of a revival of reform politics.

Sometimes Rorty (like John Dewey) is dismissed by his critics for being naïvely optimistic about the prospects for America and liberal societies. He is accused of having a superficial understanding of the depravity of human nature – what Christians have always recognized as the sinfulness and fallen condition of human beings. It is certainly true that Rorty has little sympathy for those who appeal to sinfulness as a meaningful *political* category. In the battle over this issue that took place between John Dewey and Reinhold Neibuhr concerning the political significance of sinfulness and the problem of evil, Rorty is clearly on the side of Dewey. We do not need theological categories in order to confront the horrors that exist in the world. Furthermore, Rorty is suspicious of those who adopt a spectatorial attitude of global pessimism – an attitude that diverts us from enlisting collective agency to ameliorate human misery. He fully endorses John Dewey's view of evil. Rorty thinks that Andrew Delbanco (who has strong critical reservations about Dewey) "gets Dewey exactly right when he says that for him 'evil was the failure of imagination to reach beyond itself', the human failure to open oneself to a spirit that both chastises one for confidence in one's own righteousness and promises the enduring comfort and reciprocal love. There is a sense in which all of Dewey's thought was an extended commentary on Emerson's remark 'the only sin is limitation'" (AOC 34). Rorty challenges those who think this understanding of evil is a sign of

Dewey's naiveté and superficiality. On the contrary, it is a mark of Dewey's "intellectual courage."

Furthermore, it is simply false to claim that Rorty is blithely optimistic about the prospects of America as a liberal society. Recent economic trends show that America is rapidly becoming a class and caste society, that the disparity between the small elite group of financially powerful superrich and the large group of poor is becoming more and more exacerbated. In the concluding remarks of *Philosophy and Social Hope*, Rorty gives a number of good reasons why it is "abruptly improbable" that we will ever have a "global liberal utopia" – the type of liberal utopia that he envisions. There are even reasons "for believing that neither democratic freedom nor philosophical pluralism will survive the next century." In a hundred years' time, pragmatism, democratic freedom, and liberalism may only be a faint memory. "For very few unexpurgated libraries may exist then, and very few people may ever have heard of Mill, Nietzsche, James and Dewey, anymore than of free trade nations, a free press and democratic elections" (PSH 274). These are not the words of a happy-go-lucky optimist who is convinced that bourgeois liberalism is destined to triumph. But this doesn't mean that Rorty thinks there is anything wrong with these hopes – that we should abandon them. On the contrary, his warnings bring home what he has always emphasized. The emergence of liberal societies in the West is a historical contingency. Just as circumstances that brought about the existence of liberal societies and institutions were a "happy accident," there is no reason for thinking that liberal societies will continue to exist. There is no historical necessity, no destiny, no enduring human essence that ensures that the freedom of democratic liberal societies will prevail. Indeed, present economic trends suggest that there may be a collapse of liberalism and pragmatism in America. (See his fantasy "Looking Backwards from the Year 2096" in *Philosophy and Social Hope*.) This is not reason to retreat into the spectator stance of cultural pessimism – to become a doomsayer, a herald for what Heidegger called the epoch of *Gestell* (Enframing). Rather, the contingency of liberal democracy highlights the importance of human agency – of the need to keep working to reform and improve liberal democratic institutions – to keep alive the promise of a classless and casteless liberal utopia.

There is much to admire but also much to criticize in Rorty's "inspirational" liberalism. As long as one stays on an abstract rhetorical level, one can hardly object to calling for social justice and the end of racial prejudice. Rorty acknowledges that national pride and patriotism can easily degenerate into nationalist and isolationist jingoism. But he doesn't sufficiently

acknowledge how the rhetoric of national pride can become empty and sentimental. Sometimes Rorty sounds like a speech writer for one of our politicians who dress up their campaign speeches with talk about the "promise of American democracy" and then use their political power to further the economic interests of their superrich campaign contributors. Of course, we do make distinctions between phony patriotism and the real thing. But "the real thing" (to use an expression that Rorty favors) depends upon directing one's energies toward concrete proposals for the reform of bad laws and policies. Rorty is frequently brilliant in calling the bluff of those who believe that their sophisticated theorizing is required for politics today. But if we apply to Rorty the same tough pragmatic standards that he applies to others, there is very little concrete payoff. It may be inspiring and stirring to talk of limiting greed and lessening the gap between the rich and the poor. But Rorty doesn't provide us with the foggiest idea of how this is to be accomplished. How are we to descend from Rorty's lofty rhetoric to the effective liberal reforms? I don't see that Rorty has much that is useful to contribute to this type of pragmatic activity. Although I also admire John Dewey as much as Rorty does, I think that Rorty suffers from the same defect that plagued Dewey. Like Rorty, Dewey was much better at chiding his fellow intellectuals about their failure to deal with the "problems of men" than he was in developing concrete ways for solving these problems.

There is another way of seeing what is missing in Rorty's inspirational liberalism. Suppose we ask why Rorty is so impatient with theory when it comes to dealing with political matters and questions of liberalism. His objections boil down to two complaints. Insofar as theories seek to justify liberalism by appeal to solid foundations and Archimedean resting points, they are doomed to failure. We need to get rid of the excessive "rationalism" that pervades so much of political theory today. It is this rationalism that is the bad legacy of the Enlightenment. Isaiah Berlin was right when he endorsed Joseph Schumpeter's remark: "To realize the relative validity of one's convictions and yet stand for them unflinchingly is what distinguished a civilized man from a barbarian." Rorty also approves of Berlin's comment about this remark: "To demand more than this is perhaps a deep incurable metaphysical need: but to allow it to determine one's practice is a symptom of an equally deep, and more dangerous, moral and political immaturity" (CIS 46). But Rorty doesn't think that the other kind of theorizing – postmodern, nonfoundational theorizing of the cultural Left – is much better. It gets so tangled up in its own sophisticated, dazzling jargon that it becomes the intellectual's narcissistic indulgence – it fails to connect with "real politics."

But it is terribly misleading to suggest that these are the only two viable ways of thinking about the role of political and social theory: *either* misguided foundational theory *or* self-indulgent postmodern theorizing. Suppose we consider the type of liberal democratic reform that Rorty considers to be exemplary – the New Deal social welfare legislation. It is a gross distortion to think (as Rorty sometimes suggests) that a bunch of patriotic Left Americans decided that the government simply had to take some initiative to ameliorate human misery and then instituted reform legislation. There were extensive *theoretical* debates about the causes of the Great Depression and what economic and social measures could help bring the country out of it. And these theoretical debates involved competing *normative* claims about what should be given priority in shaping America. In this sense, *theory informs* concrete programs of action. And such theory is not simply the technical theory of neutral experts, for it requires specifying the social injustices to be rectified. Without a modicum of theoretical analysis and debate, liberal reform can too easily degenerate into mindless activism or the search for quick fixes. There doesn't seem to be a place in Rorty's scheme of things for this type of responsible social and political theory – theory that is neither foundational nor postmodern but that is intended to help us understand the complex situations that we confront in order to figure out what reform is likely to be effective. Sometimes Rorty writes as if this sort of theory is better left to social scientists. But I find little evidence that social scientists are carrying on the type of social theorizing that Dewey thought was necessary for *intelligent* social reform.

Rorty, like many others, is worried about the economic consequences of globalization, especially in regard to its effect on the working populations when multinational corporations can so easily and efficiently manufacture goods almost anyplace in the world where wages are lowest. But suppose we ask Rorty: What is to be done about it? What types of reforms should be instituted? One needs some (theoretical) account of what precisely are the dynamics of globalization, of what we are even talking about when we use this all too fashionable expression. Sometimes Rorty writes as if we don't need any more sophisticated theoretical categories than "greed," "superrich," "thugs," and so on. Now, while this may be rhetorically uplifting, it isn't very illuminating in helping us to figure out what is to be done. In response to some criticisms pressed against his understanding of politics by Simon Critchley, Rorty sharply replies: "I see politics, at least in democratic countries, as something to be conducted in as plain, public, easy-to-handle language as possible. I see the enemies of human happiness

as just greed, sloth and hypocrisy, and I don't see the need for philosophical depth charges in dealing with such surface enemies."[1] Now if one uses the same sort of "plain," blunt talk that Rorty favors and presses the same sorts of tough questions he keeps pressing against others, then one might reply: "Hey Rorty, your high-flatutin' talk about 'redescription' is nothing more than what we in the political real world call 'spin.' And if one is clever enough (has good handlers), one can give almost any remark an effective 'spin.' Let's face it, what you call 'greed' is nothing but good American entrepreneurship, what you call 'sloth' (a word nobody uses today except theologians) is the creative use of leisure that keeps the economy growing, and what you call 'hypocrisy' is only a way of referring to the type of business acumen that makes this such a great country. You should take some pride in those characteristics that have made our democracy so great, powerful, and resilient!"

The trouble with Rorty's "inspirational" liberalism is that, at best, it tends to become *merely* inspirational and sentimental, without much bite. "Where's the beef?" At worst, it is a rhetorical smokescreen that obfuscates the type of serious thinking and action required to bring about liberal reform that he envisions. Inspirational liberalism without detailed, concrete plans for action tends to become empty, just as quick fixes without overall vision and careful theoretical reflection tend to become blind.

I have been arguing that we should raise the tough pragmatic questions about what is to be done, and how to do it, that Rorty keeps raising about others. But, still, we should recognize that Rorty is attempting to create a space for a different way of thinking about liberalism – an alternative to the rights-obsessed liberalism that preoccupies so many academics today.

In the concluding pages of his splendid book on John Dewey, Alan Ryan notes that the characteristic literary product of John Dewey when he deals with social and political issues is the "lay sermon." And, despite Rorty's professed secularism, his characteristic style in calling for renewed national pride and patriotism is also a type of lay sermon. Ryan raises the question of whether the lay sermon is an apt style for a modern liberal. This is his answer:

> More nearly than one might think. A great deal of recent social and political writing has operated at one or the other of two extremes: a concentration on the legal framework of politics or a narrow focus on policy. This has left a substantial hole in the middle ground where Dewey operated. The lay sermon is at home in this middle ground; between pure philosophy and a policy paper lies the terrain of intelligent persuasion.[2]

Ryan then goes on to summarize Dewey's liberalism. His eloquent summary might also serve to describe the Dewey legacy that Rorty seeks to invigorate.

> Deweyan liberalism is different. It is a genuine liberalism, unequivocally committed to progress and the expansion of human tastes, needs, and interests; its focus is on self development and autonomy of the individual; it is, if not rationalist in outlook, certainly committed to the rule of intelligence. . . . What makes it an optimistic and expansive liberalism is its insistence that the individual whom liberalism wants to encourage is neither the rip-off artist favored by the economic changes of the 1980s, nor the narcissist bewailing (or for that matter celebrating) the state of his or her psyche. The individual it celebrates is someone who is thoroughly engaged with his or her work, family, local community and its politics, who has not been coerced, bullied, or dragged into these interests but sees them as fields for a self-expression quite consistent with losing himself or herself in the risk at hand.[3]

Inspirational liberalism may be a healthy antidote to legalistic rights-based liberalism and to the abuses of the infatuation with theorizing by postmodern cultural critics. But without pragmatic toughness and a concrete program for reform, patriotic inspirational liberalism too easily degenerates into an empty rhetorical hand waving.

Notes

1. Reply to Simon Critchley, in *Deconstruction and Pragmatism*, ed. Chantal Mouffe (New York: Routledge, 1996), p. 45.
2. Alan Ryan, *John Dewey and the High Tide of Liberalism* (New York: Norton, 1995), p. 366.
3. Ibid., p. 367.

7 Don't Be Cruel: Reflections on Rortyian Liberalism

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

Richard Rorty is not only a leading light of the revival of pragmatism but one of its chief beneficiaries. His work has penetrated far and wide. He has become a kind of antiphilosopher philosopher. Rorty is an intelligent and canny thinker. He can be a powerful writer. But he tends invariably to undercut whatever gravitas might inhere in his own position with moves toward what is best called the "unbearable lightness of liberalism," or at least one dominant contemporary version of it. There are many entry points into Rortyan discourse, although Rorty doesn't make the task of expositor and critic all that easy. How so? Because his arguments are often slippery and difficult to engage. Just when you think you've come up against something solid, it turns squishy. My hunch is that this is because Rorty wants to embrace, not to debate, to draw us all under the big tent of "we liberal ironists," "we pragmatists," "we antiessentialists," we who "don't do things this way," we . . . we . . . we. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty uses the "we" word nine times in one short paragraph (CIS 79–80). Those of us who resist such "we-ness" are left to sort out just how, why, and where we disagree. I will begin with a few assorted discontents that evolve into deeper engagements, including a fleshed-out counterpoint to Rorty's positions on Freud, cruelty and self-creation, and redescription. My point of departure is *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, to which are added a few published philosophical papers (ORT, EHO).

The main themes of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* are rather easily summarized. Rorty's main task is to unpack the figure he calls the "ironist intellectual" who is central to his "liberal utopia." Right off the bat, he indicates that for liberal ironists, certain questions just don't make any sense – they are simply hopeless. There simply is no knock-down response to a question like "Why not be cruel?" or criteria for when to struggle against injustice. One just does these things – unless one is either a "theologian or a metaphysician" who lingeringly believes one can answer, or try to answer, such daunting questions (CIS 15). Central to the ironist project is the acceptance of a whole range of contingencies – those of language, selfhood,

and community most importantly. Of course, it isn't new news to discuss such contingencies – they certainly vexed St. Augustine in the fourth century, he who insisted a human being doesn't know what he or she will do "on the morrow," let alone years ahead. But Augustine believed that there was a goal; that there were better and worse ways, normatively speaking, of construing selves, and this Rorty wants to get away from even as he endorses one sort of self, the sort of self that is perpetually ironic about any endorsement, including that of the liberal ironist. Language, of course, is slippery, as we've known for a long time, and communities lack solidity and predictability, too. One problem with communities historically is that they looked "to the warrior, the priest, the sage, or the truth-seeking 'logical,' 'objective' scientist" to enshrine as heroes (CIS 73). This was a very bad idea and got us into all sorts of trouble and muddles. Rorty would lift up the "strong poet" as his prototypical hero, one who gets rid of the "Enlightenment vocabulary" and is no longer haunted by questions about relativism and the like.

He describes his ironist in some detail as one who fulfills three basic conditions. She has doubts about her own final vocabulary, she realizes that any argument phrased in "her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts," and she "does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others. . . ." She is an ironist all the way down. The liberal ironist insists on a strong split between the public and the private. She has lots of private purposes, but they are no one's business and have no relation to her public actions. Proust, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Derrida are brought forward as contributors to the position Rorty endorses, but as problematic – at least some of the time – to that project, too. But all have extended what Rorty calls the "boundaries of possibility."

When he turns his attention to community, Rorty picks up on the writers Nabokov and Orwell. Nabokov's best novels, according to Rorty, are those "which exhibit his inability to believe his own general ideas," and this makes him interesting (CIS 168). Orwell's greatness lies in his uncanny ability to describe much of the politics of the twentieth century. And then we get to "solidarity," but it is very different from the way one usually thinks of the term by associating it with strong notions of a common good and a politics that transcends self-interest. Rorty finds deplorable many attempts to evoke solidarity, especially Christianity. But for Rorty, solidarity has to do with particular contingent ties, and it also has to do with a movement that most philosophers would consider teleological toward "greater human solidarity" as part of "a thing" Rorty calls "moral progress" (CIS 192). Things just happen to have worked out that way. We identify with particular

communities largely because of contingencies, but somehow all of this is working out in the direction the liberal ironist would endorse.

Reading Rorty, here and elsewhere, I find myself concluding that he remains too much the analytic philosopher. What is at stake in this lament? It has to do with the nature of the argument and the menu of options Rorty presents as alternatives. Rorty has a tendency to argue along these lines: Either you are part of "we liberal ironists" or you are an essentialist or a foundationalist. He effectively debunks the pretensions of foundationalism, but he fails in his attempt to chart an alternative because that alternative is cast as a thin version of self-creation, wholly contingent, wholly constructed, utterly historicist, nominalist "through and through" or "all the way down," as Rorty might put it.

Further, Rorty insists that we either seek or require "proof" the old-fashioned way, relying on analytic philosophical or metaphysical reassurances and closures, or we join the ranks of his army of the contingent "we." Surely the universe of argument is far richer than this formula allows. Surely one can reject the correspondence theory of truth or strong convictions concerning the "intrinsic nature of reality" without opting for the view that truth is solely a property of "linguistic entities," the latter being a position Rorty uses to lump together all sorts of folks he likes of the idealist, revolutionary, and romantic sort. Rorty links his commitment to contingency to a rough-and-ready progressivist teleology (even though he cannot permit himself teleological arguments, he relies tacitly on Whiggish history) when he claims, as but one example: "Europe gradually lost the habit of using certain words and gradually acquired the habit of using others" (CIS 6). Aside from the peculiarity of granting agency to a continent, what is at work here appears to be a conviction that although there is nothing intrinsic or essential about anything that has happened, or that led to the construction of "we liberal ironists," we are still in pretty good shape if we endorse a loose liberal utopia in which things pretty much continue to move along the way they have been moving because, it must be said, the contingencies seem to be on "our side." At least that is the only way I can interpret a statement such as "A liberal society is one which is content to call 'true' whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be" (CIS 52). The encounters in question here are basic bad guys versus good guys stuff in which, over time, the good guys appear to be winning, more or less.

The good guys combine commitment with contingency. The bad guys are all commitment – rigid and unyielding. The good guys reject any notion of intrinsic or essentialist anything and insist that so long as everybody has a "chance of self-creation," life is pretty good. The good guy – actually, this

character of the ideal sort gets to be a "she" throughout Rorty's discussion – accepts that "all is metaphor" and neither God nor nature designed anything to some preordained purpose, or at least any human anything. I thought of Rorty's "all is metaphor" during a van ride a few years back in a driving rain down Route 91 headed from Amherst, Massachusetts, to Bradley Airport in Windsor Locks, Connecticut. My pony-tailed, perpetually grinning van driver decided to strike up a postmetaphysical conversation. "For me, life is one big metaphor," he said. And then he spelled out his general philosophy of life. It was a brief story. My only concern was whether or not the rain-slicked pavement, the low visibility, and the presence of other vehicles were to be construed metaphorically as well. I thought this might be the case because he insisted on turning to me – seated opposite him in the passenger seat up front – as he celebrated the basic unreality of existence.

Now, what connected my reading of Rorty to this metaphorical ride to the airport? (By the way, I was rather relieved to be back in Nashville, Tennessee, where cabbies are unlikely to describe life as one big metaphor as they drive you home.) I think it is the insistence that life is either to be taken straight up, as grounded and certain, or it is altogether contingent, up for grabs. As I said earlier, surely there are other options. That will be the burden of the case I intend to make.

I am also struck by the fact that Rortyan antiphilosophy is not terribly helpful to the political theorist who rejects strong Platonism and Kantianism (as do I) but wants, at the same time, to avoid the error of underlaboring, of offering far too thin an account of the body politic. When, for example, I read Rorty's characterization of the ideal liberal society, to which he believes we are heading, I learn that it is one in which the "intellectuals would still be ironists, although the nonintellectuals would not" (CIS 87). What spares this from being a bit of what in the old days would have been called a piece of class snobbery is Rorty's conviction that the latter – the vast majority, one must presume – would "be commonsensically nominalist and historicist. That is, they, too, would see themselves as contingent through and through, without feeling any particular doubts about the contingencies they happened to be." So they are in on the heady project of self-creation, although not so aware of its ironic dimension as the true cognoscenti, "we intellectuals." Somehow I don't think historicist nominalism is going to fly with Joe Six-Pack. And I don't mean fly as an argument – I mean as a "story" about reality, about his or their (the nonintellectuals) reality, despite the fact that this thoroughgoing contingency is the thing Rorty calls "moral progress," one small step for men, one big leap for humankind in the direction of "greater human solidarity."

On Rorty's account, we become more solid the thinner we get because we recognize as contingent all the things that constitute who we are. This means jettisoning as core to our identity that which traditionally constituted it (tribute, religion, race, custom), recognizing them as inessential. All that matters is a brotherhood and sisterhood, or pain and humiliation. This smuggles universalism back in, of course, but that isn't the most important point. The most important point is that even in our would-be liberal utopia, people don't and, I would argue, cannot think of themselves as "thoroughly" contingent because when they think of themselves they see concrete fears, pains, hopes, and joys embodied in concrete others – say, a grandchild – and it is impossible for them to construe that grandchild, or to tell the story of the coming into being of that grandchild, in the way Rorty says we must.

Minimally, all those nonintellectuals out there would be unable to practice the incessant self-scrutiny required in order to purge "any particular doubts about the contingencies they happened to be." Leaving aside recent evidence on just how deep and wide are the religious commitments of Americans, including belief in God and personal immortality, a noncontingent fragment that appears to infect over 85 percent of American people (the nonintellectuals I presume), Rorty's evidence for the capacity of nonironists to be wholly historicist and nominalist is pretty thin; indeed, such evidence isn't proffered.[1] Rorty holds up the claim, eschewing coming to grips with the evidence. That is a further reason for the difficulties I have when I try to engage his arguments: they are cast at such a level of generality and diffuseness that it is hard to know what one is endorsing, if one goes along, or what it might mean to oppose what is being said. At this point, Rorty owes us some stories – some postmodern, liberal-ironical, antifoundational, historicist, nominalist stories. "We" party poopers remain ironical about his ironical liberalism. We need exemplars. We need narratives that do not require the bogeymen of foundationalism and essentialism to frighten us into an underspecified alternative.

Sharing his view that in a liberal-democratic society overly precise and highly programmatic demands and policies are neither required nor desired, we nevertheless ponder: what is his alternative? And when we do that, the images that come to mind are of a world in which nothing is ever distinct or ever stands out in stark relief and in which I am not called upon to make tough decisions of the sort that might require that I reject one version of multiculturalism in favor of a more authentic version of diversity – a choice Rorty would be loath to make because he would want to associate all the things that come down the pike with a vaguely progressivist air or flair as

worthy of endorsement or at least not worth opposing. Imagine the liberal ironist at a roller-skating rink – watch me whiz by, catch me if you can, I know I'm going in circles but at least I'm moving in the right direction. What does it mean to "acknowledge contingency"? How can I avoid using any "inherited language game"? What can it mean to use a "new language" in a world in which language is always already before me, in me, through me? What counts as a record of failure or success in the Rortyan world of self-creation? Is there an example of a group of persons, a movement, an ethico-politics that has successfully transcended transcendence of the bad universalist sort in order to achieve an authentic universalism of the contingent sort?

A genuinely ironic history and account should puncture our illusions. The Rortyan ironist, remember, is *first* a historicist and nominalist. The ironic part is the bonus, the door prize, the ideal liberal utopia. The possibility of such a utopia is aided and abetted by a decline of religious faith (I have already called this into question as an empirical matter); the rise of literary criticism that, although it widens the gap between intellectuals and nonintellectuals, all in all seems a good thing: the consensus, or growth toward a consensus, that everybody should have a chance at "self-creation"; and the hope that "with luck" – Lady Luck is a pretty important figure in Rorty's world – modern liberal society can keep telling optimistic tales about itself and how things are getting better. He, for one, sees "no insuperable obstacles in this story's coming true" (CIS 86). This is the basis of hope.

By contrast to this rather blithe account, would not the genuine ironist, one with a well-developed tragic sensibility, insist that "we" come to recognize the illusions – the political illusions – embedded in the progressivist story as Rorty retells it? His ironist – once again a "she" – fulfills three conditions. Each of these conditions is presented as an intramural debate – a matter of "final vocabulary," of "present vocabulary," and the repudiation of some "real" vocabulary, real in the sense of being closer "to reality" or closer to some outside "power" (usually called God, though Rorty might also have Nature in mind). Ironists are folks who do battle over vocabularies and who recognize that "anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed." Given this recognition, they renounce any attempt "to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies" (CIS 73). This puts the Rortyan ironist in a "metastable" position.

Surely Rorty's "meta" is a bit too stable, hence not nearly ironic enough. Rorty's ironist is insular and self-enclosed, fighting a fight of words, words, words. Far easier to stabilize this world in the name of destabilization than

to confront the thicker reality of lived life, the densities and intractabilities of a world I did not create and do not control. Rorty also encases his ironic self in a cocoon of private self-creation; yet he clearly means to endorse and to serve liberal democratic society as "we liberal ironists" construct the ironic identity as a form of loose community. There is a lot of seepage of private to public and public to private within Rorty's argument. That being the case, it is fair play to take him to task on whether his ironism stabilizes or destabilizes and makes problematic that which the nonironist would cast in the mold of dogmatic certitude. Return with me, then, to those not-so-golden days of yesteryear Rorty describes thus:

> The French Revolution had shown that the whole vocabulary of social relations, the whole spectrum of social institutions, could be displaced almost overnight. This precedent made utopian politics the rule rather than the exception among intellectuals. Utopian politics set aside questions about both the will of God and the nature of man and dreams of creating a hitherto unknown form of society. (CIS 3)

Presumably Rorty would say this is "we antiessentialists' " description of the French Revolution, descriptions being inventions that serve certain purposes. His description aims to show how contingent, even arbitrary, our political characterizations are, and this, in turn, serves to deepen the ironic stance. But that isn't the cause his description of the French Revolution serves: rather, his bland depiction wipes the blood off the pages. Utopian politics becomes the stuff of intellectual politics. The French Revolution takes on a quasi-foundational status as the mother of all political redescriptions. The modern liberal utopian ironist moves away from the guillotine, to be sure, under the "don't be cruel" rule, but the French Revolution continues to edify, to lie at the heart of the project of political hope.

Rorty describes events in a way that misses the terrible tragedy, hence the deep irony, of the revolution. In the name of the Rights of Man, or under that banner, tens of thousands were imprisoned and at least 17,000 were guillotined between 1792 and 1794 alone. One avid executioner bragged that the revolution would "turn France into a cemetery rather than fail in her regeneration."[2] This statement is horrifically funny: the sort of thing that makes the blood run cold. The genuine ironist would describe in a way that foregrounds the Terror and the horror, that holds it up for all would-be utopians to see. Rorty does the opposite. Why, I wonder? Surely we need continually to be reminded of the mounds of bodies on which nationalistic and revolutionary politics rest. Surely the liberal, above all, must proffer such reminders. Contrast the thinness of Rorty's characterization of the

French Revolution in terms of vocabulary change with Camus's story of the Republic of the Guillotine.

> Saint-Just exclaims: "Either the virtues or the Terror." Freedom must be guaranteed, and the draft constitution presented to the Convention, already mentions the death penalty. Absolute virtue is impossible, and the republic of forgiveness leads, with implacable logic, to the republic of the guillotine. . . . But at the heart of this logical delirium, at the logical conclusion of the morality of virtue, the scaffold represents freedom. . . . Marat, making his final calculations, claimed two hundred and seventy-three thousand heads. But he compromised the therapeutic aspect of the operation by screaming during the massacre: "Brand them with hot irons, cut off their thumbs, tear out their tongues."[3]

The strong ironist would be certain that her description of revolutionary virtue included a (be)headed count. For her task would be one of making as clear as possible, in as dramatic a way as possible short of some blunt laying down of the law, that virtue all too easily translates into vice; that the tragic and the ironic keep very close company; that self-deception is most visible when illusions are greatest; that any and all claims to purity must be punctured. Rorty does none of these in his few words on the French Revolution. This omission of any mention of the bloodiness of one of history's most grandiose movements of redescription permits, in turn and in tandem with Rorty's overall rhetoric and narrative strategy, far too smooth sailing over tranquilized waters to the present moment as one in which there are no "insuperable obstacles" to the liberal progressivist story.

Writes Richard Reinitz in his volume *Irony and Consciousness*: "Belief in the inevitable growth of human knowledge and progress, and in America as an exemplar of that progress, is one of those pretensions. [The pretensions he here discusses are those depicted by Reinhold Niebuhr as characteristic of American society.] Like all modern liberal cultures, America's culture has for the most part rejected the doctrine of original sin in favor of the irony-inducing pretense to 'objectivity,' the belief that we can keep selfish interests from affecting our understanding."[4]

Don't get me wrong: Rorty would never endorse the cruelty of the Terror. But by holding it at arm's length, by not allowing it into the picture, he more easily preserves intact his own endorsements and future projections and promises. Thus, his claim that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed *is* genuinely troubling – ethically and politically. Take the following story, one Camus offered in a speech at Columbia University

in 1946 as a way to characterize "a crisis of world-dimensions, a crisis in human consciousness":

> In Greece, after an action by the underground forces, a German officer is preparing to shoot three brothers he has taken hostages. The old mother of the three begs for mercy and he consents to spare one of her sons, but on the condition that she herself designate which one. When she is unable to decide, the soldiers get ready to fire. At last, she choose the eldest, because he has a family dependent on him, but by the same token, she condemns the two other sons, as the German officer intends.[5]

How might this story be redescribed in order to make it "look good"? Rorty, remember, insists on this possibility. I will put the point in stronger terms: He *requires* this possibility in order to sustain his larger argument about the utter contingency and arbitrariness of our characterizations. So it is something that "just happened," that Europe acquired a habit of using other words, words that promote "don't be cruel." Camus describes a moment of genuine terror. He means to evoke our horror and revulsion. He means to do this to alert us to how dangerous the world is and how necessary it is to sustain an ethical-political stance that limits the damage.

Were I to suggest that Camus's story is but one way of describing something that could be as easily described in an alternative way designed to make it look good, I would make myself loathsome; I would become a ravager. Rorty surely agrees with this because he, too, hopes to lower the body count; thus, I think it is fair to ask him whether Camus's story puts pressure on his rather carefree advocacy of the infinite possibilities of redescription. This is a point I will return to in my discussion of just what sorts of stories – political stories – "we liberal ironists" might tell. Camus is an ironist and many call him liberal, but he locates us in the heart of darkness, a place we must visit from time to time, not as one textual experience among many possible textual experiences but as a historic reality and ever-present possibility that cannot be contained by being transported behind a private *cordon sanitaire*. If, as Rorty claims, solidarity is created "by increasing our sensitivity to the particular details of the pain and humiliation of other, unfamiliar sorts of people" (CIS xvi), it is puzzling that he steps back from the opportunity to deepen the pool of sensitivity by telling the story of all those unfamiliar sorts of people – peasants in the Vendeé as well as aristocratic families and intellectuals (of the wrong sort) in Paris – who lost their heads to revolutionary virtue.

Rorty's Freud is as puzzling in this regard as his French Revolution. Freud is a pivotal thinker for Rorty, serving as one of the masters of

redescription and decentering of the self central to the rise and future hope of "we liberal ironists." But I have a rather hard time recognizing his Freud. Freud becomes either too mechanistic (in Rorty's discussion in Volume 2 of his philosophical papers) or too much the flower child, an odd combination of scientism and expressivism. Briefly, the story Rorty tells about Freud depicts his project as a knowing demolition of many received understandings – fair enough – and offering, as a consequence, simply "one more vocabulary," his own chosen metaphoric. Pressing just "one more description" is an extraordinary taming of a project whose father characterized himself as Hannibal, Moses, a conquistador. Conquistadors usually aim a bit higher than providing one more description. They seek to impress themselves on a territory and a people – to conquer. Freud saw his project in similarly dramatic terms and, as well, he claimed the imprimatur of science and truth. His demolition of his opponents is scarcely the work of a man tossing out one more vocabulary for our consideration!

As well, Freud's awareness is not simply of life's contingencies but also its tragedies; his insistence that psychoanalysis is not primarily a cure-all but the basis for a very "grave philosophy" disappears in Rorty's story. Instead, Freud is assimilated to a too-simple version of socialization theory, not unlike that favored by functionalists and structuralists. Here as elsewhere, in exposing the too-grandiose presumptions of traditional metaphysics and strong Aristotelian teleology, Rorty falls into an overreliance on the categories of analytic philosophy. That is, the absence of an "intrinsic" human nature or of moral obligations that are preprogrammed leads Rorty into a world that is at one and the same time too open and plastic ("any and every dream") or too constricted ("blind impress"). These too-restricted alternatives are strikingly in evidence when he takes up Freud. For Freud's aims went far beyond showing how we are determined and might be free for self-creation nonetheless. Contra Rorty, Freud did not give up "Plato's attempt to bring together the public and the private, the parts of the state and the parts of the soul, the search for social justice and the search for individual perfection" (CIS 303–4). Freud's discussions of ego and superego, of war and the self, of the trajectory of individual development – all turn on the connections Rorty claims Freud severed.

A long exposé or unpacking is not possible. I will serve up just a couple of points to put pressure on Rorty's redescription of Freud's project, beginning with "blind impress," which I take to be Rorty's way of insisting that instinct as a form of preprogramming may not be "unworthy of programming our loves or our poems," although this is not terribly clear (CIS 35). "Private obsessions" is another way Rorty talks about what he calls "blind

impresses" unique "to an individual or common to members of some historically conditioned community" (CIS 37–8). One way or the other, Rorty is depicting conditioning – conditioning that he doesn't sort out into the biological and the historical, although "blind impress" suggests both.

Either way, this rather misses the Freudian boat. Freud could never agree that "socialization . . . goes all the way down – that there is nothing 'beneath' socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human" (CIS xiii). To be sure, this is a slippery Rortyan formulation. Perhaps Rorty here means to incorporate bioevolutionary dimensions within the historical. But it needs to be stressed that, for Freud, the human being is a complex physiological entity, driven in ways not at all historically contingent. We are critters of a particular kind. There is a biology, a morphology, a neurophysiology definatory of "the human" and prior to our historical construction in a particular family, time, and place.

For an individual to be forged out of the human, certain things are required – first and foremost, human love, for we are exquisitely social. Freud's understanding of the very possibility of human freedom turns on there being something to us humans that is not thoroughly and exhaustively defined and captured by history. There would be nothing to be discontented with were we as totally historicized as Rorty suggests. Where Freud is powerful – in offering a developmental account, teleologically driven, of what is required in order that a distinctive individual might emerge from the human – Rorty falters. Rorty does insist that one cannot, from the day of a child's birth, rear a child to be tentative and "dubious" about his or her society and culture. But that is pretty much it. Freud goes much further. He does lay down the law (again, the Moses analogy Freud used to understand himself is not unimportant in this regard, and sketches out a clear and mordant theory of development). Conscience – necessary to the don't-be-cruel rule – is not, Freud insists, simply there, is not given. But it can and must emerge if aggression – the greatest problem in civilization – is to be tamed, curbed, and muted, if not eliminated.

Rorty offers us no developmental account. We cannot, therefore, understand where noncruelty comes from. Freud is insistent on this score. He reverses conventional accounts of the rise of moral ideals. For persons capable of a moral point of view (that is, capable of occupying the position of the other; capable of empathy and identification with those different from themselves) to emerge what is required is (1) specific powerful others (usually called parents) who are libidinally cathected, the objects of both love and hate. This demands constancy in early object identification. (2) In order for reality testing, essential to mature development and the

emergence of genuine individuality to occur, those others cannot be absent or remote, nor will "objective" structures and institutions do the job; they must be real human beings to whom the child is erotically attached. This and this alone lays the groundwork for the child to become a social being.

The superego has a specific history; it bears a double burden of aggression, a combination of the child's own aggressivity and the child's introjection of parental authority. In order that this aggressivity be bound, the child must engage in a series of complex experiments of thought and action within an environment of loving discipline. Ethical and erotic are necessarily intertwined in moral life. This intertwining escapes the confines of particular families and feeds into, even as it is fueled by, the wider culture.[6] The development of the individual is, of course, contingent in many ways: no one selects his or her parents, place or culture of birth, and so on, but it is not arbitrary. Development has a teleological thrust; it bears within it the seeds of possibility. That possibility is best understood as an attempt to work out what it means to be free and to be responsible in light of predeterminations of an embodied sort and determinations of a cultural sort.

Freud never shirked from specifying the sorts of environments and worlds that gave rise, or had a fighting chance of giving rise, to individuals and those that did not. As well, there would be no point at all in therapy if an ideal of the structural unity of the self were not held up. This is tied, in turn, to the possibility of truth. Hysterics and neurotics suffer from reminiscences, from the telling of inappropriate, false, or obsessive stories. The truth *does* set one free, but it cannot be any old construction – it must "take"; it must be a construction that leads to a recollection that invites a "yes," a liberating "yes," from the analysand.

Now none of this makes any sense at all if it is severed from a strong developmental account that enables us to sift and winnow some ways of rearing children from others; that enables us to say this is rotten and awful; this is better; this is better yet. Writes Jonathan Lear: "From all we know of cruelty, it is not lovingly instilled. It is cruelty that breeds cruelty: and thus the possibility of a harmonious cruel soul, relatively free from inner conflict and sufficiently differentiated from the cruel environment, begins to look like science fiction." Lear goes on in a footnote to write unabashedly, as did Freud, of the formation of a soul as being "dependent on a certain type of responsiveness. Sanity is a constitutive condition of a fully formed soul. Clinical experience suggests that the closest example of a happy torturer is a torturer who is happier than he normally is when he is torturing. Such people are not stably happy or well-integrated humans. On the whole, it is a tough life to be a torturer."[7]

The upshot of all this is that Freud does *not* deuniversalize the moral sense, as Rorty claims; he reuniversalizes it. Rorty claims that Freud made the moral sense as "idiosyncratic as the poet's inventions" (CIS 30). Freud would not recognize this description of his project. It is precisely bad and destructive idiosyncrasy that he aims to reveal in order that the too-idiosyncratic obsessive, as one example, may take his or her place in the human community, more or less following those rules that make social life possible and dangerous aggressivity against self or others less likely. It is important to bear in mind that Freud is displacing Kantian–Christian teaching about universal moral claims and dispositions, but not in order to eradicate such claims altogether. If Rorty were right about Freud, private life would become impossible – a world of self-creating idiosyncratics continually searching for new descriptions – and public life would become uninteresting, severed as it would be from all that private creativity. But Freud insisted that there is truth to be found; that a metapsychological account relocated our understanding of the self by offering a strong story of development, including the emergence of consciousness in a way that puts pressure on older projects; that central to this project is love – the work of Eros – which he links specifically to Plato's *Symposium*.

On one account, it is cruel to chide a woman wearing a fur coat: it hurts her feelings. On the other hand, more than the fox's feelings have been hurt in creating that sign of vanity and conspicuous consumption. A careless putdown is cruel, but systematic torture is far more cruel and reprehensible. But leave this aside. I want instead to home in on just where the don't-be-cruel rule comes from. I have already suggested that Freud offers, and would require, a developmental account of restraint from cruelty. In order not to be cruel we must learn that cruelty hurts and harms, and we learn this because the ethico-politics of eroticized moral learning have been worked out: we can identify with the other. Freud always bows in the direction of those universal moral norms and rules he challenges, especially Christianity and the Sermon on the Mount, by saying that such rules are impossible to live out fully but that they may, nonetheless, serve a vital purpose in stemming the tide of aggression.

The twentieth century was very cruel, probably the most cruel on a public-political scale. Rorty doesn't really offer an account of public cruelty of the fascist-Stalinist sort either, though he clearly stands in opposition to it. But how robust is his stance? With the don't-be-cruel rule in mind, he poses alternatives that, I fear, make us dumber than we may have any right to be at this late stage. It "just happened" that liberal societies condemn torture because liberals want to be reasonable, and they want this because

the contingencies fell out this way. But it didn't just happen. Liberal society and democratic possibility are the heirs of a very strong account – a Hebrew–Christian story – of why cruelty is sinful and must be stopped, beginning with the Roman games and the exposing of children. These were the first cruelties Christianity forbade. You don't torture people because that is a violation, and it is a violation because we are all children of God.

If one jettisons the metaphysical underpinning of the don't-be-cruel rule, one must offer an alternative. That alternative is usually cast these days in the form of "universal human rights." Amnesty International doesn't talk about reasonableness; it talks about violation of fundamental human dignity taken as an ontological given, not a historic contingency. It might be an interesting exercise for Rorty to rewrite the Declaration of Human Rights so that it retains its power to condemn, separate, and define, yet abandons the basis on which it now does so. Celebrating the decline of religious faith, which served initially to underscore natural law and natural right, Rorty wants to maintain and sustain the injunctions embedded in such earlier formulations. Here I will take up just one instance where I think Rorty misses the boat on cruelty.

Specifically, I have in mind the stories of rescuers – those who put their own lives at risk to stop the torture and destruction of fellow human beings. Having said "fellow human beings" I have already distanced myself from Rorty's account, for he insists that rescuers who saved Jewish neighbors (his examples, very underspecified, are Danes and Italians) did so not because Jews were fellow human beings but by using "more parochial terms," for example that a particular Jew was a "fellow Milanese, or a fellow Jutlander, or a fellow member of the same union or profession, or a fellow bocce player, or a fellow parent of small children" (CIS 190). I have read many accounts of rescue and I have never once encountered "fellow bocce player" as a reason proffered by someone for why he came to put his life and that of his family at risk. Ironical reasonableness didn't have a lot to do with life-risking. Indeed, rescuers during the Nazi years talk the sort of talk Rorty aims to supplant. Here are brief examples drawn from five accounts of anti-Nazi activism and rescue.

1. Students from the White Rose Society, an anti-Nazi student group from Munich, who were caught, tried, and executed, left behind Five Leaflets designed to animate anti-Nazi sentiment.

   > Therefore every individual, conscious of his responsibility as a member of Christian and Western civilization, must defend himself as best he can

> at this late hour, he must work against the scourges of mankind, against fascism and any similar system of totalitarianism. . . . For, according to God's will, man is intended to pursue his natural goal, his earthly happiness, in self-reliance and self-chosen activity, freely and independently within the community of life and work of the nation. . . . It is not possible through solitary withdrawal, in the manner of embittered hermits, to prepare the ground for the overturn of this "government" or bring about the revolution at the earliest possible moment.[8]

The White Rose students cite Aristotle, St. Augustine, Kant. To be sure, many who endorsed this final vocabulary remained quiescent during the Nazi era; others, to their shame, offered support. But that isn't what's at stake here; what's at stake is the basis for resistance.

2. Rescue in Italy. The Italians spared 85 percent of their Jewish population. The definitive work on this story offers the following by way of insight:

> In many cases after the war, non-Jewish Italians who had saved Jews, when asked about their motivations, were annoyed and even angered by the very question: "How can you ask me such a question?" one man inquired. "Do you mean to say that you do not understand why a devout Catholic like myself had to behave as I did in order to save human beings whose lives were in danger?" Other rescuers insisted, simply, "I did my duty."[9]

3. Samuel and Pearl Oliner interviewed authenticated rescuers identified by Yad Vashem, Israel's memorial to victims of the Holocaust. These rescuers came from Poland, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Denmark, Belgium, and Norway. Probing the circumstances and the reasons for rescue, they learned that rescuers were ordinary people – farmers and teachers, entrepreneurs and factory workers, rich and poor, Protestants and Catholics, distinguished by "their connections with others in relationships of commitment and care." The point the Oliners make runs opposite to Rorty's about immediate identification serving as the basis for rescue – "fellow Jutlander" and the like. Rather, rescuers moved from strong grounding in family, community, church – all were rooted in this way – to "broad universal principles that relate to justice and care in matters of public concern." They rescued because they could generalize beyond their immediate attachments rather than merely enact.[10] Religious affiliation – overwhelming for both rescuers and nonrescuers – did not per se propel individuals into danger, but the

way religious obligation was interpreted by rescuers and nonrescuers did mark a sharp distinction between the two groups.

4. Nechama Tec, a rescued Polish Jew, also relies on Yad Vashem identification of bona fide rescuers. Tec is fascinated and horrified that some Polish peasants were executed for their selfless help, while others were busy rounding up Jews and delivering them to the authorities. Within Poland, to help Jews was to risk one's life. This extended to one's family. Among rescuers there were many religious anti-Semites, but there was something in their religious upbringing that led them to the conclusion that "cruel, glaringly murderous behavior towards the Jews was a sin." What religion offered was no certain guarantee of rescue but the possibility of such in light of religious values and teachings. Religion was, then, a necessary but not complete explanation for rescue, according to Tec, and it is unclear that anything other than a fundamental, first language of sin and justice could have propelled ordinary people (those Rorty would have us construe as thoroughly historic, nominalist, and contingent through and through) into the danger zone.[11]
5. Finally, the best known rescue book – Philip Hallie's account of the village of Le Chambon, a Protestant commune that, to the man, woman, and child, committed itself to rescue. The entire village was put at risk of massacre. Public duty took precedence. The Chambonnais opened their homes to those unlike themselves – Jewish refugees – at great risk to themselves. They spoke of an ethic of responsibility; of not wanting to increase the harm in the world, of following the example of Jesus. None talked of an immediate identification with those they risked their lives to save – these were strangers, aliens in their midst, but Christian responsibility was cast universally and meant to be applied concretely, so they did what they had to do. Led by their pastor, André Trocmé, the villagers prayed and acted. By attacking evil, they cherished "the preciousness of human life. Our obligation to diminish the evil in the world must begin at home; we must not do evil, must not ourselves do harm."[12] Trocmé's sermons offered no blueprint, but they did animate a spirit of resistance that required, in order that it be enacted, precisely the identification Rorty denatures. The Chambonnais did not rescue neighbors. They rescued strangers, and their determination not to be cruel rested for them on imperatives that were obligatory, not contingent; necessary, not incidental. They could have acted otherwise, they said.

I am aware, as I wind down, of how easy it is to be taken for a moral scold, if not a scourge. (I hope I haven't been that heavy-handed.) These

are the days of lightness and froth as well as political correctness, an odd combination of "anything goes" and micromanagement of every word I say and every thought I think. Ah, well, tribulations of the spirit come and go. And my final point is this: what would a Rortyan redescription of rescue that omitted the first vocabularies and noncontingent (to their eyes) actions of the rescuers look like? Have we "progressed" beyond the need for any such "justification"? It seems not if I may judge from what was told by the Mothers of the Disappeared in Argentina who speak of universal human rights, of obligations and immunities, of human beings who must not by definition be violated, a strong onto-ethical political claim. What would a liberal ironist account of ethical heroism be? I understand what a tragic-ironic account is; one can turn to Camus, among others, for that. But an account that insists on its own incessant displacement is trickier by far.

I am struck by the fact that Vaclav Havel, former dissident, recent president, always playwright, published his collection of essays under the title *Living the Truth*. Havel is insistent that there is an absolute horizon of being; that the world is possible only because we are grounded; that there is such a thing as a "metaphysical offense," an assault on the mystery of the absolute. Here he has in mind the violation of forests, rivers, streams, living creatures. This is the don't-be-cruel rule, but with teeth. As a performer of political thought – my way to describe him – Havel is working with a very rich script that requires the language of totalitarianism, truth, lies, violation, being, nature, the "very notion of identity itself." Truth and lies are contextual but not *merely* contextual. There are false and true vocabularies, and one can distinguish between and judge them and dissent or assent to them. There may not be a human nature, but there is a *human condition*, described by Hannah Arendt thus: "the conditions of human existence – life itself, natality and mortality, worldliness, plurality, and the earth – can never 'explain' what we are or answer the question of who we are for the simple reason that they never condition us absolutely."[13] It is recognition of this condition as the horizon of thought and action that makes possible freedom and responsibility. This recognition escapes the Rortyan net, composed as it is of either preordained natures, identities, being, and reality or of a thoroughgoing contingency with nothing "left over," no "surplus," nothing that is not arbitrary in the first and last instance. Havel's and Arendt's positions elude Rorty's alternatives.

The final word shall be Havel's. I conclude the essay this way because I want to suggest that without the possibility of creating a Havelian sort of "I," a modern identity at once committed yet aware of the irony and limits to all commitments; prepared to suffer but wary of all calls to sacrifice, we

would live in a moral universe impoverished beyond our poor powers of imagination. This Havelian "I" is a thicker being by far than "we liberal ironists."

> The problem of human identity remains the center of my thinking about human affairs . . . as you must have noticed from my letters; the importance of the notion of human responsibility has grown in my meditations. It has begun to appear with increasing clarity, as that fundamental point from which all identity grows and by which it stands or falls; it is the foundation, the root, the center of gravity, the constructional principle or axis of identity, something like the "idea" that determines its degree and type. It is the mortar binding it together, and when the mortar dries out, identity too begins irreversibly to crumble and fall apart. (That is why I wrote you that the secret of man is the secret of his responsibility.)[14]

His mission, Havel insists, is to "speak the truth about the world I live in, to bear witness to its terrors and miseries, in other words, to warn rather than to hand out prescriptions for change."[15] My hunch is that Rorty wouldn't characterize his mission all that differently, although he would probably want to drop "mission" as too religious-sounding. "Truth" would also have to go in order that it be absolutely clear that truth is a characteristic assigned to linguistic properties rather than a strong contrast to "lie" and a claim that truth and lies are linked to definable realities, as Havel intends. "The world" might be a bit tricky, as it has too solid and universalistic a ring to it as Havel deploys it. "Bear witness" derives from Christian witness, so it should probably be jettisoned. This leaves "warning." But would "to warn" retain its force were all else redescribed or excised? I don't think so.

Notes

1. Rorty recognizes that most "nonintellectuals are still committed either to some form of religious faith or to some form of Enlightenment rationalism," but he quickly forgets this recognition as a limiting condition to his own argument in the body of his text, perhaps because he construes as contingent comments what for the committed are anything but (CIS xv).
2. Eugene Weber, "A New Order of Loss and Profit," *Times Literary Supplement* (January 15–21, 1988): 51–2. Se also Richard John Heuhaus's biting "Joshing Mr. Rorty," *First Things*, No. 8 (December 1990): 14–24.
3. Albert Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), pp.124–6.
4. Richard Reinitz, *Irony and Consciousness* (Lewisburg, PA: Bucknell University Press, 1980), p. 65.

5. Camus, "The Human Crisis," *Twice a Year* (Vol. I, 1946–7), lecture delivered in the United States, Spring 1946, p. 21.
6. On this see Freud's complex discussions of the interpenetration of stage aggressivity – war – and the moral enactments of individuals in "Thoughts for the Times of War and Death," in *On the History of the Psycho-analytic Movement*, *Standard Edition*, ed. James Strachey Vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1962), pp. 273–330, and "Why War?" in *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-analysis Standard Edition*, ed. James Strachey Vol. 22 (London: Hogarth Press, 1964), pp. 196–215.
7. Jonathan Lear, *Love and Its Peace in Nature. A Philosophical Interpretation of Freudian Psychoanalysis* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1990), p. 189.
8. Inge Scholl (ed.), *The White Rose: Munich 1942–1943* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1983), pp. 74, 82.
9. Susan Zuccotti, *The Indians and the Holocaust* (New York: Basic Books, 1987), pp. 281–2.
10. Samuel P. Oliner and Pearl M. Oliner, *The Altruistic Personality: Rescuers of Jews in Nazi Germany* (New York: Free Press, 1986), pp. 259–60.
11. Nechama Tec, *When Light Pierced the Darkness: Christian Rescue of Jews in Nazi-Occupied Poland* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), pp. 117, 104.
12. Philip Hallie, *Lest Innocent Blood Be Shed* (New York: Harper Colophon, 1979), p. 85.
13. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), p. 11.
14. Vaclav Havel, *Letters to Olga* (New York: Henry Holt, 1989), p. 145.
15. Vaclav Havel, *Disturbing the Peace* (New York: Knopf, 1990), p. 8.

8 Rorty and Philosophy

CHARLES TAYLOR

I

Rorty has a distinctive stance in the contemporary philosophical world. It is one that is often described as "antirealist," "relativist," "subjectivist," including by myself. But Rorty repudiates such labels. His point rather is that we should get away from a number of philosophical dichotomies that have supposedly outlived their usefulness; we should learn that we can lay them to rest, that they add nothing of value to our thought. Somewhat overmodestly describing himself with the Lockean term "underlaborer," he sees himself as "clean[ing] up and dispos[ing] of what [great] imaginative pioneers [e.g., Frege and Mill, Russell and Heidegger, Dewey and Habermas, Davidson and Derrida] have shown to be rubbish" (TP 8).

Now Rorty and I have an old debate going. This is the *n*th round; I have lost count. But what seems constant throughout is an agreed-upon basis – that we both see ourselves as getting out from under the Cartesian, representational epistemology – and within this a difference. This latter might be put in the following way: that for Rorty we escape from "the collapsed circus tent of epistemology – those acres of canvas under which many of our colleagues still thrash aimlessly about" (TP, 93), mainly by getting rid of certain traditional distinctions and questions: for example, the scheme–content way of talking or the issue of correspondence with reality; while I think that these distinctions and questions have to be recast. Rorty is a minimalist: he thinks we had best just forget about the whole range of issues that concern how our thought relates to reality, the relation of Mind to World, if I can lapse again into those great uppercase terms about which Rorty loves to wax ironic. I am a maximalist: I think that we badly need to recast our distorted understanding of these matters inherited from the epistemological tradition.

My reason is that you don't just walk away from these deep, pervasive, half-articulated, taken-for-granted pictures that are embedded in our

culture and enframe our thought and action. "A picture held us captive," as Wittgenstein put it.[1] You can't free yourself from them until you identify them and see where they're wrong; and even then it's not always easy. Just saying you've abandoned them, and then not giving them any further thought, à la Davidson, is a sure recipe for remaining in their thrall.

It seems to me that Rorty's whole approach fails to take account of what has come in modern philosophy to be called the "background," the skein of semi- or utterly inarticulate understandings that make sense of our explicit thinking and reactions. This is the area opened up in the twentieth century by Wittgenstein in one way and by Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty in another. It involves what has at times been called "phenomenological description" or, in Wittgenstein's language, "assembling reminders" – drawing on our inarticulate and semirepressed knowledge of what it is to be in the world as a knowing agent in order to puncture the illusions of a distortive framework.

One of the things I claim this work has shown us is precisely that our culture has been in thrall to a picture of our thinking as entirely representational. That is, the distorting framework, which seemed too obvious to need articulation, was that our grasp of our world took the form of representations: ideas in the mind or sentences held true – the form has varied greatly since Descartes, but the basic structure has remained constant. What this framework repressed from sight is the way in which the representations we frame, and our entire ability to frame them, are underpinned by our ability to cope with our world in a host of ways: from our capacity as bodily beings to make our way around in our surroundings, picking up, using, avoiding, and leaning on things to our knowing as social beings how to relate to and interact with friends, strangers, lovers, children, and so on. These capacities are distorted if we try to construe them as the having of mere representations; they are rather what allows the representations we do form, the sentences we do articulate, the words and images we exchange to make the sense that they do. Nothing is gained and much is lost if we collapse this crucial distinction between foreground and background, the articulate and the inarticulate, as the modern epistemological tradition has always done. It is because Davidson's and I believe also Rorty's attempt just to walk away from representations leaves the distinction collapsed, because they still think in terms of sentences, that they remain trapped, in my view, under the canvas.

Now Rorty reacts to this kind of position by returning the compliment, as it were. He thinks that I am still under the canvas because I

am so concerned with propounding an alternative story about what it is to be a knowing agent rather than just dropping the whole poisoned epistemological subject (in both senses).

Let's see what these different approaches involve by taking a thesis we both share and spelling out how we in our different ways try to establish it. I want to take our common rejection of what has been called "foundationalism," the ambition to build a principled justification of our beliefs about the world from the ground up. This was crucial to the original formulation of the epistemological view in Descartes and was taken up again in other ways by Locke, questioned by Hume, and appears again in the Vienna Positivists.

Now on my view, Cartesian–Lockean foundationalism breaks down because the certainty-producing argument would have to proceed from establishing elements (whatever else is true, I'm *sure* that: red, here, now) to grounding wholes; but you can't isolate elements in the way you would have to for this to work. In other words, a certain holism gets in the way. But here a first confusion arises. There are a number of different doctrines that fall under the title "holism." The one I'm invoking here is *not* the Quine–Davidson holism. That is a holism of verification, first of all; it reflects that propositions or claims can't be verified singly. It is only derivatively a holism about meaning insofar as attributions of meaning to terms in the observed agent's speech amount to claims that, like most others, can't be verified singly, but only in packages with other claims. In other words, Quinean holism is a thesis that applies even after accepting the classical Cartesian–empiricist doctrine of the atomism of the input, as Quinean talk of "surface irritations" and "occasion sentences" makes clear. But the holism I'm invoking is more radical. It undercuts completely the atomism of the input. First, because the nature of any given element is determined by its "meaning" (*Sinn*, *sens*), which can only be defined by placing it in a larger whole. And even worse, because the larger whole isn't just an aggregation of such elements.

To make this second point slightly clearer: the "elements" that could figure in a foundationalist reconstruction of knowledge are bits of explicit information (red, here, now; or "there's a rabbit" ["gavagai"]). But the whole that allows these to have the sense they have is a "world," a locus of shared understanding organized by social practice. I notice the rabbit, because I pick it out against the stable background of those trees and this open space before them. Without my having found my feet in this place, there could be no rabbit-sighting. If the whole stage on which the rabbit darts out were uncertain – say, swirling around, as it is when I am about to faint – there

could be no registering of this explicit bit of information. But my having found my feet in this locus is not a matter of my having extra bits of explicit information – that is, it can never just consist in this, although other bits may be playing a role. It is an exercise of my ability to cope, something I have acquired as this bodily being brought up in this culture.

So holism in some form is a generally agreed-upon thesis among antifoundationalists. All the trouble arises when each one of us spells out what seems obviously to follow from this or makes clearer what seems evidently to be the nature of this holistic background. What seems evident to one seems wildly implausible to others.

My spelling out involves something like this. Our ability to cope can be seen as incorporating an overall sense of ourselves and our world, which sense includes and is carried by a spectrum of rather different abilities: at one end, beliefs that we hold, which may or may not be "in our minds" at the moment; at the other, the ability to get around and deal intelligently with things. Intellectualism has made us see these as very different sites; but philosophy in our day has shown how closely akin they are, and how interlinked.

Heidegger has taught us to speak of our ability to get around as a kind of "understanding" of our world. And indeed, drawing a sharp line between this implicit grasp on things and our formulated, explicit understanding is impossible. It is not only that any frontier is porous, that things explicitly formulated and understood can "sink down" into unarticulated know-how in the way that Hubert and Stuart Dreyfus have shown us with learning;[2] and that our grasp on things can move as well in the other direction, as we articulate what was previously just lived out. It is also that any particular understanding of our situation blends explicit knowledge and unarticulated know-how.

I am informed that a tiger has escaped from the local zoo, and now as I walk through the wood behind my house, the recesses of the forest stand out for me differently. They take on a new valence; my environment now is traversed by new lines of force in which the vectors of possible attack have an important place. My sense of this environment takes on a new shape, thanks to this new bit of information.

So the whole in which particular things are understood, bits of information taken in, is a sense of my world carried in a plurality of media: formulated thoughts, things never even raised as a question, but taken as a framework in which the formulated thoughts have the sense they do (e.g., the never questioned overall shape of things, which keeps me from even entertaining such weird conjectures as that the world started five minutes

ago or that it suddenly stops beyond my door), the understanding implicit in various abilities to cope. As in the multimedia world of our culture, although some parts of our grasp of things clearly fit one medium rather than others (my knowing Weber's theory of capitalism, my being able to ride a bicycle), in fact the boundaries between media are very fuzzy, and many of the most important understandings are multimedia events, as when I stroll through the potentially tiger-infested wood. Moreover, in virtue of the holism that reigns here, every bit of my understanding draws on the whole and is in this indirect way multimedia.

Maybe I'm still saying things with which all antifoundationalists agree. But very soon, I come to further inferences where our ways part. For instance, it seems to me that this picture of the background rules out what one might call a "representational" or "mediational" picture of our grasp of the world. There are many different versions, but the central idea in this picture is that all our understanding of the world is ultimately mediated knowledge. That is, it is knowledge that comes through something "inner," within ourselves or produced by the mind. This means that we can understand our grasp of the world as something that is in principle separable from what it is a grasp of.

This separation was obviously central to the original Cartesian thrust that we are all trying to turn back and deconstruct. On one side, there were the bits of putative information in the mind – ideas, impressions, sense data; on the other, there was the "outside world" about which these claimed to inform us. The dualism can later take other, more sophisticated forms. Representations can be reconceived, no longer as "ideas" but as sentences, in keeping with the linguistic turn, as we see with Quine. Or the dualism itself can be fundamentally reconcentualized, as with Kant. Instead of being defined in terms of original and copy, it is seen on the model of form and content, mold and filling.

I want to call the whole class of theories that accept dualisms of this kind "mediational epistemologies." I believe it would be of inestimable benefit to the Republic of Letters if we could lay them to rest once and for all.

In whatever form, mediational theories posit something that can be defined as inner, as our contribution to knowing, and that can be distinguished from what is out there. Hence these theories can also be called "Inside/Outside" accounts ("I/O" for short).

And hence also the continuance of skeptical questions or their transforms: maybe the world doesn't really conform to the representation? Or maybe we will come across others whose molds are irreducibly different from ours, with whom we shall therefore be unable to establish any

common standards of truth? This underlies much facile relativism in our day.

But a reflection on our whole multimedia grasp of things ought to put paid to this dualism once and for all. If we stare at the medium of explicit belief, then the separation can seem plausible. My beliefs about the moon can be held, even actualized in my present thinking, even if the moon isn't now visible; perhaps even though it doesn't exist, if it turns out to be a fiction. But the grasp of things involved in my ability to move around and manipulate objects can't be divided up like that, because, unlike moon beliefs, this ability can't be actualized in the absence of the objects it operates on. My ability to throw baseballs can't be exercised in the absence of baseballs. My ability to get around this city and this house is demonstrated only in getting around this city and this house.

We might be tempted to say: it doesn't exist in my mind, like my theoretical beliefs, in my "head," but in the ability to move that I have in my whole body. But that understates the embedding. The locus here is the ability to move-in-this-environment. It exists not just in my body, but in my body-walking-the-streets. Similarly, my ability to be charming or seductive exists not in my body and voice, but in my body-voice-in-conversation-with-interlocutor.

A strong temptation to place these abilities just in the body comes from the supposition that a proper neurophysiological account of the capacities can be given that would place them there. This is one source of that weird post-Cartesian philosophical dream of the brain-in-a-vat. Once one really escapes Cartesian dualism, it ceases to be self-evident that this even makes sense. But unfortunately, I haven't the space to go into that here.

Living with things involves a certain kind of understanding (which we might also call "preunderstanding"). That is, things figure for us in their meaning or relevance for our purposes, desires, activities. As I navigate my way along the path up the hill, my mind totally absorbed in anticipating the difficult conversation I'm going to have at my destination, I treat the different features of the terrain as obstacles, supports, openings, invitations to tread more warily or run freely, and so on. Even when I'm not thinking of them, these things have those relevances for me; I know my way about among them.

This is nonconceptual; or, put another way, language isn't playing any direct role. Through language, we (humans) have the capacity to focus on things, to pick an X out as an X; we pick it out as something that (correctly) bears a description "X," and this puts our identification in the domain of potential critique (Is this really an X? Is the vocabulary to which X belongs

the appropriate one for this domain/purpose? etc.). At some point, because of some breakdown, or just through intrinsic interest, I may come to focus on some aspects of this navigational know-how. I may begin to classify things as "obstacles" or "facilitations," and this will change the way I live in the world. But in all sorts of ways, I live in the world and deal with it without having done this.

Ordinary coping isn't conceptual. But at the same time, it can't be understood in just inanimate-causal terms. This denial can be understood in two ways. Maximally, it runs athwart a common ambition of, for example, much cognitive psychology, which aims precisely to give one day a reductive account in machine terms. I would also bet my money that the denial will turn out right in this strong sense and that the reductive ambition is ultimately a fantasy. But for our purposes, we just need to focus on a minimal sense: namely, that in the absence of this promised but far distant mechanistic account, our only way of making sense of animals, and of our own preconceptual goings-on, is through something like preunderstanding. That is, we have to see the world impinging on these beings in relevance terms; or, alternatively put, we see them as agents.

We find it impossible not to extend this courtesy to animals, as I have just indicated. But in our case, the reasons are stronger. When we focus on some feature of our dealing with the world and bring it to speech, it doesn't come across as just like a discovery of some unsuspected fact, such as, for example, the change in landscape at a turn in the road or being informed that what we do bears some fancy technical name (M. Jourdain speaking prose). When I finally allow myself to recognize that what has been making me uncomfortable in this conversation is that I'm feeling jealous, I feel that in a sense I wasn't totally ignorant of this before. I knew it without knowing it. It has a kind of intermediate status between known and quite unknown. It was a kind of proto-knowledge, an environment propitious for the transformation that conceptual focus brings, even though there may also have been resistances. In the preceding, I have been drawing on Heidegger, as well as on the work of Merleau-Ponty. We find in both of them this idea that our conceptual thinking is "embedded" in everyday coping. The point of this image can be taken in two bites, as it were. The first is that coping is prior and pervasive ("*zunächst* and *zumeist*"). We start off just as coping infants, and only later are we inducted in speech. And even as adults, much of our lives consist of this coping. This couldn't be otherwise. In order to focus on something, we have to keep going – as I was on the path while thinking of the difficult conversation; or as the person is in the laboratory, walking around, picking up the retort, while thinking hard about the theoretical issues (or maybe about what's for lunch).

But the second bite goes deeper. It's the point usually expressed with the term "background." The mass of coping is an essential support to the episodes of conceptual focus in our lives, not just in the infrastructural sense that something has to be carrying our mind around from library to laboratory and back. More fundamentally, the background understanding we need to make the sense we do of the pieces of thinking we engage in resides in our ordinary coping.

I walk up the path, and enter the field and notice: the goldenrod is out. A particular take on the world, rather of the kind that boundary events are supposed to be on the I/O; except that under the pressure of foundationalism, they sometimes are forced to be more basic – yellow here now – and build up to goldenrod only as a later inference. One of the errors of classical epistemology was to see in this kind of take the building blocks of our knowledge of the world. We put it together bit by bit out of such pieces. So foundationalism had to believe.

One of the reasons that Kant is a crucial figure in the (oft so laborious) overcoming of the I/O – even though he also created his own version of it – is that he put paid to this picture. We can't build our view of the world out of percepts like "the goldenrod is out," or even "yellow here now," because nothing would count as such a percept unless it already had its place in a world. Minimally, nothing could be a percept without a surrounding sense of myself as perceiving agent, moving in some surroundings, of which this bit of yellow is a feature. If we try to think all this orientation away, then we get something that is close to unthinkable as an experience, "less even than a dream," as Kant puts it (A 112). What would it be like just to experience yellow, never mind whether it's somewhere in the world out there or just in my head? A very dissociated experience, not a very promising building block for a worldview.

So our understanding of the world is holistic from the start, in a sense different from the Quinean one. There is no such thing as the single, independent percept. Something has this status only within a wider context that is understood, taken for granted, but for the most part not focused on. Moreover, it couldn't be focused on, not just because it is very widely ramifying, but because it doesn't consist of some definite number of pieces. We can bring this out by reflecting that the number of ways in which the taken-for-granted background could in specific circumstances fail is not delimitable.

Invoking this undelimitable background was a favorite argumentative gambit of Wittgenstein in both the *Investigations* and *On Certainty*. He shows, for instance, that understanding an ostensive definition is not just a matter of fixing a particular; there is a whole surrounding understanding of

what kind of thing is being discussed (the shape or the color), of this being a way of teaching meaning, and the like. In our ordinary investigations, we take for granted a continuing world; our whole proceedings would be radically undercut by the "discovery," if one could make it, that the universe started five minutes ago. But that can't be taken to mean that there is a definite list of things that we have ruled out, including among others that the universe started five minutes ago.

Now this indefinitely extending background understanding is sustained and evolved through our ordinary coping. My recognition that the goldenrod is out is sustained by a context being in place – for example, that I'm now entering a field, and it's August. And I'm not focusing on all this. I know where I am, because I walked here, and when I am because I've been living the summer, but these are not reflective inferences; they are just part of the understanding I have in everyday coping. I might indeed take a more reflective stance, and theorize the existence of goldenrod in certain geographical locations on the earth's surface in a certain season, and so on, just as I might lay out the environment I normally walk about in by drawing a map. But this wouldn't end the embedding of reflective knowledge in ordinary coping. The map becomes useless, indeed ceases to be a map in any meaningful sense for me, unless I can use it to help me get around. Theoretical knowledge has to be situated in relation to everyday coping to be the knowledge that it is.

In this way, embedding is inescapable, and that in the stronger sense: that all exercises of reflective, conceptual thought have the content they have only as situated in a context of background understanding that underlies and is generated in everyday coping.

This is where the description of our predicament in Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty, the analyses of *Inderweltsein* and *être au monde*, connect to the powerful critique of dualist epistemology mounted by John McDowell.[3] The dualism McDowell attacks, following Sellars, is the sharp demarcation between the space of reasons and the space of causes. The accounts of *Inderweltsein* and *être au monde* also have no place for this boundary. They are meant to explain, as McDowell's argument does, how it can be that the places at which our view is shaped by the world, in perception, are not just causal impingings, but sites of the persuasive acquisition of belief. They argue that one can never give an adequate account of this if one focuses just on belief formation at the conceptual level.

We are able to form conceptual beliefs guided by our surroundings, because we live in a preconceptual engagement with these that involves understanding. Transactions in this space are not causal processes among

neutral elements, but the sensing of and response to relevance. The very idea of an inner zone with an external boundary can't get started here, because our living things in a certain relevance can't be situated "within" the agent; it is in the interaction itself. The understanding and know-how by which I climb the path and continue to know where I am are not "within" me in a kind of picture. That fate awaits it if and when I make the step to map drawing. But now it resides in my negotiating the path. The understanding is in the interaction; it can't be drawn on outside of this, in the absence of the relevant surroundings. To think it can be detached is to construe it on the model of explicit, conceptual, language- or map-based knowledge, which is of course what the whole I/O tradition, from Descartes through Locke to contemporary artificial intelligence modelers, has been intent on doing. But just that is the move that re-creates the boundary and makes the process of perceptual knowledge unintelligible.

II

This ought to ruin altogether the representational construal. Our grasp of things is not something that is in us, over against the world; it lies in the way we are in contact with the world, in our being-in-the-world (Heidegger) or being-to-the-world (Merleau-Ponty). That is why a global doubt about the existence of things (does the world exist?), which can seem quite sensible on the representational construal, shows itself up as incoherent once you have really taken the antifoundational turn. I can wonder whether some of my ways of dealing with the world distort things for me: my distance perception is skewed, my too-great involvement with this issue or group is blinding me to the bigger picture, my obsession with my image is keeping me from seeing what's really important. But all these doubts can only arise against the background of the world as the all-englobing locus of my involvements. I can't seriously doubt this without dissolving the very definition of my original worry, which made sense only against this background.[4]

Here we come to a serious parting of the ways. Some people think that what we're really against is just foundationalism, that is, the attempt to offer a convincing construction of knowledge "from the ground up." They think you can show this to be impossible on Quinean holist grounds, or on grounds closer to older skeptical arguments. But they are willing to leave in place what I call representationalism, that is, an account of the agent's knowledge that is distinct from the world.

But surely I don't think of Rorty in this connection. Does he not himself inveigh against talking of "representation"?[5] This is where I want to return to my point, that just saying that you reject a concept is not necessarily climbing out of the picture that embeds it. You also have to explore and bring to awareness how that picture holds you captive. Just walking away avoids doing this. I believe that Rorty is still deeply enmeshed in representationalism.

We can see this if we look at the whole complex of issues around "realism" and "antirealism." The mediational view provides the context in which these questions make sense. They lose this sense if you escape from this construal, as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have done. Or, perhaps better put, one awakes to an unproblematic realism, no longer a daring philosophical "thesis."

It has often been noticed how representationalism leads, by recoil, to skepticism, relativism, and various forms of nonrealism. Once the foundationalist arguments for establishing truth are seen to fail, we are left with the image of the self-enclosed subject, out of contact with the transcendent world. And this easily generates theses of the unknowable (e.g., *Dingen an sich*), of the privacy of thought (the Private Language Argument), or of relativism. More particularly in this last case, the picture of each mind acceding to the world from behind the screen of its own percepts, or grasping it in molds of its own making, seems to offer no form of rational arbitration of disputes. How can the protagonists base their arguments on commonly available elements when each is encased within her own picture?

From skepticism or relativism, it is obvious and tempting to adopt some mode of antirealism. If these questions can't be rationally arbitrated, then why accept that they are real questions? Why agree that there is a fact of the matter here to be right or wrong about? If we can never know whether our language, or ideas, or categories correspond to the reality out there, the things-in-themselves, then what warrant have we to talk about this transcendent reality in the first place? We have to deny it the status of the "real." Hence antirealism.

The key move of these nonrealisms is to deny some crucial commonsense distinction between reality and our picture of it: the world as it is versus the world as we see it; what is really morally right versus what we think is right; and so on. The irony is that this denies distinctions that were first erected into dichotomies by the representational construal.

Now it is obvious that foundationalism is in a sense in the same dialectical universe as nonrealism, that set up by mediational theories. These raise the fear that our representations might be just in the mind, out of touch with

reality (even that we might be the victims of a *malin genie*). Foundationalism is an answer to such fears. That is why there is often such an indignant reaction in our scientific-philosophical community to various relativist or nonrealist theories and to Rorty as the supposed propounder of such. This is because the whole culture is in the grip of a mediationalist perspective and therefore can entertain the nightmare of being irremediably out of touch with the real. But science seems to depend on our not being so out of touch; so whoever flirts with such theories is against science, giving aid and comfort to the enemy, destroying our civilization, and so on.

Rorty rightly doesn't allow himself to be fazed by such Blimpish reactions. But his way of dealing with them shows that he is still in the same mental universe in crucial ways. The sense of representationalist I'm using here can be explained in this way. Representations are formulated or explicit bits of knowledge, as these have figured in foundationalist–epistemological theories. How these have been conceived has varied. For Descartes and Locke they were "ideas," particulate mental contents, hovering on the boundary between little copy-objects in the mind and knowledge-claims that could only be captured in that-clauses. Later Kant claimed that the minimal such content involved some subsumptive judgment. Some theorists tried to get these basic units out of the mind and into the material body, hence the surface irritations of Quine. But in the twentieth century, with the linguistic turn, the basic unit came to be something like sentences held true or beliefs.

Now I'm calling representationalists those who think that our knowledge consists exclusively of representations and that our reasoning involves manipulating representations. To speak the language of Sellars and McDowell, they hold that the only inhabitants of the space of reasons are beliefs. In other words, they are people who have (in my view) failed to take on board the Heidegger or Merleau-Ponty point about the embedding of our explicit beliefs in our background grasp of things.

Now in this sense, Rorty, following Davidson, is still representationalist. Thus Davidson says: "What distinguishes a coherence theory is simply the claim that nothing can count as a reason for holding a belief except another belief."[6] And he makes it clear that in this sense he wants to endorse a coherence theory, albeit claiming that it is compatible with what is true in a correspondence theory. In the same passage, Davidson quotes Rorty approvingly: "nothing counts as justification unless by reference to what we already accept, and there is no way to get outside our beliefs and language so as to find some test other than coherence."[7] The two seem to be in agreement on this.[8] Indeed, this stance, and the connected sharp distinction

between causation and justification, seem to be an essential part of Rorty's strategy in this domain.

This is clearly a representationalist view. Beliefs are the only accepted denizens of the space of reasons. But I want to note something more here. This view is not put forward as a surprising finding. It is articulated as a truism. *Of course*, nothing can justify a belief except another one. Why is this so obvious? Because, dummy, the only way you could find an alternative would be to "get outside our beliefs and language." Davidson makes the same point in talking of the possible alternative of confronting our beliefs "with the tribunal of experience. No such confrontation makes sense, for of course we can't get outside our skins to find out what is causing the internal happenings of which we are aware."[9]

What I want to bring out here is the way that both philosophers lean on the basic lineaments of the mediational picture in order to show their thesis to be obvious. We can't get outside: this is the basic image of the I/O. We are contained within our own representations and can't stand somehow outside of them to compare them with "reality." This is the standard picture, out of which nonrealist theories were generated in the first place. And here we find it invoked within an argument that is meant to repudiate that picture. This is what it means to be held captive.

To show how this coherentist claim is so far from obvious as to be plainly false, we need to step outside the mediational picture and think in terms of the kind of embedded knowing that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have thematized. Of course, we check our claims against reality. "Johnny, go into the room and tell me whether the picture is crooked." Johnny does as he is told. He doesn't check the (problematized) belief that the picture is crooked against his own belief. He emerges from the room with a view of the matter, but checking isn't comparing the problematized belief with his view of the matter; checking is forming a belief about the matter, in this case by going and looking. What is assumed when we give the order is that Johnny knows, as most of us do, how to form a reliable view of this kind of matter. He knows how to go and stand at the right distance and in the right orientation, to get what Merleau-Ponty calls "maximum prise" on the object. What justifies Johnny's belief is his knowing how to do this, his being able to deal with objects in this way, which is, of course, inseparable from the other ways he is able to use them, manipulate, get around among them, and so on. When he goes and checks, he uses this multiple ability to cope; his sense of his ability to cope gives him confidence in his judgment as he reports it to us; and rightly so, if he is competent. About some things he isn't competent (e.g., "Is the picture a Renoir?"), but about this he is.

Nor should we go off into the intellectualist regress of saying that Johnny believes that his view-forming here is reliable. This may never have been raised. He believes this no more than he believes that the world didn't start five minutes ago or that everybody else isn't a robot.

This shows how, in certain contexts, we can make perfectly good sense of checking our beliefs against the facts without swinging off into absurd scenarios about jumping out of our skins. The Davidson–Rorty truism is false. It also shows, I hope, how a picture can hold us captive, even when we think we are escaping it. It holds us by enframing our thought, so that the arguments we profer and accept are conditioned by it; and we don't even notice, because in the nature of frames, it is invisible as long as we're operating within it.

But Rorty's whole way of coping with foundationalism, realism, antirealism, and such-like issues cannot but exacerbate his vulnerability to this kind of capture. Essentially Rorty's view closely resembles certain kinds of relativisms and nonrealisms: justification ultimately must appeal to the way we do things here. If that's different from the way they do things there, there is no arbitration in reason. But Rorty repudiates the (much execrated) titles "relativist" and "nonrealist." He does this essentially by trying to convince us to stop asking the questions, to which these positions, and foundationalism, are rival answers. There are just different ways of dealing and coping. Vocabularies are tools. "Different vocabularies equip us with beliefs that are of more or less use in coping with the environment in various respects."[10]

But just walking away from the issues this way closes down all consideration of how thinking agents acquire reliable, justified knowledge of the world. We know, on the one hand, that our beliefs emerge out of causal contact with the world; and we deploy certain procedures and standards of justification. These two relations with things can be explored but somehow not be related. But the previous considerations suggest that one can't just walk away from certain questions. Is the mediational construal or the embedded construal (i.e., Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty) more adequate? We're supposed to be able just to drop this question. But nevertheless, we find that one such construal is controlling our thinking. This is unavoidable, and the embedded view can illuminate the reason. We in a sense "know" much more than we know. The inverted commas used refer to the as yet unarticulated sense we have of things. We draw on this, or some distorted theorizing of it, all the time in thinking about the world. Not just in doing philosophy, as we saw with the coherence theory, but in perfectly ordinary attempts to find out about things in the world. The distinctions I draw that Rorty finds no use for – such as that between our self-understandings,

which we can't construe as independent objects, and an independent reality staying put through all changes in description, like the solar system stayed there, waiting for Kepler – are there, embedded in our practice. Kepler didn't treat his ellipses as a new proposal about how the heavenly bodies might understand/comport themselves. The enframing understanding of the whole inquiry was that this was the way they had always been, and would make sense of all observations past, present, and future. I am not importing some hyped-up, metaphysical overlay of commentary (Kepler had some of that in his views about the perfect solids, but that's another matter). I am just articulating an essential frame of Kepler's inquiry, what gave it its sense, and without which it would have been conducted quite differently.

Indeed, Rorty draws on just this framework understanding when he tells us that we are causally impinged on by the world. Here is no new discovery, but an articulation of what we all have to know to be functioning human agents. Indeed, it is common ground between all theories in this domain, with the possible exception of some raving idealists. But in virtue of what hidden boundary are we allowed to note this fact but forbidden to go on and describe the way our thought is embedded in our active agency, as Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty do? There should be no bar to our articulating the framework understandings by which we actually make sense of our thought and action.

III

In this connection, I want to challenge Rorty's interdict on the scheme–content distinction. Whereas Rorty, following Davidson, seems to think that this is something we should put behind us, it seems to me evident that we cannot do without it. We are using it all the time.

Once again, I think Rorty has focused on a caricature of what he's attacking. He asks: "can we distinguish the role of our describing activity, our use of words, and the role of the rest of the universe, in accounting for the truth of our beliefs?" (TP 87). A rhetorical question, to which the answer is plainly "no." The inference is that we must drop "the third dogma of empiricism," the scheme–content distinction.

The assumption that underlies this inference is that the only way to make sense of the distinction would be to disaggregate and isolate somehow a component of pure precategorized reality, which could then somehow be compared or related to language. But this is a chimera, of the same family

as "nature's own language," which Rorty has agreed to take out of the play for the moment.

This assumption is very shaky. Compare: you can't make sense of a form–color distinction unless you can somehow separate off a pure colorless form and a pure formless color. You can't? So drop the distinction. To which the answer would quite legitimately be: we don't need this feat of metaphysical disaggregation. We've identified two ways in which inseparable form–color combinations can vary, and that allows us to distinguish them.

Trivially: yesterday there were twelve chairs in this room; today there are only ten. The language of classification is the same; what has changed is the reality described. Less trivially: Aristotle: the sun is a planet; us: the sun is not a planet. What brings about this change is not reality, but our adopting a different scheme.

Now this gets untrivial, because once we can identify schemes as alternative ways of describing the same reality, we can sometimes rank them. Our description is better, because it is part of a scheme that allows us to describe reality better. There are very important features of the way things work in our galaxy that you can't get a handle on unless you can distinguish stars from the planets (in our sense) that orbit around them. A way of talking that puts the sun and Mars in the same category is going to be incapable of dealing with these distinctions. So it has to be replaced.

Now I don't quite understand where we part company, because I haven't appealed to anything in this example that Rorty doesn't also accept. There are things that are causally independent of us (here stars and planets, particularly those of our own solar system). These things are causally related in various ways. Further, these things can be classified in different ways.

Some alternative classifications are rivals because they purport to allow us to come to grips with the same questions: hard issues about the motions and causes of motions of the earth and the heavenly bodies. We can sometimes show that one classification is superior to the other, because it allows us to make plain important features of motion and the causes of motion that the other fudges, misrepresents, or makes unstatable.

Now coming to see this at no point involves somehow grasping the world independently of any description. And it is also true that there are other modes of classification of heavenly bodies (e.g., in terms of their colors or aesthetic properties) that can in no way be ranked alongside Aristotle's or Kepler's, because they are not related to the same question. So a scheme can't be compared to reality unframed by any scheme. And not all schemes can be ranked, because some raise quite different questions. Indeed, questions arise only because there are schemes. But when all this is said, some schemes can

be ranked, and ranked because they permit us to grasp or prevent us from grasping features of reality, including causal features, which we recognize as being independent of us.

This is the nub of what I want to call realism. It involves ranking (some) schemes, and ranking them in terms of their ability to cope with, allow us to know, describe, come to understand reality. I can't see what's wrong with saying this. More, I can't see how one could invalidate any one of these formulations without substituting another with the equivalent sense. On pain of failing to make distinctions between schemes; or schemes that are rivals versus schemes that are not; or schemes that are better and those that are worse; or on pain of being unable to articulate why some are better and others worse.

There is, of course, another very important area in which we want to distinguish something like scheme and content, and that is where we are dealing with the very different "takes" of very different cultures on nature and the human condition. Here I think the Davidsonian rejection of the distinction runs us into incoherence or worse. The standard danger here is ethnocentrism, misunderstanding the other because he or she is interpreted as operating with the same classifications as we are. The differences in behavior are then often simply coded as bad versus good. For the more unsophisticated conquistadors, the Aztecs had to be seen as worshipping the devil. It's simple, compadres, you either worship God or the devil. Ripping out hearts, is that worshipping God? It follows. . . .

What is needed is not the Davidsonian "principle of charity," which means "make the best sense of them in what we understand as sense," but rather coming to understand that there is a very different way of understanding human life, the cosmos, the holy, and so on. Somewhere along the line, you need some place in your ontology for something like "the Aztec way of seeing things" in contrast to "our way of seeing things"; in short, something like the scheme–content distinction. To fail to make this distinction can be, literally, lethal.

We can see, incidentally here, how the embedded view offers resources for recognizing differences of scheme without generating arguments for nonrealism. The conception of the knowing agent at grips with the world opens quite different possibilities to the mediational view. There may be (and obviously are) differences, alternative takes on and construals of reality, which may even be systematic and far-reaching. Some of these will be wrong, and all may be. But any such take or construal is within the context of a basic engagement with/understanding of the world, a contact with it that cannot be broken off short of death. It is impossible to be totally

wrong. Even if, after climbing the path, I think myself to be in the wrong field, I have situated myself in the right county, I know the way back home, and so on. The reality of contact with the real world is the inescapable fact of human (or animal) life, and can only be imagined away by erroneous philosophical argument. This is the point of Merleau-Ponty's claim that "*Se demander si le monde est réel, ce n'est pas entendre ce que l'on dit*."[11] And it is in virtue of this contact with a common world that we always have something to say to each other, something to point to in disputes about reality.

This kind of realism allows us to give a perfectly good sense to my phrase about the world waiting for Kepler. The shift to Kepler's description, unlike that about the chairs, was a shift to a new scheme, which allowed a superior description, in virtue of what we now recognize to be enduring features of the universe. This can come out in our being able to put these descriptions also in the past tense, as Rorty agrees.

The contrast I want to make is with the kinds of changes in self-understanding that change us. Here we get something that fits neither of the categories mentioned so far. When I come to see myself as having resented your attitude all these years, or as being in love with someone, there can be a change that is not just the recognition of a continuing reality. It may be phrased that way, but the feelings also change in being so acknowledged. But nor is it simply a matter of changing realities justifying changing descriptions, as with the chairs. There is a change of description that also alters what is being described. And yet, we can also sometimes rank the descriptions as being more or less self-clairvoyant or more or less self-deluding. There is a complexity of relations here that is not captured simply by saying that I make some predicate true of myself by taking on the description, as Rorty seems to be saying (TP 89–90). It is trivially true that I make the predicate "self-confessed coward" true of myself for the first time by acknowledging that I am a coward. So do I make the predicate "self-described Montrealer" true of myself when I answer your question about where I come from? But the whole dynamic between description, reality, and truth noted in the previous paragraph will normally be absent in this second case.

This is the interesting dynamic to explore. But how can one do this without saying something about the different ways in which sentences can be true? or perhaps, otherwise put, made true by whatever makes them true?

It might be tempting to follow Rorty in just abandoning a host of troubling expressions. But not if one becomes incapable of saying important things or is forced to banalize important distinctions.

IV

So Rorty's aim, as is mine, is to free us from the old mediational epistemology, which comes down to us from Descartes. But his way of doing this is to walk away from the whole skein of issues about "Mind and World" (to use McDowell's phrase): how to relate the space of reasons and the space of causes, how thought is embedded in bodily and social action, and the like. I believe, on the contrary, that you can't free yourself from the distorted picture that the old epistemology articulated without working through it, identifying it, and seeing where it went wrong – the kind of thing that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have done.

Who is right? I want to argue that I am. I do so on the grounds that we can't really escape these issues. Our explicit thinking about the world is framed and given its sense by an implicit, largely unarticulated background sense of our being in the world. At some level, we are always living some answers to these questions, whether we like it or not.

That is why the mediational picture can still have a hold on our theoretical imagination even though we declare ourselves free of it. This should alert us to the limitations of the strategy of just walking away. But we can also see what is wrong with this when we note that Rorty's dismissal of these questions pushes him to deny things that we can make perfectly good sense of, things that we can't help saying in some form or other, because they articulate the preunderstanding that makes sense of our practices of learning about the world, describing it, and communicating our findings. So we ask each other to check some claim against the facts, as with the order given to Johnny. And we talk about successive takes on an unchanging reality, as with theories of the heavenly bodies, and we talk about rectifying mistakes and getting a less distorted view.

Rorty's way of escape from mediationalism is into a kind of night where all views about Mind and World are shrouded in an equal darkness. You can't look and see anymore, articulating what we always already "know" at some level, in the fruitful way that Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty have done. This is what gives his theory an oddly a priori air. We aren't allowed to distinguish between different contexts of truth, where different things make our claims true. We have to believe that justification is ultimately a matter of how we do things here, and that you can't arbitrate by argument that it's better or worse than how they do things there. This seems to be a blanket doctrine; there is no sense that issues and contexts immensely differ; that an arbitration in reason might be very much in place in one context and not at all in another. For instance, it seems to me solidly

established that the move from Aristotelian to Galilean–Newtonian mechanics was very soundly grounded. Once you've been through the transition, with the anomaly resolution it entails, you can't rationally go back; that is, you can't return without forgetting some of the things you've learned. There is a supersession here. But to claim an analogous supersession of baroque over Renaissance music would be absurd. Other cases lie in between and are more complex. But think of the reasons offered against giving women the vote when they were still struggling for it. How many of them could be repeated today with a straight face? Women were supposed to be incapable of political judgment. People could and did believe this when they still were denied political responsibility. But once they have exercised this right for a century, the belief just looks absurd. Much that we now know would have to be forgotten before one could once more assert this.

In a sense, it is a shame that among so many things that Rorty has jettisoned from the narrow, rationalistic tradition of modern philosophy, he has retained that most irritating habit of the a priori, deciding things wholesale on the basis of highly general considerations. Are differences of conceptual scheme arbitrable? (I apologize for using this condemned term.) One is supposed to be able to say "yes" or "no" on the basis of some highly general features common to all contexts. Whereas if one really broke the thrall of this kind of philosophy, one would see right away that there is no substitute for looking hard at each new context.

V

Earlier in our long debates, I complained about Rorty's habit of using ironically inflated language to describe the position of his realist opponents – for example, that they would have to believe that they were using "Nature's Own Language" or take on some other form of Raving Platonism (TP 85). I want to distinguish the ordinary everyday inescapable realism we all operate on from any such overblown theories; he wants to elide them, and hence discredit all talk of reality, checking with the facts, and so on. As a result, he seems to claim, in keeping with a long tradition of revisionist thinkers, that his view captures all that we need to say about our ordinary practices of learning, arguing, communicating. (Think of Bishop Berkeley claiming the mantle of the plain man). I have tried to show how I think this is wrong. But I have also believed that this way of talking was in the nature of a rhetorical flourish, designed to discredit the opponent.

Recently, however, I read Robert Brandom's account of Rorty's overall program in his editor's Introduction to *Rorty and His Critics*. This puts in a new light Rorty's invocation of earlier Platonist and theological views as his targets.

Brandom quotes John McDowell's statement of how he sees the Rortyan program. It offers a certain way of completing the Enlightenment. This was understood as having freed us from "a religion of debasement before the divine Other." We escaped from a "posture [that was] infantile in its submissiveness to something other than ourselves." But this emancipation is incomplete if we still go on conceiving the secular world, the object of science, in ways that "paralleled [the] humanly immature conception of the divine."

> What Rorty takes to parallel authoritarian religion is the very idea that in everyday and scientific investigation we submit to standards constituted by the things themselves. . . . Full human maturity would require us to acknowledge authority only if the acknowledgement does not involve abasing ourselves before something non-human. The only authority that meets this requirement is the human consensus. . . . So Rorty's call is to abandon the discourse, the vocabulary, of objectivity, and work instead towards expanding human solidarity. . . . As Rorty sees things, participating in the discourse of objectivity merely prolongs a cultural and intellectual infantilism, and persuading people to renounce the vocabulary of objectivity should facilitate the achievement of full human maturity. (RHC xi)

Now I'm not sure that this really represents Rorty's view. I am sure that he would introduce at least some nuance in that dry, deflationary style for which he has become justly famous. But it is certainly a possible take on his work and a reception of it that might be highly influential, and as such it is worth commenting on.

Before getting to my main point, I can't resist a remark about the narrative frame offered here for modern history: the Enlightenment as emancipation. What we are freed from is belief in a transcendent God; this represented an earlier, more infantile stage in human development; now we attain to maturity. This narrative can be set over against one adopted by many believers, that this humanist breast thumping, and self-declaration of maturity and mastery, betoken an adolescent infatuation with one's own powers. Both stories offer a picture of oneself as grown up and the opponent as stuck in an earlier stage, in one case as a child, in the other as a teenager.

Now I don't think these narrations are without validity. They certainly reflect the self-congratulatory self-understanding of unbelievers and believers, respectively. Moreover, their negative description of the other certainly hits some targets: who could deny that a certain infantilism is a feature of a lot of faith, a certain self-absorbed breast thumping of much humanism?

But to assume that the transition from the infantile-dependent to the mature-emancipated sums up the movement of the twentieth century, besides being rather *ex parte*, is a simplification of almost comic-book crudity. It adopts a naively flattering view of self and an utterly unobservant view of the other. If we were dealing with one culture's view of another, we would speak of "ethnocentrism"; what is the corresponding word when it's a matter of metaphysical views? (And some of these people call themselves pragmatists! What would William James say to this?)

However, my main comment is not about this; let's take the frame as given for the sake of argument. Does it make sense to see Rorty's walk away from realism as another phase in the same process, as an emancipation? I confess I cannot see how this can be.

Let's say that things are just as Rorty claims; that the ultimate line in the order of justification is: that's how we do things here; that, in other words, there may be no way of arbitrating in reason between the ways of doing things here and there. (My view, may I remind the reader, is that this is almost certainly the case in some contexts but not in others; there is no such thing as a blanket answer here.) This would be a fact that some of us would consider a sad one, but it would be one we would have to accept. In one sense, this acceptance would be the path of maturity, but in a way opposite to the Enlightenment narrative of self-congratulation: we would accept it because it was so, and there was no point kidding ourselves about it. It would be the maturity of resignation, not of self-affirmation. All we would have to go on, in the end, is the local human consensus.

But I cannot see how we are somehow freer, more self-responsible, if there isn't an arbitrable answer to the question, who's right, us or the Aztecs, about human sacrifice? Or who's right, Aristotle or Galileo, about mechanics? Am I less emancipated as a human being because I can see no alternative to believing that $2 + 2 = 4$? Such a view would indeed remind us of the teenager racing down the highway as though he were invulnerable to wounds or death.

In my lexicon, the ideally emancipated subject would be as free from illusion as possible. But what if the belief that our ultimate reference is the local consensus were, for certain issues, an illusion? To find out, we have to look hard at these issues and their potential modes of resolution. We have to

get away from blanket answers in epistemology. This is the sense in which a certain realism is at the very heart of freedom.

Notes

1. Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations* (New York: Macmillan, 1967), §115.
2. Hubert Dreyfus and Stuart Dreyfus, *Mind over Machine* (New York: Free Press, 1986),
3. John McDowell, *Mind and World* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993).
4. "Se demander si le monde est réel, ce n'est pas entendre ce que 1'on dit," Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *La Phénoménologie de la Perception* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945), p. 396.
5. "I do not think that either language or knowledge has anything to do with picturing, representing, or corresponding, and so I see formulating and verifying propositions as just a special case of what Taylor calls 'dealing' and I call 'coping' " (TP 95–6).
6. "A Coherence Theory of Truth and Knowledge" in Ernest LePore (ed.), *Truth and Interpretation: Perspectives on the Philosophy of Donald Davidson* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1992), p. 310.
7. See PMN 178.
8. See also "Introduction" in Robert Brandom (ed.), *Rorty and His Critics* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. xiv.
9. Davidson, "Coherence Theory," p. 312.
10. Brandom, "Introduction," p. xiv.
11. Merleau-Ponty, *La Phénoménologie*, p. 396.

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