Rorty, Liberalism and the Limits of Contingency

by

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The foundational role of metaphysics, traditionally taken to be the basis of justification for our beliefs and vocabularies, is attacked by Richard Rorty, who sees, rather, contingency everywhere. Truths are not found or discovered through a mirroring relation between our products and an authority that is timeless and independent; instead they are made solely through the internal workings and development of vocabularies. Attempts to restore and modernize foundationalist paradigms, to write metanarratives that try to fit all of our existing and possible narratives into a scheme of commensuration, thus need to be abandoned. Although we should be grateful for the liberal institutions that foundationalist paradigms helped sustain through the use of supporting metaphysical views of the self and the world, we are now mature enough to keep the institutions and throw away the obsolete justifications. Those of us socialized into expecting such justifications for political institutions may feel a sense of irony at their abandonment, but generations to come, no longer socialized as we at present are, will see that sort of justification as quaint.

Rorty thinks that this way of describing things, his vocabulary, will work better; indeed, this pragmatism, which replaces
foundationalism, motivates his entire enterprise. However, a
vocabulary, albeit itself contingent, that can describe creatures that are
capable of producing things such as vocabularies which "work" and
may "work better", is one that, by necessity, includes the terms and
relations needed to describe such creatures. Chief among the ideas
needed is action, since a vocabulary that cannot distinguish events
from actions cannot describe human practicality, or pragmatism.

The concept of action takes us to a core self, identified by the
cognitive states which explain the difference between acts and other
events, and to an epistemic relation with a world that can be
described at least in terms of its functional properties, but which is
properly external to beliefs. These terms and their relations comprise
a set of 'contingent necessities' which constitute a metanarrative that
Rorty cannot reject and continue to describe himself as a non-idealist
pragmatist. Furthermore, these elements, which a pragmatic
vocabulary cannot [re-]describe or otherwise evolve its way out of and
remain pragmatic, are rich enough to justify the basic rights espoused
by liberals. In such descriptions sufficiently self-conscious describers
find the limits of contingency and therefore the limits of irony. Such
connections, of which Rorty appears to be unaware, exist between the
necessities of his pragmatism and certain fundamental aspects of
Abstract

liberalism.

Rorty criticizes Dworkin, Foucault and Habermas for resting their views on unqualified or absolute necessities which are the mark of a metaphysics. Rorty takes the modalities of description to be either unqualifiedly a matter of necessity or contingency. However, as we have seen, there is a third way. Once these theorists can avail themselves of this third way, the contributions made by these theorists can no longer be summarily dismissed as metaphysics.
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This thesis dedicated to my Mother, Leslie Barbara Naylor and the memory of my Father, Geoffrey Corfield Naylor. No one could ask for better parents.
Chapter Summary

This chapter provides a brief overview of Rorty's distinct philosophical vocabulary. His revisionary approach to traditional liberal political morality will be sketched. This involves looking at the divided vision that Rorty describes; the tensions between poetry and philosophy; self-creation and solidarity; the private and the public; the ironist and the metaphysician. His historicist successor-scheme to the ahistorical ambitions of ancient, Enlightenment and modern philosophers will be adumbrated. From this exegesis we will be able to determine the main lines of his anti-foundationalist critique, and obtain a clearer sense of the positions that he must take for himself in order to produce a coherent program. The precise nature of his historicism will require further exploration in chapter two. In chapter three the tension between Rorty's pragmatism and his critique will form the basis upon which an alternative conception of pragmatism will be advanced. It will then be argued that the requirements of a coherent pragmatism can stand in a justificatory relation to a set of basic rights. Chapter four works out some of the implications for political morality of these two versions of pragmatism by evaluating several contemporary liberal theorists. We will begin with Rorty's attack on attempts to find foundations for our moral practices. Rorty's alternative conception, ironist liberalism, will then be summarized. Ironist theorizing, a program that aims to replace the metaphysical, epistemological program that gave birth to foundationalism, will follow. Rorty's account of 'what we are' and how our vocabularies are to be understood will be provided. With this summary of Rorty's views in hand, we will be better placed to foreshadow the criticisms of Rorty that will be presented in the following chapters.
1] **Rorty's vocabulary**

Rorty's position pushes against traditional connections between our social life and justification, or, in other other words, between how we live together and our answers to "What is the best way to live together?" As we have become more self-conscious about the justification of our political institutions and actions, and jurisprudence has become more self-conscious about its relationship to political morality, Rorty arrives to attempt to sever these links. In the history of political morality, Rorty's work is a revisionary challenge to the nature and method of justification in that discipline.

The despair of the traditional skeptic is caused by the belief that truth and/or justification requires a picture of a relational sort between our beliefs and their extra-belief justifiers and that such a relationship is impenetrable. Rorty, in a revisionist move, suggests that a "liberal society is badly served by an attempt to provide it with "philosophical foundations"" and throws out the skeptic along with that picture.

To recapitulate, we can think of knowledge as a relation to propositions, and thus of justification as a relation between the proposition in question and other propositions from which the former can be inferred. Anti-foundationalism, historicism, pragmatism and liberalism are

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united by Rorty into a position that he once labelled "post-modern". Rorty weaves a powerful defense of these positions by arguing that although they can come into conflict with one another, they can, nevertheless, be combined, through both public and private spheres of action, in a human life. A primary target of Rorty's program is modern political morality. He believes that liberal institutions can be defended and sustained even when foundationalist methods of justification, inherited from the ancient Greeks, transformed by the 'onto-theological' tradition and deepened by the Enlightenment, are eliminated.

Writ large, Rorty's position tries to find a way to settle the quarrel between poetry and philosophy. He is "content to treat the demands of self-creation [poetry] and of human solidarity [philosophy] as equally valid, but forever incommensurable". Self-creation is seen to be a 'private' matter, 'solidarity', public. He does not think that a single theory can unify the divergent goals the private and the public embody [autonomy/freedom and solidarity/liberalism, respectively] and requests that we abandon any requirement that these goals "speak the same language". He defends this incommensurability by attacking various strategies which attempt to find a meta-vocabulary, or metanarrative, that would synthesize both of these spheres of human

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5 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. xv.
6 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. xv.
action into a scheme of commensuration. While Rorty does not believe that his view is the entailment of modern treatments of epistemology or philosophy of language⁷, he does find positions in these areas that support him in undercutting attempts at producing a metanarrative (a view that allows us to commensurate competing theories or descriptions) that unites the public and the private.

Nothing requires us to first get straight about language, then about belief and knowledge, then about personhood, and finally about society⁸.

2] Moral foundationalism: an attack

Rorty will replace traditional, foundationalist, political morality with "historical comparison with other attempts at social organization"⁹. The theorizing of traditional, foundationalist political morality will give way to the recognition that traditional touchstones of justification, such as the nature of the self, or of truth, are "touchstones which are merely cultural artifacts"¹⁰. Political morality should cease making futile attempts to ground normative claims upon necessities and admit that our normative choices are historically conditioned, contingent artifacts. Rorty encourages us, as liberals, to stop trying to find touchstones, or foundations for liberal institutions, and instead, "take as its goal the creation of even more various and multicolored artifacts"¹¹.

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⁷ R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 54.
⁸ R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 55.
⁹ R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 53.
¹⁰ R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 53.
¹¹ R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 54.
The idea that liberalism ought to have foundations was a result of Enlightenment scientism, which in turn was a survival of the religious need to have human projects underwritten by a non-human authority.  

We can keep using expressions from the traditional vocabulary of morality, such as the language employed in utilitarian or Kantian principles. However, once we recognize the contingency of these methods of persuasion and control, we should see them as "reminders of, or abbreviations for, such practices, not justifications for such practices".

We can keep the notion of "morality" just insofar as we can cease to think of morality as the voice of the divine part of ourselves and instead think of it as the voice of ourselves as members of a community, speakers of a common language. We can keep the morality-prudence distinction if we think of it not as the difference between an appeal to the unconditioned and an appeal to the conditioned but as the difference between an appeal to the interests of our community and the appeal to our own, possibly conflicting, private interests. The importance of this shift is that it makes it impossible to ask the question "Is ours a moral society?" It makes it impossible to think that there is something which stands to my community as my community stands to me, some larger community called "humanity" which has an intrinsic nature.

12 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 52.
The successors to the Theologians who attempted to justify a morality through the authority of God are those who believe that there is some equally fixed authority for morality within the human realm, 'the intrinsic nature of humanity', self-evident truths, or the nature of reality. One representative approach, which Henry Sidgwick uses to describe himself, is labelled "Intuitionist". On this account, one intuits the truth of certain claims. They are self-evident truths which imply something that can be used to 'ground' or be the foundation for our moral practices. Sidgwick thought that we can have such 'knowledge' about normative matters and, on the basis of such a self-evident intuition, claimed that Utilitarianism could be seen to rest on the self-evident intuition that "happiness is the only rational ultimate end of action." Sidgwick, as a token of the type of foundationalist moral theorist that Rorty is eager to attack, is within a paradigm of justification which Rorty's position wishes to abandon: "a moral psychology which will safeguard the interests of reason, preserve a morality-prudence distinction... a different way of seeing language, one that treats it as a medium in which to find truth which is out there in the world (or, at least, deep within the self, at the place where we find the permanent, ahistorical, highest-level desires which adjudicate lower-level conflicts)". Because of the systematic nature of his arguments and the clarity with which he expresses them, I will be use

14 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 59.
Sidgwick as a foil to illustrate Rorty's anti-foundationalism.

Sidgwick believes that one can distinguish "self-evident truths" from intuitions that are simply appealing. Sidgwick considers many candidates for self-evidence before concluding that only the intuition "happiness is the only rational ultimate end of action"\textsuperscript{17} is self-evident. For example, determinate duties, such as those against incest, cannot, on reflection, be maintained to be self-evident. "Even against incest we seem to have rather an intense sentiment than a clear intuition"\textsuperscript{18}. For Sidgwick, the fundamental axiom of utilitarianism can be seen as self-evident, but the process of discerning self-evident normative truths does not identify more than this fundamental premise.

I find that I undoubtedly seem to perceive, as clearly and as certainly as I see any axiom in Arithmetic or Geometry, that it is 'right' and 'reasonable' for me to treat others as I should think that I myself ought to be treated under similar conditions, and to do what I believe to be ultimately conducive to universal Good or Happiness. But I cannot find inseparably connected with this conviction, and similarly attainable by mere reflective intuition, any cognition that there actually is any Supreme Being who will adequately reward me for obeying these rules of duty, or punish me for violating them\textsuperscript{19}.

This inseparable connection is an example of how the authoritative

\textsuperscript{17} Henry Sidgwick, Ibid., p. 201.
\textsuperscript{18} Henry Sidgwick, Ibid., p. 255.
\textsuperscript{19} Henry Sidgwick, Ibid., p. 507.
function once performed by God can be internalized into the human mind. In Sidgwick we have an excellent example of a secularized, but still foundational, morality. The idea of a divine authority for such beliefs is dropped, but through the process of discerning self-evident normative truths, the idea of a neutral, ahistorical and absolutely valid premise is maintained. From this foundation the imperatives of a public morality can be derived.

Rorty responds by seeing a 'divinization' of the faculty that intuits these self-evident truths. Rorty portrays the people capable of discerning absolutely valid normative beliefs as "those in whom reason, viewed as a built-in righteousness detector, is powerful enough to overcome evil passions, vulgar superstitions, and base prejudices"\textsuperscript{20}. It seems that Sidgwick’s position requires a type of faculty that is capable of discriminating between self-evident normative truths and contingent, culturally induced, normative beliefs. As in epistemology, this issue can be described in terms of the problem of representation, or in Rorty's terminology, 'mirroring'. Since there is no independent way to verify the accuracy of our representation of these truths, just as there is no independent way to get out from behind the 'veil of perception'\textsuperscript{21} to verify our beliefs about the world, there is no means to verify which beliefs have the property of being self-evident.

Sidgwick's paradigm of justification, which takes skepticism as the product of the failure of foundationalism, makes this move:

\begin{itemize}
\item If on the other hand we find that in our supposed knowledge
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{20} R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. 47.
of the world of nature propositions are commonly taken to be universally true, yet seem to rest on no other grounds than we have strong disposition to accept them, and that they are indispensable to the systematic coherence of our beliefs,—it will be more difficult to reject a similarly supported assumption in ethics, without opening the door to universal skepticism.22

For Sidgwick, the unintuitive position of skepticism is the inevitable consequence of the failure of foundationalism. Sidgwick's paradigm of justification uses the traditional skeptic, whose despair is caused by the belief, on the one hand, that truth and/or justification requires a picture of a relational sort between our beliefs and their justifiers, and, on the other, believes that relationship to be impenetrable.

A quick response to Sidgwick's normative claim is to say that it is merely a belief that is caused by a historical process. Sidgwick responds, "if it be admitted that all beliefs are equally in the position of being effects of antecedent causes, it seems evident that this characteristic alone cannot serve to invalidate any of them."23 Rorty can respond that the claim is attempting to gain our assent as an absolute, ahistorical, self-evident truth. Yet its appeal is a product of its coherence with the content of common moral beliefs. Sidgwick admits that there is a causal history to the intuition "happiness is the only rational ultimate end of action"24, but that "no general demonstration of the derivedness or developedness of our moral faculty can supply an

23 Henry Sidgwick, Ibid., p. 213.
24 Henry Sidgwick, Ibid., p. 201.
adequate reason for distrusting it"\textsuperscript{25}. But Rorty can respond that this move is just a conflation of self-evidence with commonplace platitudes, claims that people rarely trouble themselves to disagree about. To say that moral beliefs are common is to say that they are, at a historical time and place, causally effective in producing behaviour in a majority of agents. Since we are causal with respect to common moral beliefs, both in acting on them and promoting them to other members of the community, the fact that they are perceived as intuitively true is to be expected, and explained in such causal terms, but not to be confused with their ahistorical validity.

Rorty's paradigm of justification removes the representational relation between beliefs and their justifiers. In that way, the traditional skeptic is jettisoned along with the paradigm of justification used by foundationalists like Sidgwick.

If there were essential properties to creatures like us, then a foundational project would be possible. We would be able to justify our choices between competing moralities by making reference to that nature. But Rorty is convinced that no such nature can be found, and thus no foundation can be built. The issue of whether there can be a nature of the self, and thus a nature common to humanity as a collection of such selves, will be explored in chapter three.

3) \textbf{Liberalism without Foundations: Liberal ironists}

Rorty believes that what requires elimination or transformation is the traditional methods of justifying liberalism - not the institutions

\textsuperscript{25} Henry Sidgwick, Ibid., p. 213.
that have been justified by such methods. While these justifications have causally contributed to liberalism, they cannot complete an agenda set by Enlightenment standards, and have run their course as tools.

Most important, I think that contemporary liberal society already contains the institutions for its own improvement...

Western social and political thought may have had the last conceptual revolution that 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 to be pretty much the last word.  

Rorty outlines his revisionary approach to the justification of liberalism by engaging in a critical analysis of theorists who look to find something deeper than mere historical accident that has produced liberal institutions. Although it is intuitively plausible to think that by jettisoning the justification of liberal institutions one would be compelled to jettison what is justified by those arguments, Rorty disagrees. "Hostility to a particular historically conditioned and possibly transient form of solidarity is not hostility to solidarity as such." Our solidarity in support of liberal institutions may have been, in part, caused by some of those traditional liberal arguments. However, we should recognize that those arguments were only occasionally sufficient in a particular historical situation and are not necessary now for the maintenance of liberal institutions. For example,

27 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. xv.
he finds the 'rights thesis' of Ronald Dworkin, because it relies on some essentialism of 'what we are', to be flawed in its 'foundational' program.28

"Ronald Dworkin and others who take the notion of ahistorical human "rights" seriously serve as examples of the first absolutist pole."29

The intellectuals in Rorty’s liberal utopia will have stopped being foundationalists and will have become liberal ironists:

[Ironists are] people who combine commitment with a sense of the contingency of their commitment."30. "[T]he sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her 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.31

This name, 'liberal ironist', reflects the polarities throughout Rorty’s views such as public/private, philosophy/poetry, and solidarity/self-creation. In their public lives, these citizens are willing to die for liberal institutions, but privately, they feel the irony produced by the recognition that although, as a matter of historical fact, they are

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28 Whether it is a foundational program in the relevant sense will be determined later in chapter four.
31 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. xv.
32 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 189.
committed to liberal institutions, time and chance may have impressed very different allegiances and commitments into their web of beliefs and desires.

Consistent with his preference for narrative rather than theory, Rorty uses a historical description to introduce the idea of irony into his views.

For it somehow became possible, toward the end of the nineteenth century, to take the activity of redescription more lightly than it had ever been taken before. It became possible to juggle several descriptions of the same event without asking which one was right - to see redescription as a tool rather than a claim to have discovered essence... This is the sort of phenomena it is tempting to describe in terms of the march of the World-Spirit toward clearer self-consciousness... But any such description would betray the spirit of playfulness and irony which links the figures that I have been describing.\footnote{R. Rorty, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 39.}

The state of irony is a product of the temporalizing and finitizing of our "final vocabulary", the fundamental, but not foundational, cognitive items to which our self-descriptions and justifications eventually resort. Rorty thinks that a central problem of the ironist is finding a way of "keeping the seriousness of its finality while letting itself express its own contingency... constantly dismantling itself and constantly taking itself seriously".\footnote{R. Rorty, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 112.}

As human beings are 'incarnated vocabularies',\footnote{R. Rorty, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 35.} or 'sentential
attitudes', so too is society a concatenation of vocabularies. The concern of contemporary liberal political morality has been to 'rationalize' the vocabulary which has served as the touchstone behind our liberal institutions. To understand how this process needs to be reformed, and why we should look to literature and politics for our ends, or goals, we need to understand how a vocabulary functions in both individuals and the state.

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes ... 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 non-circular 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. A small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible and ubiquitous terms such as "true", "good", "right" and beautiful. The larger part contains thicker, more rigid and more parochial terms, for example, "Christ", "England", "professional standards", "decency", "kindness", "the Revolution", "the Church", "progressive", "rigorous", "creative". The more parochial terms do most of the work.\(^37\)

\(^{35}\) R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 80.

\(^{36}\) R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 88.
Applying this thin/thick distinction to the vocabulary of liberalism, we find that political morality spends most of its time on the thin words, and little time on the thick words that do most of the work. Reforming political culture, poeticizing it, would help to draw our attention to the details that are required in order to make the thicker terms more palpable, more causal. We need "an increasing sense of the radical diversity of private purposes, of the radically poetic character of individual lives, and of the merely poetic foundations of the "we-consciousness" which lies behind our social institutions". As a society, we should not look for charter or "a lading list which was a copy of the universe's own list... to know the truth; instead, our society should be, as Proust was, "unashamed of his own finitude. What contemporary liberalism needs is a conversation with new vocabularies, the playing off of our institutions against utopias envisaged by those who are trying to work out new vocabularies: "[M]oral philosophy takes the form of historical narration and utopian speculations rather than the search for general principles." Once freed from our old habits of justification, perhaps liberals can find new descriptions that help to expand the scope of liberalism, including new groups that were formerly excluded.

Although this state of irony might appear to leave the individual so decommitted that action is not possible, Rorty does not believe that he

37 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 73.
38 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 67-68.
39 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 27.
40 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 102-103.
41 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 60.
has undermined his pragmatic goals. "The fundamental premise of the
book is that a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth
dying for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused
by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance"42.

Further examination (see chapter two "The Ironist") of the relation
between commitment, action and irony should clarify for us how the
concept of irony functions (or does not function) in Rorty's overall
view.

For Rorty, liberalism can be seen as worth dying for. "Nothing is
more important than the preservation of these liberal institutions"43.
Rorty believes that we can take the contingent vocabulary that we have
inherited very seriously. But how is this seriousness compatible with
the recognition that everything, including our most cherished beliefs,
can be redescribed? Ironist theory, which, through redescription, de-
metaphysicalizes and shows the contingencies in our culture, "can be
privatized, and thus prevented from being a threat to political
liberalism"44. This treatment of the public/private split, like the
liberal/ironist, philosophy/poetry, solidarity/self-creation splits, shows
how Rorty is attempting to juggle the conflicting demands of goals that
appear to work against each other. Without a metanarrative we cannot
expect to synthesize these polarities into a scheme of
commensuration.

Rorty defends this divided vision by eliminating any overarching set

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1987, p. 567.
of concepts that might be used to synthesize or at least harmonize these dualisms into a coherent single metanarrative. Without something like a fixed concept of the world, the self, or the nature of linguistic consciousness to do the job, metanarratives cannot find anything substantial to help get the job done. The ironists, it seems, can describe their way out of any public attempt to ground our liberal institutions.

What was glimpsed at the end of the eighteenth century was that anything can be made to look good or bad, important or unimportant, useful or useless, by being redescribed.\(^4\)

Against such an agile opponent, the public philosophy of liberalism cannot succeed in a synthesis of the ironist theorists and self-creators with public liberals into a single system, or, in Rorty's "jargon"\(^5\), a metanarrative. What cannot be brought together in theory may still be brought together in a human life. Rorty believes that he has described a way to distinguish the question of whether you and I share the same final vocabulary from the question of whether you are in pain. Distinguishing these questions makes it possible to distinguish public from private questions, questions about pain from questions about the point of human life, the domain of the liberal from the domain of the ironist. It thus makes it possible for a single person to be both.\(^6\)

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\(^4\) R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 7.
\(^5\) As he refers to it himself.
\(^6\) R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 198.
Although the quest to synthesize these two realms 'in theory', is to be dropped, Rorty still believes that a human life can exhibit behaviour that crosses back and forth between these two realms. Nevertheless, he does offer some reasons, 'in theory', as to why they are to be kept separate. The vocabularies of the private and the public sphere are 'incommensurable'. In the final section of chapter three, we will offer an explanation of why Rorty claims there is incommensurability between these realms.

In a representative move, Rorty faces the disappointed liberal foundationalist and asserts that we should see the unimportance of asking questions that require reference to something neutral, ahistorical and absolutely valid. For Rorty, the failure of foundationalism should not lead to skepticism. Such a result is inevitable only if one's paradigm of justification requires foundations. If one is sufficiently nominalist and historicist -- in other words, if one is an 'ironist' -- one will not require foundations in order to be committed to the truth of a belief. Rorty, in a revisionist move, suggests that a "liberal society is badly served by an attempt to provide it with "philosophical foundations"". Rorty thinks that the sting of the charge of relativism is only painful to those trapped in the foundationalist scheme of justification. Once we describe our way out of that paradigm, we will not solve the problems in that paradigm; rather we will dissolve the attraction we have to the problems from that paradigm. The questions that remain unanswered, the problems that remain unsolved, will no longer inhibit our commitment to

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48 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 52.
believe and act on those beliefs. As an individual, Rorty believes that one should be "the person who accepts chance as worthy of determining her fate". As a society, we should see chance and contingency as worthy of determining our political institutions and actions. This account of justification, which denies the possibility of realizing the neutral, ahistorical and absolutely valid premises needed by the foundationalist enterprise, abandons the foundationalist paradigm of justification and is content with seeing our deepest commitments as the result of a particular historical causation.

We cannot assume that liberals ought to be able to rise above the contingencies of history and see the kind of individual freedom which the modern liberal state offers it citizens as just one more value ... Only the assumption that there is some such standpoint to which we might rise gives sense to the question, "If one's convictions are only relatively valid, then why stand for them unflinchingly". To say that convictions are only "relatively valid" might seem to mean that they can only be justified to people who hold certain other beliefs - not to anyone and everyone. But if this were what is meant, the term would have no contrastive force, for there would be no interesting statements which were absolutely valid.

The problem that remains is the issue of commitment. Why should persons who believe that their commitments are simply the product of

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49 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 51.
50 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 50.
51 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 47.
the 'blind impress' of causation be willing to die for their commitments? Rorty's solution is complex, but the first move is to remove the problem from the old paradigm of justification, where such a vetting of our commitments appears to be a natural requirement of practical reasoning, and rephrase the issue in his historicist vocabulary. Rorty suggests that the 'problem of relativism', commitment to beliefs that are only justifiable in relation to a vocabulary, disappears when one drops the paradigm of justification that requires foundational, trans-vocabularic beliefs in order to justify commitment.

there is no such thing as the relativist predicament, just as for someone who thinks that there is no God there will be no such thing as blasphemy. For there will be no higher standpoint to which we are responsible and against whose precepts we might offend"52.

Given this paradigm of justification change, Sidgwick's fundamental moral premise, for example, can be interpreted as true (because it appears true in the language-game), but not self-evidently true (when that means neutral, ahistorical and absolutely valid), or, perhaps, simply uninterestingly true. Interesting normative positions are found at the level of 'first and second-order' desires, the types of desires that inform action, but Sidgwick's normative claim, that happiness is the goal of human action, could be called uninteresting because it is too abstract, and thereby does not have any 'mediating power' in our choices of action.

52 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 50.
But Davidson is assuming -- rightly, I think -- that the only candidates for such highest-level desires are so abstract and empty as to have no mediating powers... Because what will count as "good" and "rational" ["happy"] or "true" will be determined by the contest between the first- and second-level desires, wistful top-level protestations of goodwill are impotent to intervene in that context53.

This claim about 'interesting' beliefs seems to draw a distinction between first and second-order normative and what we might call meta-normative beliefs. What Rorty wants to delineate is the division of labour that these different classes of normative beliefs perform. As a pragmatist, he is hoping to draw our attention away from the meta-normative beliefs, which he believes do not inform our actions, and refocus our attention onto the first and second-order normative beliefs that do inform our actions, or, in pragmatist terms, do most of the work. The question of whether these more abstract beliefs do some work is explored in the final section of chapter three. For Sidgwick, these meta-normative beliefs are required to commit one to one morality rather than another, and thereby these meta-normative beliefs do have some work to do. Rorty's reasons for thinking that these beliefs do not have a job to do stems from his rejection of the paradigm of justification that has a role for such beliefs. However, when the pragmatic consideration of maintaining liberal institutions is combined the presence of a population accustomed to expecting such justifications, the shift in justificatory practices becomes more

53 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 49.
problematic. We will be able to sharpen this point in the final section of chapter three.

Hilary Putnam\textsuperscript{54} is not quick to agree that Rorty has overcome the problems of relativism. The argument will be thoroughly addressed in chapter two.

Rorty thinks that culture should be "poeticized"\textsuperscript{55} rather than rationalized.

I also said that literature and politics are the spheres to which contemporary intellectuals look when they worry about ends rather than means. I can now add the corollary that these are the areas to which we should look for a charter of a liberal society. We need a redescriptions of liberalism as the hope that culture as a whole can be "poeticized" rather than, as the Enlightenment hoped, that it can be "rationalized" or "scientized"\textsuperscript{56}.

As an example of how the foundational program has become an impediment to the progress of liberal institutions, Rorty takes some time examining three important thinkers in political morality: Foucault; Habermas and Dworkin. Each of them, in one way or another, is under the spell of the justificatory system that Sidgwick exemplified and which Rorty believes should now be dropped. Foucault is an "ironist without being a liberal", Dworkin and Habermas are "liberal[s] unwilling to be... ironist[s]"\textsuperscript{57} Rorty criticizes each of these theorists


\textsuperscript{56} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 53.
for their reliance on metanarratives. The merits of Rorty's critique of
these theorists is best evaluated after the issue, discussed in chapter
three, of whether Rorty, as a pragmatist, is committed to a
metanarrative despite his repudiation of such an idea. We will turn to
his critique of these theorists in chapter four.

The foundationalist liberal, and methods in that tradition, are to
give way to the ironist liberal. Rorty's project requires that we stop
asking for a metaphysics or a metanarrative that underwrites our
acceptance, or in Foucault's case, our rejection of liberal institutions.

4] Rorty the Anti-epistemologist -- Ironist Theorizing

Rorty is an ironist theorizer. "The goal of ironist theory is to
understand the metaphysical urge, the urge to theorize, so well that
one becomes entirely free of it"58. He "wants a way of seeing [his] past
which is incommensurable with all the ways in which the past has
described itself"59. The "Plato-Kant canon"60 is responsible for the
method of justification that attempts to ground liberal institutions
upon necessities. To overcome this model Rorty must not succumb to
the metaphysical urge to affiliate his position "with a non-human
power"61. He cannot, for example, side with the realists and claim
that 'justification talk' can be reduced to certain physical processes
that science will eventually help us to explicate. To do so would
'divinize' the world. For the same anti-metaphysical reasons he cannot

57 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 65.
58 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 96-97.
60 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 96.
61 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 97.
adopt a form of idealism and 'divinize' consciousness. Both approaches would leave Rorty in the shadow of 'great redescribers' or great philosophers of the past. Rorty believes that ironist theorists must redescribe the redescribers of the past, "if he is to become their equal rather than their epigone"\textsuperscript{62}

Rorty does not think that idealism or realism will do. Realism holds that 'there is some way that world is', but questions arise when we try to recognize that 'true nature'. Rorty objects to realism on a variety of grounds, not least of which being the problem of recognizing when we have a \textit{bona fide} example of "the way that the world is". Since he holds that we are "incarnated vocabularies", it remains open to ask, at all times, whether our perception of the world is ever independent of our cognition, or, to put it in his terms, our vocabulary. To say that we see a 'mountain' is already to be in the realm of the cognitive, and it is difficult to see how anything non-cognitive can underwrite our cognitions. If 'raw sense data' is non-cognitive, then it cannot underwrite our cognitions, and if it is already cognitive, then we have not escaped the realm of vocabulary, cognitions, or, as Bishop Berkeley would put it, "ideas", and thereby we do not have a \textit{bona fide} example of the world underwriting our beliefs or cognitions. We are in the 'cognicentric' predicament and no privileged representations can get us out of it\textsuperscript{63}.

\textbf{Idealism}, can be seen as a response to these problems with realism.

\textsuperscript{62}R. Rorty, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 103.

Chapter one, section four

The world is 'my beliefs about it'; 'to be is to be believed'; 'to be is to be in my vocabulary'. The response to the problems of realism has its problems too. If the world has such a dependence on my cognitions, can we generate a robust enough conception of the non-self, including both the 'world' and other selves? Without Berkeley's 'God in the Quad', idealism has only the beliefs of the individual and the individuals beliefs about the communities' beliefs to use as a means to an account of 'proper commitment to beliefs'. While the use of counterfactuals and hypothetical constructions can remedy some of the counterintuitive aspects of this view, eliminating any authority outside of the individual's first-person experience is a recipe for sliding into solipsism. For if we are true to the slogan 'to be is to be perceived', then even the community is a construction out of the resources of the first-person experiences of the individual. Instead of simply maintaining that the authority for belief is internal to the realm of the cognitive, the [non-theistic] idealist must internalize authority inside the individual altogether. While this leaves open tests of coherence, and thereby some sort of appearance/reality distinction, the question of whether such individuals inhabit a common world always remains open.

Skeptics use the metaphysical framework developed by idealists and realists to show the defects of each position and conclude that the attempt to prove 'what really exists' is doomed. The epistemological positions that respond to the metaphysical framework of idealism/realism respond to the skeptic in various ways, some more successful than others. For our purposes it is not necessary to evaluate
the merits of these attempts. Critics of Rorty have been quick to locate him in this tradition, and in particular, they argue that his position must be a variation of idealism, since it is not realist. 64 This is an option that he is committed to rejecting 65.

Rorty claims to have superseded the realist/idealist metaphysical framework, and the related epistemologies, and in doing so, leaving the skeptic behind too. However, if critics such as Charles Taylor66 still find Rorty to be trapped within this tradition, perhaps a clearer statement of the 'Pragmatist' epistemology is in order. Taylor writes, the inescapability of certain philosophical issues... the considerations that I have been advancing suggest that this move is far from being a liberation. Just trying to walk away from the old [metaphysics and] epistemology, without working out an alternative conception, seems paradoxically a formula for remaining trapped in it to some degree... those who ignore philosophy are condemned to relive it."67

We will return to this issue, whether Rorty can somehow escape from the realist/idealist framework in chapter three. Although some of the historical associations with these labels may be rejected, Rorty must choose between a vocabulary that has the resources to describe

something sufficiently contrasting our cognitive states, the world, or not. If not, then he will have a cognitivism, or a vocabularism, that presents problems for his pragmatism. If he allows for a world, something that sufficiently contrasts our cognitive states, then this world must have a use, and that use will allow a thin epistemic relation. This choice is a central issue in section one and two in chapter three.

**5] The incommensurability of vocabularies**

"Language speaks man": there is no higher ground than our temporary languages.

there is no standpoint outside the particular and historically conditioned and temporary vocabulary we are presently using from which to judge this vocabulary... giving us the idea that intellectual or political progress is rational, in any sense of "rational" that is neutral between vocabularies.

From the materials of our present vocabulary, there is no means available to tell a story about why our vocabulary is more rational, or 'gets things right' as compared to other vocabularies. Human beings are 'incarnated vocabularies', or 'sentential attitudes' and we cannot escape our vocabularies to judge our vocabularies.

speaking a language... is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought. So there is no chance that someone can take up a vantage point for comparing

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conceptual schemes by temporarily shedding his own72.

We cannot ask if one language game is more rational than another, since rationality is relative to the conditions that are put in place by a vocabulary, and ranking vocabularies would presuppose that we had access to a meta-language game or something extra-vocabularic which could serve as the criteria for such a ranking. There is no 'pre-linguistic consciousness' against which which language-games must be adequate73. Nor is there a 'World' that speaks a language that must be obeyed by our language-games. We are left with our capacity to describe, but the world does not "provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors".74 Any position that lets a non-intentional system be regulative of an intentional system falls prey to the 'Enlightenment Hangover'; the attempt to underwrite human projects with a non-human authority.75 "The world does not speak. Only we do."76 When we speak for it, we cannot produce a meta-language that allows us to rank the merits of other vocabularies. If we could, then we would be on our way to finding an evaluative system that would let us rank different vocabularies.

By "commensurable" I mean able to be brought under a set of rules which will tell us how rational agreement can be reached on what would settle the issue on every point where statements seem to conflict. These rules tell us how to

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72 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 50.
73 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 21.
74 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 21.
75 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 52.
76 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 6.
construct an ideal situation, in which all residual disagreements will be seen to be "noncognitive" or merely verbal, or else merely temporary - capable of being resolved by doing something further. What matters is that there should be agreement about what would have to be done if a resolution were to be achieved. In the meantime the interlocutors can agree to differ - being satisfied of each other's rationality the while.77

Rorty rejects the idea that we can produce such a scheme of evaluation, whether out of the resources of vocabularies, or from finding some extra-vocabularic ground upon which comparison is possible. Therefore our vocabularies, our historically conditioned ways of speaking and thinking are, at least in some ways, incommensurable.

6] Self-creation

Philosophers have traditionally searched for continuities, universals and context-transcending truths. Rorty sides with the Nietzschean idea that 'finding a single context for human lives is to be abandoned'.78 Instead of following the philosopher, we are to look to the poet, and aim for freedom rather than truth79. In vocabularic terms, this amounts to creating one's own language. Self-creation is to be understood in terms of changing the vocabulary that we have been programmed with by causation's 'blind impress'. "We revise our moral

79 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 27.
identity by revising our final vocabulary.\textsuperscript{80} Those of us who feel the conscious desire to be autonomous may feel a form of Heideggerian guilt; that is, "guilty because his final vocabulary is made by the past"\textsuperscript{81}.

Those who hope to be autonomous, to be the 'cause of ourselves', must scrutinize our 'final vocabularies' or the 'elemental words'\textsuperscript{82} that make us who we are. This is not a metaphysical inquiry into the nature of "the Self": "These elemental words reveal us because they made us but they are not revealers of anything else"\textsuperscript{83}. When we are choosing between different final vocabularies, "there is nothing beyond vocabulary which serves as a choice between them"\textsuperscript{84}.

Metaphor creation is a way to alter the influence of the final vocabulary that we have inherited, but we begin with the literal. "Common sense", for Rorty, is described as "dead metaphors"\textsuperscript{85}:

Once the freshness wears off of the metaphor, you have plain, literal, transparent language... ideas so clear and distinct, you can look right through them... (Honoured in the abstract but forgotten in the particular)\textsuperscript{86}.

Common sense and literal language have important uses, including being a means to metaphor creation. But if we remain the product of the vocabulary we have inherited, then we cannot be autonomous.

\textsuperscript{80} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{81} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 109.
\textsuperscript{82} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{83} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 117.
\textsuperscript{84} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 80.
\textsuperscript{85} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 152.
\textsuperscript{86} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 152.
Metaphors are unfamiliar uses of old words, but such uses are only possible against the background of other old words being used in old familiar ways. A language which was "all metaphor" would be a language which had no use... Every sparkling metaphor requires a lot of stodgy literal talk to serve as its foil.87

Against the background of the literal, the commonsensical, the individual interested in autonomy, in self-creation, can use "narrative in relation to the past rather than a real essence" and work on an "unconscious need everyone has - to come to grips with the blind impress which chance has given him".89 Theorists will "redescribe big things from a distance" and those interested in self-creation, in other words, those who attempt "autonomy spend their lives reworking -- hoping to trace the blind impress home and so, in Nietszche's phrase -- become who they are", will focus on the little things that have caused their actions.

The only thing that makes heroic action or splendid speech possible is some very specific chains of association with some highly idiosyncratic memories...

In the pursuit of autonomy, an individual will, for example, "redescribe the people who describe him"92, which will be useful for

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87 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 41.
89 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 43.
90 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 100.
91 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 141.
92 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 102.
"temporalizing and finitizing" the grip that particular authority figures can have on an individual. Some will carry through the "attempt to create a new self by writing a bildungsroman about their old self." In this process of coming to grips with the blind impress, self-creators are not surmounting time and chance and finding something timeless underneath the causal imprint that their history has given them. Instead, they are "using time and chance" to lead them to a better description of the contingencies which have shaped them. As there is nothing outside vocabularies which identifies the 'right' description, the goal of 'private perfection' is a series of redescriptions which "turned other people from [Proust's] judges into his fellow sufferers, and thus succeeded in creating the taste by which he judged himself." 'Better' descriptions are ones which help each of us redescribe those who have described us. If self-creators are sufficiently historicist, they will finitize authority figures "not by detecting what they "really" were but by watching them become different than what they had been, and by seeing how they looked when redescribed in terms offered by still other authority figures, whom [they] play off against the first."

In terms of the Kantian autonomy/heteronomy distinction, none of us can be autonomous, since, for Rorty, and unlike for Kant, there is no 'Self' behind our web of beliefs and desires. In a representative

93 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 103.
94 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 119.
96 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 103.
97 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 103.
Rortian move, once the metaphysical idea of an transcendent self is eliminated, one is left with the view that there is a kind of autonomy in an escape from a particular, historical conditioned heteronomy by the individualized, and in this de-metaphysicalized sense, autonomous, capacity to redescribe. To put it in different, but causal terms, one can become autonomous by redescribing and, in that way, reducing the causal force that others, and their vocabularies, can exert upon us. As an example, Rorty chooses Proust.

All he wanted to do was get out from under finite powers by making their finitude evident... free himself from the descriptions of himself offered by people he met... Proust became autonomous by explaining to himself why the others were not authorities, but simply fellow contingencies. He redescribed them as being as much a product of other's attitudes towards them as Proust himself was a product of their attitudes towards him...the result of all of this finitization was to make Proust unashamed of his own finitude...98

In this sense, Rorty believes that Proust is to be preferred to a writer who is unsatisfied with contingency. As a contrast, Rorty considers Philip Larkin, who believes that "one might get more satisfaction out of finding a blind impress which applied not only to "one man once" but, rather, to all human beings"99. Larkin is unsatisfied with an idiosyncratic 'lading list' of his blind impress because his expectations have been shaped by the ambitions of the "Greek philosophers, still

98 R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 102-103.
later the empirical scientists and later still the German idealists"\textsuperscript{100}. Larkin looks for "a lading list which was a copy of the universe's own list... \textit{to know the truth}"\textsuperscript{101}. Proust is satisfied with the freedom and autonomy that he finds in redescription.

In a Nietzschean mode, Rorty paraphrases the reasons why he prefers the activity of Proust over the ambitions of Larkin.

His perspectivism amounted to the claim that the universe had no lading list to be known, no determinate length... he would have created the only part of himself that mattered by constructing his own mind. To create one's mind is to create one's own language, rather than to let the length of one's mind be set by the language other human beings have left behind... Nietzsche did not abandon the idea of discovering the causes of our being what we are. He did not give up the idea that an individual might track home the blind impress that all of his behavings bore. He only rejected that this tracking was a process of discovery... he saw self-knowledge as self-creation... confronting one's contingency, tracking one's causes home, is identical with the process of inventing a new language - that is, of thinking up some new metaphors. For any \textit{literal} description of one's individuality, which is to say any use of an inherited language-game for this purpose, will necessarily fail... So the only way to trace home the causes of one's being as one is would be to tell a story about one's

\textsuperscript{101} R. Rorty, \textit{Ibid.}, p. 27.
causes in a new language\textsuperscript{102}.

Larkin, and the traditional truth-seeking philosophers that he represents are trying to break "out of the world of time, appearance and idiosyncratic opinion ... into the world of enduring truth"\textsuperscript{103}. Nietzsche and Rorty think that the "important boundary to cross is not the one separating time from atemporal truth but rather the one which divides the old from the new"\textsuperscript{104}.

The hope of such a poet is that what the past tried to do to her she will succeed in doing to the past: to make the past itself, including those very causal processes which blindly impressed all her own behavings, bear her impress... "giving birth to oneself"\textsuperscript{105}

Self-creation is linked to metaphor creation because "[t]he person who uses words as they have never been used before is best able to appreciate her own contingency"\textsuperscript{106}. She can see that "her language is as contingent as her parents... she can see the force of the claim that "truth is a mobile army of metaphors" because, by her own sheer strength, she has broken out of one perspective, one metaphoric, into another"\textsuperscript{107}. Those who are capable of producing metaphors are poets and some become strong poets.

The line between weakness and strength is thus the line

\textsuperscript{102} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 27-28.
\textsuperscript{103} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{104} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{105} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{106} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 28.
\textsuperscript{107} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 28.
between using language which is familiar and universal and producing language which, although initially unfamiliar and idiosyncratic, somehow makes tangible the blind impress all one's behavings bear. With luck -- the sort of luck which makes the difference between genius and eccentricity -- that language will also strike the next generation as inevitable. Their behavings will bear that impress\textsuperscript{108}.

This Romantic vision of our capacity to give birth to ourselves appears to suffer from an essentialist view of the 'self', and posits an expressive relation between the 'core self' and the product of the capacity to redescribe, the 'created self'. But Rorty's anti-essentialism is at odds with this picture. He says "Freud thus helps us take seriously the possibility that there is no central faculty, no central self, called "reason"\textsuperscript{109}. Freud does not "see humanity as a natural kind with an intrinsic nature"\textsuperscript{110} and helps Rorty "get rid of the last citadel of necessity... to abjure the attempt to divinize the self as a replacement for a divinized world"\textsuperscript{111}. Self-creation is a process of invention, not discovery. This process of invention and creation should not be conflated with the Romantic idea of language expressing the essential nature of the self.

In chapter three we will have reason to question whether Rorty's vocabulary can get along without a core self. He claims that there is no thing as the self itself, and that our natures are contingent all the way

\textsuperscript{108} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 29.
\textsuperscript{109} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 33.
\textsuperscript{110} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 35.
\textsuperscript{111} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 35.
down. However, can Rorty remain a pragmatist without some view of what is presupposed by the idea of practicality? That question will help frame a critique of Rorty's rejection of a metanarrative of the self.

7] Rorty's vocabulary: a summary

We can see that Rorty's systematic arguments against any form of essentialism block foundationalist arguments that ground their explanation/justification of human actions and practices on the purported real natures of the self, language or reality. The self is not a 'natural kind with an intrinsic nature'; Reality/The World itself is not knowable; and language is not accountable to either the world or the self and thus does not function, as it did in Enlightenment models, as a 'medium'. Prescriptively, Rorty believes that the activity of redescribing should be entirely unfettered in the private realm of self-creation. In the public sphere, however, redescription has less application since solidarity is the goal and liberal institutions are the means.

As a pragmatist, Rorty's political goal is to preserve liberal institutions:

Such fragile, flawed institutions, the creation of the last three hundred years, are humanity's most precious achievements...[the best means]... to Rawls' two principles... possible that they may vanish by the year 2100... nothing to prevent the future from being, as Orwell said, "a boot stamping down on a human face forever" Nothing is more important than the preservation of these liberal institutions.112
Yet as an anti-foundationalist, he is aware that our liberal institutions are only an historical product of a description about the 'best way to live together'. There is no way to refute competing answers to that question. This awareness is the mark of the liberal ironist.

This would mean giving up the idea that liberalism could be justified, and Nazi or Marxist enemies of liberalism refuted, by driving the latter up an argumentative wall -- forcing them to admit that liberalism has a "moral privilege" which their own values lacked...any attempt to drive one's opponent up against a wall fails when the wall against he is driven comes to be seen as one more vocabulary, one more way of describing things.\footnote{R. Rorty, Thugs and Theorists: A reply to Bernstein’, Political Theory vol. 15, no. 4, Nov. 1987, p. 567.}

The delicate condition of the liberal ironist is the problem of being committed while believing in the contingency of all of one's commitments. Rorty says that there is nothing more important than these institutions, but he can only give a circular response to the question "Why do you believe that there is nothing more important than these institutions?"

The idea of "essences" has been eliminated. The self has no fixed nature; the world is a constellation of random causes; there is no 'expressive' relation between the self and its language, nor is there any representational relation between the world and the self. Language is the effect of a "blind impress" and can no longer be held hostage to

\footnote{R. Rorty, Contingency, irony and solidarity, Op Cit.. p. 53.}
that blindness. Language, contingent as it is, becomes the determinant rather than the determined. Rorty is "able to set aside the idea that both the self and reality have intrinsic natures"\textsuperscript{114}.

We turn now to the issues arising within Rorty's paradigm of justification. What is Rorty's account of proper commitment to a belief?

\textsuperscript{114} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 11.
Chapter Two: Authority; Enlightenment and Historicist

In this chapter, an section summary will be provided for each section.

[1] Authority

Section Summary

The role of an account of proper commitment to belief, i.e. of true belief states, is set within a brief account of standard and ironical action. What account of proper commitment to a belief does Rorty hold? Against Rorty, the foundationalist metaphysicians countenance an authority which rules on which beliefs are true and which false that is metaphysical in the sense that it is taken to exist outside our vocabularies -- an authority which is neither states of agents nor their actions.

Historicist theories of justification respond to the Foundationalist's treatment of transcendent, authoritative concepts such as reality and reason in either a moderate or extreme way. The moderate way holds that while reason, for example, is always immanent in particular systems, it is still not reducible to that immanence since it has some properties which transcend any particular historically induced expression of it. The extreme historicist position, on the other hand, would take reason as something that is reducible to what particular historical communities produce.  

Extreme Historicism takes a piece of vocabulary as having a role only within the vocabulary of which it is a part. That role is determined by unique historical forces which shaped the vocabulary in which it functions. An account of

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1 This distinction between moderate and extreme historicism is based on one that Alasdair MacIntyre uses to distinguish himself from Rorty. MacIntyre, on this interpretation, would be a moderate historicist. Thank you to Prof. E. Rand for pointing this article out to me. Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Arguments and Social Contexts: A response to Rorty" Hermeneutics and Praxis ed. R. Hollinger, University of Notre Dame Press, Notre Dame, Indiana, 1985. p. 222-223.
the role of a piece of vocabulary must, for this view, be in terms of its relation solely to other pieces of that same vocabulary. Otherwise its particular and unique historical nature is lost and it has no other.

**moderate Historicism**, in contrast, such as it appears in the work of Alasdair MacIntyre\(^2\), allows that a piece of vocabulary may have role which is found in even radically different historical situations. A role which exists in one vocabulary may be found identical in others. Even though that role may have some "local" difference there may exist, as a matter of fact, an identity of roles or functions among many vocabularies. History is not unique and neither are vocabularies or their parts.

On the **Extreme Historicist** position, if it is not to be just a contingent possibility, i.e., as a matter of fact a piece of vocabulary has a role which is unique, a role found in only one vocabulary, must be resting on some idea of the uniqueness of each vocabulary and the roles within them. This is, as Putnam will show, solipsism in through the front door. In short, he wonders why one would occupy themselves with Extreme Historicism if its really only **Historical Uniqueness** (Induplicability) which is the counterpart of first person uniqueness (my pain can never be yours equals my history can never be yours).

The problems with the extreme historicist picture, which will be sharpened in section two of this chapter, will allow us to present Rorty with a difficult choice. If Rorty is an extreme historicist, then he will find it difficult to give a coherent account of his view of irony. If he is a moderate historicist, the possibility of a metanarrative emerges. Setting up this problem requires us to first clarify the implications of these two forms of historicism. We turn to that task now.

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\(^2\) Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Arguments and Social Contexts: A response to Rorty"

Rorty's account of proper commitment to cognitive states that function in action is examined by using the Foundationalist model as a contrasting picture. The older view requires a representational relation between justified cognitive states and an external authority.

The foundationalist picture understands that this external authority for our beliefs was not itself an aspect of some larger agent -- the authority was taken to be extensional, truly altogether outside the belief realm and its effects. Nevertheless the foundationalist's authority, while not itself 'agency-like' (in non-theistic models) had to have, as the passive authority of our beliefs, just those properties which our proper beliefs were to have. How else could a non-agency authority function except as a (passive) model? And since the agency lay with us our role as belief-formers was to represent that passive authority. This was the nature and role of the world as authority.

The Foundational picture was not however constrained to see authority for our beliefs existing solely in what was passively external to us. Kant\textsuperscript{3} showed us that the nature of reason could be (at least part of) the authority. This was still consistent with the Enlightenment's main tenet that the authority was external to our beliefs - in Kant's case in the very forms of beliefs themselves, whatever their historically derived differences. The world and the structure by which it would be necessarily shaped is the authority for


proper beliefs according to Kant.

The Foundational model requires an authority that comes from a picture of a relational sort between our beliefs and their extra-belief justifiers, and so is engaged in a foundationalism connecting us to the world, as in realism, or to our sensory experiences, as in empiricism. The model uses the external authority of the non-cognitive, the world or raw sense-data, as the authority for the cognitive.

Rorty's historicist picture, however, rejects the idea that justification could aim for an external authority that transcends a particular historical condition and therefore any particular historical "vocabulary". Rorty's remark that 'truth is a property of sentences' is, then, to be taken to mean that it is now somewhere within vocabularies that the authority for distinguishing true from false beliefs and/or utterances exists. Truth is a property of sentences; sentences depend for their existence on vocabularies; communities [we] make vocabularies, and therefore 'we' [the community] make truth, writes Rorty⁴. Since communities are contingent products of time and chance, we should see that truth is also contingent. Instead of using an Enlightenment relation between the cognitive and the non-cognitive, beliefs and an external authority, Rorty prefers an authority within the realm of the cognitive; the authority for beliefs is found in 'what my peers believe', in short, an internal authority. This rejection of an external authority and the acceptance of an internal authority for belief is the "historicist" strain in Rorty's position.

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This Enlightenment picture lends itself to an ahistorical foundationalism. In contrast, all historicists reject atemporal truth. Within historicism, two positions will be identified. In an extreme position our cognitive states and their related vocabularies are taken to be historically unique and impossible to evaluate on the basis of any trans-historical standards. There will not be a single authority which transcends particular historical vocabularies; rather, many authorities will exist, each independently embedded in its historical or contingent vocabulary setting, each ruling within its historical context. A moderate historicism allows that although vocabularies may emerge from different historical situations they are each nevertheless vocabularies in the sense that they may play a part in a scheme of commensuration which allows the evaluation of different historically conditioned vocabularies.

Rorty is not meeting the foundational project head-on; he believes that ". . . a talent for speaking differently, rather than arguing well, is the chief instrument of cultural change"\(^5\), yet there is a parallel between his program and the Foundational program that seems to undercut the impression Rorty gives that the two projects are incommensurable. Both programs give an explanation of proper commitment to beliefs.

Suppose that we take commitment\(^6\) to be that threshold state of

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causal readiness which characterizes beliefs or desires (or other cognitive states) which are believed by the agent, *ceteris paribus*, to have the right properties to contribute causally through an intention to relevant action.

The Foundational program gives an account of commitment from a picture of a relational sort between our beliefs and their justifiers. The account is metaphysical because the authority for our beliefs is not within our vocabularies, but is taken to exist independently of our descriptions of it. The properties of this external authority are just the properties of our proper beliefs. Commitment is proper if the beliefs, desires and/or other cognitive states functioning in action have the property of re-presenting, or as Rorty would put it, mirroring, the properties of these external authorities.

Rorty writes that the metaphysical view, sketched above, saves the intuition that 'truth is out there' by personifying the world, making it "something we ought to respect as well as cope with, something personlike in that it has a preferred description of itself". Rorty thinks that this metaphorical understanding of the world is something that we can supercede if we stop worshipping these "dead metaphors". Perhaps on some extreme pantheistic views the external authority for belief really did have agency-like properties, but the secular revolution of the Enlightenment eschewed such a picture of the authority for our beliefs and saw the external authority as passive. It was our job to form true representations, or accurate mirrorings of that passive external

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Kant thought that the authority for our beliefs did not exist solely in what was passively external to us. He thought that the nature of reason could be at least part of the authority. But in saying this, he did not depart from the main feature of the Foundational/Enlightenment's picture of the authority for our beliefs being external to our beliefs. If the very form of beliefs themselves was a part of their authority, then the externality of the authority for beliefs remains intact in Kant's views. The world and the structure by which it would be necessarily shaped remain external to our agency, providing, as they do, the necessary conditions for our agency.

Rorty's anti-metaphysical position is that there is no single authority (such as the World, Nature, Reality, God, events and the Self) that we can interpret as the Authority to justify our beliefs, desires and/or other cognitive states. Since such metaphysical sources of authority are external to beliefs and their expression in vocabularies, they could be used in a scheme of commensuration which would allow us to judge all 'vocabularies', all of the different ways of speaking that humans have developed. Rorty believes this form of justification, this attempt to ground our knowledge claims on a single metaphysical or external authority, entails a belief in the existence of a 'metanarrative', an ur-vocabulary to which all vocabularies are accountable. Instead Rorty thinks that we must see everything about ourselves, including

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our most fundamental beliefs, as contingent products of time and chance. Notions such as the 'world' and the 'self' cannot function as indicative of an ahistorical necessity, authority or foundation.

Metanarratives like the correspondence theory of truth, or any other form of representationalism, must be superseded and replaced with a vocabulary-relative\textsuperscript{10} view of truth. If the Foundational/Enlightenment view holds that full commitment to a belief requires, for some beliefs at least, a representational relation between beliefs and their external justifiers, then what is the contrasting picture that Rorty offers?

Historicist theories of justification, while keeping some account of how agents are (should be) committed to their beliefs, respond to the Foundational/Enlightenment's transcendent, regulative\textsuperscript{11} concepts in either a 'moderate' or 'extreme' way. The moderate way holds that while such concepts are immanent in particular systems, they are still not reducible to that immanence since they can have properties which transcend any particular historically induced expression of them\textsuperscript{12}. The extreme historicist position would take,

\textsuperscript{10} Keeping in mind Rorty's disavowal of the 'relativist predicament', it remains true of Rorty that only sentences are 'true' and that sentences depend for their existence on vocabularies, and that we make vocabularies. Therefore truth is relative to vocabularies. There are not 'floating true propositions' which our particular sentences hope to express.

\textsuperscript{11} Such concepts, like truth or reason, are transcendent insofar as they are not reducible to particular, historical communities. They are found to occur across these communities. These concepts are regulative insofar as they provide a means to criticize the practices of existing communities. Together, these features make committing the 'naturalistic fallacy' possible. One can say 'X is good', if X is approved by a given community, but if there are transcendent, regulative concepts available, one can always ask if the community is justified in thinking that 'X is good'.

\textsuperscript{12} See Alasdair MacIntyre, "Moral Arguments and Social Contexts: A response to Rorty" 
for example, reason as reducible to what particular historical communities produce. In this discussion of morality, notice how Rorty undercuts the idea that justification can reach for a single authority.

We can keep the morality-prudence distinction if we think of it not as the difference between an appeal to the unconditioned and an appeal to the conditioned but as the difference between an appeal to the interests of our community and the appeal to our own, possibly conflicting, private interests. The importance of this shift is that it makes it impossible to ask the question "Is ours a moral society?" It makes it impossible to think that there is something which stands to my community as my community stands to me, some larger community called "humanity" which has an intrinsic nature. [italics mine]

This quotation suggests that Rorty wishes to keep commitment functioning, but wishes to allow only the particular historical community itself to be the authority. It would also be the case that no common functions of different vocabularies could be found across different vocabularies. If this is his position, then in the terminology that we have been using, he is an extreme historicist. There will not be any external [metaphysical] authority, nor any transcendent functions across vocabularies, available to underwrite our beliefs. The possibility of a metanarrative, a scheme of commensuration for different vocabularies, seems to be eliminated too.

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1985. p. 222-223 for the use of this sort of distinction.

Given Rorty's anti-metanarrative position, there cannot be, in order to give an account of "proper" commitment, or justification, an appeal to something that transcends our particular historical condition. On Rorty's historicist account, our final vocabularies are the fundamental cognitive items, beliefs, that can be used to explain our actions. To say that these cognitive items are fundamental is not to say that they are foundational, for in Rorty's analysis, they are fundamental because there is no means available to say why, in cognitive terms, these beliefs are central to the explanation of our actions. "If doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no non-circular argumentative recourse". If the beliefs were foundational, then there would be a picture of a relational sort between our beliefs and their justifiers, and Rorty's position does not allow a move which would "have human projects underwritten by a non-human authority". Rorty wants us to remain "the sort of person who faces up to the contingency of his or her 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". In short, Rorty allows that some beliefs may be fundamental but rejects the paradigm of justification which would picture those beliefs as foundational, i.e. that they correspond to the intentional properties of a thing that is serving as the extra-vocabulary source of external authority. "The fundamental premise of the book is that a belief can still regulate action, can still be thought worth dying

for, among people who are quite aware that this belief is caused by nothing deeper than contingent historical circumstance"\(^{17}\).

Rorty wants the 'world' and causation to function in his views and avoid Idealism. As a pragmatist, he requires the idea of 'works', as in 'this approach works better' or 'this vocabulary works'. Can 'works' be purely described within vocabularic terms? How do you explain commitment to a vocabulary without some idea of a sufficiently contrasting realm to the cognitive? We will take up this issue, along with Bernard Williams,\(^{18}\) in section four of this chapter, and carry it a little further in chapter three. If there is nothing which stands to 'my community as my community stands to me', then there is nothing outside of 'our communities' beliefs' that explains our individual commitment to a vocabulary. Commitment will be a matter of 'being persuaded according to the norms of justification that are used by my culture'. Note that our practices of justification cannot themselves be held accountable to any higher source of authority. On this view, Justification is Authority, and there is no independent authority that we have available to evaluate and criticize our justification practices. The extreme historicist position, then, collapses the functions of Justification and Authority. There is no room for the idea of 'justified, but still not true' if we are to stay within the terms available in this account.

In Chapter Three it will be argued that justification is the proper


process of belief formation. Yet, as we know, a belief may be formed according to the proper process -- justified -- but still not true, not underwritten by Authority. Justification and Authority, it will be argued, must therefore be kept separate. We know of proper belief formation that its causal history may include other belief and other cognitive states as well as non-cognitive states. We also know that proper belief formation, or what is, I believe, called justification, is restricted to the first of the above historical materials: the proper formation of belief is by other beliefs. Note that the extreme historicist position, however, denies that there are two separate functions here at work. We will have reason to question whether collapsing these two functions will cohere with an account of pragmatism in section one of chapter three.

In this chapter, we will have an opportunity to see why Rorty is faced with a difficult choice between giving up his anti-metanarrative stance or accepting the problematic consequences of the extreme historicist position. In defense of Rorty, it will be argued that conceding a metanarrative, being a moderate rather than extreme historicist, will clear up many of the problems that Rorty's critics have advanced.\textsuperscript{19}

We have seen that both the Foundationalist/Enlightenment theorists and Rorty address the issue of what constitutes an account of proper commitment to beliefs. For the Foundationalist/Enlightenment, this issue is a matter of metaphysical authorities and epistemological questions of how to best represent

\textsuperscript{19} In particular, Bernard Williams.
those authorities. For Rorty, dropping such external, metaphysical authorities is necessary. It remains to be seen, however, whether the historicism that Rorty adopts is of the extreme or moderate varieties. If extreme, then the authority for proper commitment to beliefs will be found internal to historically situated agents and their practices. We know that Rorty rejects the Foundationalist/Enlightenment picture of proper commitment to beliefs, and now we need to inquire whether his account is based on either Extreme or moderate historicism.
Relativism, Cultural Solipsism and Putnam

Section Summary

Hilary Putnam raises a problem for the extreme historicist position. By drawing an analogy between extreme historicism and methodological solipsism, Putnam shows the difficulty of one culture speaking about another, except as a logical construction out of the resources of the host culture. This, we are reminded, is analogous to the predicament of the solipsist, who can only muster a logical construction of other persons from the resources of the first-person perspective. The upshot of this problem for the extreme historicist position is that it becomes inconsistent to say that truth is relative to vocabularies, since we are unable to give a robust enough account of different vocabularies without abandoning the premises of extreme historicism. This 'culturally solipsistic' consequence of eliminating any transcendent concepts gives Rorty, and us, reason to look to a moderate form of historicism if we are to be historicists. Rorty is faced with the Hobson's choice of giving up the elimination of metanarratives and accepting cultural solipsism or, (the better alternative) accepting an historicist translation of transcendent concepts as his metanarrative. As we will see later, only the second alternative allows Rorty to keep his idea of irony.

Putnam writes, "I shall develop my argument in analogy with a well-known argument against "methodological solipsism"."20. Methodological solipsism "holds that all of our talk can be reduced to talk about our experiences, and logical constructions out of our experiences"21. The problem, Putnam believes, is to keep methodological solipsism from becoming solipsism proper. For how

can the methodological solipsist claim that "you, dear reader, are the "I" of this construction when you preform it"\textsuperscript{22}? The extension of the perspective of methodological solipsism cannot be offered when we stay true to the methodology of solipsism. Solipsism "implies an enormous asymmetry between persons... My experiences are different from everyone else's (within the system) in they are what everything is constructed from. But this transcendental remark is all that is symmetrical"\textsuperscript{23}. The only 'you' that the methodological solipsist can understand is the 'you' in the transcendental sense of extending the method to everyone, but since everyone is a construction out of our first person experiences, the 'you' referred to is empirically unintelligible.

A symmetrical problem arises for the extreme historicist. Other cultures become constructions out of the host culture.

In general, if R.R. understands every utterance p that he uses as meaning "it is true by the norms of American culture that p", then he must understand his own hermeneutical utterances, the utterances that he uses to interpret others, the same way, no matter how many qualifiers of the "according to the norms of German culture" type or however many footnotes, glosses, commentaries of the cultural differences, or what ever, he accompanies them by. Other cultures become, so to speak, logical constructions out of the procedures and practices of American culture. If he now

\textsuperscript{22} H. Putnam, Ibid., p. 230.
\textsuperscript{23} H. Putnam, Ibid., p. 230.
attempts to add "the situation is reversed from the point of view of any other culture" ...the transcendental claim of a symmetrical situation cannot be understood if the relativist doctrine is right\textsuperscript{24}.

Through his analogy between the methodological solipsist and the cultural relativist, Putnam draws our attention to the inconsistency of a non-metanarrative-based historicism. Without the supplement of a transcendental concept, methodological solipsism makes other minds logical constructions out of our own experiences, which is equivalent to saying that other minds do not have independent existence. The transcendental claim that the perspective of cultural relativism extends to other cultures cannot be made when we stay true to the methodology of cultural relativism. The deep inconsistency in theoretical relativism is that the "transcendental claim of a symmetrical situation cannot be understood if the relativist doctrine is right"\textsuperscript{25}. The upshot of this problem for the extreme historicist is that it becomes inconsistent to say that truth is relative to vocabularies, since we are unable to explain what it is for other vocabularies to exist without abandoning the premises of extreme historicism. This inconsistency, a consequence of eliminating any transcendent concepts gives Rorty, and us, reason to look to a moderate form of historicism if we are to be historicists.

The analogy holds another surprise for the extreme historicist. Just as the methodological solipsist is led, by the demands of consistency.

\textsuperscript{24} H. Putnam, Ibid., p. 231-232.
\textsuperscript{25} H. Putnam, Ibid., p. 232.
into solipsism proper, the cultural relativist is led out of cultural relativism, by the demands of consistency, into cultural imperialism. One cannot make the transcendental claim that truth is relative to the norms of other cultures for members of other cultures if, for you, all truth is relative to the norms of your culture. So as consistent methodological solipsism is led into solipsism proper, the extreme historicist is led into Cultural Imperialism. Putnam's expression, 'Cultural Imperialism', is a little misleading. If the argument is right, and the very idea of independent cultures becomes problematic, then how could one culture colonize an 'other'; how could one be an imperialist? Imperialists, it would seem, must have something independent to take over, but if Putnam's argument is right, the independence of other cultures, if we are to take the consequences of extreme historicism seriously, has been eliminated. Instead of imperialism, we seem to have Cultural Solipsism.

So Putnam has shown that just as the methodological solipsist, in order to stay consistent, is led into solipsism proper, so too the cultural relativist is led into cultural imperialism: For if truth is just warranted assertability in terms of cultural norms, how can we do anything else but use our norms?

consistent cultural relativism becomes indistinguishable from realism... It is realist in that it accepts an objective difference between what is true and what is merely thought to be true... the argument turns on the fact that our culture, unlike totalitarian or theocratic cultures, does not have "norms" that decide philosophical questions... Consensus definitions of
reason do not work, because consensus among grownups presupposes reason rather than defining it.\textsuperscript{26}

The heart of Putnam's argument against extreme historicism is that the vocabulary used by members of a linguistic community, if it is to stay consistent, must always be recognized in terms falling within the host language, and since the non-host vocabularies can only be referred to quotationally in the host language, it cannot admit the independent existence of other vocabularies without denying a fundamental methodological assumption of the position: That is, there is nothing extra-vocabulary which makes\textsuperscript{27} sentences true. The irony of extreme historicism is that, if Putnam is right, it cannot stay relativist, it must become imperialist.

Rorty cannot escape from Cultural Solipsism by claiming that there are differences between how, say, cultures are 'carving up the world' through their different vocabularies: If Putnam is right, such a claim amounts to saying that the host culture finds that 'p is true' and that a mere construction out of the host culture, culture2 finds that 'not-p is true'. Notice how this comparison of the host culture and culture2 is performed within the host culture, and makes reference only to sentences within these groups generated exclusively from the host culture. Rorty must either accept metanarratives (which makes relativism possible but leads to the possibility of a scheme of commensuration) or give up a pluralism of vocabularies and accept

\textsuperscript{26} H. Putnam, ibid., p. 235.

\textsuperscript{27} Rorty allows that the world may 'cause' us to think that something is true, but the world cannot function as an authority for the truth of a belief. Here, the relation of causation is opaque.
Cultural Solipsism. Since 'the extra-vocabulary existence of p' or 'reality underwrites p and not-p is false', are either transcendent/metanarrative-based claims or simply reports on cultural acceptance, Rorty has to make the Hobson's choice between accepting a metanarrative (and being a moderate historicist) or giving up the idea that 'truth is relative to vocabularies' (and being an extreme historicist).

Cultures, subcultures, traditions, whether we are in a butcher shop or a chemical laboratory, will all make a difference to the truth or falsity of a particular sentence, and this is what Putnam calls the *immanence* of truth and rational acceptability. For Putnam, truth and rational acceptability are relative to, or immanent in, the language and the context, or tradition that we are in, but the complete reduction of these concepts to beliefs held at a particular time and place does not follow unless we deny that traditions can themselves be criticized\(^\text{28}\).

The moderate historicist admits that truth and rational acceptability always require historically conditioned circumstances, but what makes him a moderate (as opposed to extreme) historicists is that he also believes that through the criticism of cultures themselves based on metanarrative considerations, truth and rational acceptability *transcend* their context too.

[3] Cultural Solipsism

Section Summary
The defensibility of Cultural Solipsism is examined more closely. The transcendent, regulative\textsuperscript{29} function of reason is found resistant to a naturalization in terms of a closed, historically specific set of beliefs.

Since Rorty's position takes the elimination of metanarratives seriously, it is important to see if Cultural Solipsism is a tenable position to hold. Putnam argues that "it is a special kind of realism"\textsuperscript{30}. It is realist in that it accepts an objective difference between what is true and what is merely thought to be true... It is not a metaphysical or transcendental realism, in that truth cannot go beyond right assertability, as it does in metaphysical realism. But the notion of right assertability is fixed by "criteria" in a positivistic sense: something is rightly assertible only if the norms of the culture specify that it is; these norms are, as it were, an operational definition of right assertability, in this view.\textsuperscript{31}

Putnam says that the position does not hold up under examination and

\textsuperscript{29} Such concepts, like truth or reason, are transcendent insofar as they are not reducible to particular, historical communities. They are found to occur across these communities. These concepts are regulative insofar as they provide a means to criticize the practices of existing communities. Together, these features make committing the 'naturalistic fallacy' possible. One can say 'X is good', if X is approved by a given community, but if there are transcendent, regulative concepts available, one can always ask if the community is justified in thinking that 'X is good'.


\textsuperscript{31} H. Putnam, Ibid., p. 233.
the "argument turns on the fact that our culture, unlike totalitarian or theocratic cultures, does not have "norms" that decide philosophical questions". If we look to our culture as an example, it seems that 'p is true only if it is assertible according to the norms of our culture' is, given the norms of our culture, empirically false. It may be a necessary condition, if that, but for the norms of 'right assertability' in our actual, historical epoch, mere agreement is insufficient. So Putnam holds that Cultural Imperialism (or as we have reason to call it, Cultural Solipsism) is "contingently self-refuting". To reinforce his conclusion, Putnam adds that, given the vagueness and even the incoherence of existing cultural norms, they are not the sorts of standards that can be mechanically applied to issues raised by justification. "Our task... is to interpret them [the standards], to criticize them, to bring them and the ideals that inform them into reflective equilibrium." For Putnam, the openness, the transcendence, that informs our cultural norms cannot be reduced into particular, historically conditioned beliefs. The normative dimension of 'reasonable', 'good', and 'justified', cannot, without committing the 'naturalistic fallacy', be reduced to particular, historically conditioned beliefs. To say with the Cultural Solipsist, that 'Truth is whatever convinces my cultural peers', does not capture the normative transcendence of truth, for one can always ask, "What about when my cultural peers are wrong?" Putnam is not denying the

historicist claim that truth and falsity only make sense against an inherited background, but he wants to leave open the important condition that these backgrounds can themselves be criticized.
The Consequences of Being Anti-Metanarrative:

Williams and Commitment.

Section Summary
Putnam has shown that if Rorty is an extreme historicist, eliminating metanarratives and any extra-vocabularic authority, he is inconsistent to also hold that truth is relative to vocabularies. We turn now to problems that arise from Rorty's elimination of any extra-vocabularic authority. Bernard Williams' critique of Rorty is that there may be a pragmatic cost rather than, as we might expect, a gain, to holding an anti-metaphysical picture. In other words, if foundationalism works, then why replace it? Rorty cannot know that his position would work better, and therefore seems unable, on his own pragmatic grounds, to give any reason for replacing the Foundationalist/Enlightenment metaphysics with an extreme historicism.

Williams objection to Rorty's recommendation that we sever science from Enlightenment metaphysics may be seen in a rather different way, however. His claim could be that science's consciousness requires an authority which is itself totally non-vocabularic, completely outside the belief realm; an external authority. Without this duality between a scientific vocabulary and its object, science's consciousness will lack its main motivational concepts and will not 'work'. If science thinks of itself as not "working" on its external object but standing in only a blind, causal relation to what is outside it and that its true object, the real subject of its sentences and descriptions is some part of its (or an) already existent vocabulary, then science's motivation will necessarily collapse. Since Williams thinks that this motivation on the part of science (to think that its external object is essential to the scientific enterprise) he must also believe that when this present motivation of science is removed and replaced science, unnourished by its essential
motivation, will necessarily wither. But this bit of essentialism seems confused. Science's product is one thing; its final motivation another. This account of William's complaint thus makes Rorty's answer to him more clearly apparent: "They'll learn".

If science's product and its continuance may remain unharmed by its separation from the metaphysics of an external authority then Rorty is free to speculate about alternative authorities which are more productive in other areas of endeavour consistent with and without necessarily risking any loss in the usefulness of science.

This approach furthermore supplies Rorty with an answer to William's question of "if Enlightenment metaphysics works (for science) why should a pragmatist want to fix it?" The answer, as above, would be that a non-external authority works better. "Works better" is cashed out as the idea that such an authority is consistent with and more productive of self-creation. Where such an authority can serve both the private and the public realm, greater freedom in the private realm is possible, less danger to it would exist than from a public realm with an external authority and no danger to the scientific enterprise need result once scientists are disabused of a workable although unnecessary metaphysics.

But now the question attributable to Williams is further sharpened. It becomes: "Is the idea of an external authority essential for the function of all vocabularies?" That may be what Williams actually had in mind when he urged that an Enlightenment metaphysics was essential for science.

For Rorty's vocabulary, the existence of a world external to agents is a "platitude". For purposes of this essay we are therefore entitled to accept this without argument although it is worth noting that Rorty has not given us the world, the external, without motive. First he wants to eschew Idealism or eschew what Rorty might well call "vocabularism". So he accepts a world with selves and their actions which includes their vocabularies and everything they understand on one hand, and a 'something', a realm,
beyond that but still causally connected. It is a realm which causes our cognitions but which is not itself cognizable. Without allowing us to have an epistemic relation to this realm, it has become a pragmatic dangler, the 'thing-in-itself'. This realm is thus quite deliberately stripped by Rorty of any conceivable authority over cognition or vocabulary. And, we recall, Rorty's good reason for this is that what is itself outside the realm of our vocabulary, our beliefs, our cognitions, lacks therefore the very properties needed to be an authority for the realm of vocabulary.

But such a realm, totally external to vocabularies, either has to play a role in the scheme of things, or be eliminated on the pragmatic grounds Rorty himself accepts. The external realm is granted a causal role but is that really a role unless it is accompanied by the role of explananda? If one refuses to admit that "where a cause exists, a law may be written" or more in keeping with Rorty's terms, "where a cause exists a description of that cause as cause awaits (may be caused) - an explanation awaits" then that refusal leaves the causal role of the external world without a role or function. This refusal denies that we can make descriptive reference to the world as causes or explananda. A vocabulary with this restriction is a vocabulary without any terms of reference than other bits of vocabulary. In short a vocabularism/idealism. So Rorty must choose either this idealism or a real role for the external within vocabularies. In chapter three we will see that Rorty should choose the latter horn of this dilemma. Whether in choosing a real role within vocabulary for the idea of the external Rorty is opting for an external authority for vocabulary, we shall leave for later when further resources for this choice emerge. They are reasons which come out of the preservation of pragmatism and therefore actions and, generally, the difficulty of sustaining a pragmatic Idealism35.

35 See Chapter Three, section one, "The Metanarrative of Pragmatism". (If we are not caused by an External world and do not effect it can we hold onto the notion of action?)
Bernard Williams argues that Rorty's pragmatism should force him to accept an external authority, the world, at least as far as science is concerned. Williams thinks that the 'consciousness of science' is inseparable from the motivation that one is getting 'closer the way the world really is'. Why should Rorty, the arch-pragmatist, want to replace Enlightenment metaphysics if that picture of justification helps scientists preserve this motivation?

Williams' claim must be that there is an essential connection between the external authority of a world and scientific inquiry. Without a criterion such as Sellars' "better picturing" to provide a ground for comparison, we are left without a means to commensurate different vocabularies. Without a way to convince ourselves that our vocabulary is the 'best', our capacity to be committed to our chosen 'work' may be diminished. This is the pragmatic cost that Williams foresees:

[Rorty] naively treats his discourse as standing quite outside the general philosophical situation that he is describing. He thus neglects the question whether one could accept his account of the various intellectual activities, and still continue to practise them.37

The function of metaphysical external authorities has been to say or show how there is one right answer. Metaphysics caused one to be committed to beliefs. It is this causal feature which Williams believes

Rorty's picture lacks, and thus this lack explains why he thinks that "if Rorty's descriptions of what science really is are true, they are not going to be accepted into that consciousness without altering it in important ways-- almost certainly for the worse, so far as the progress of science is concerned"\textsuperscript{38}. That is, our commitment to the vocabulary of science cannot continue without diminishment if Rorty's account of commitment continues to eliminate the extra-vocabularic. Williams continues,

> It is not very realistic to suppose that we could long sustain much of a culture, or indeed keep away boredom, by playfully abusing the texts of writers who believed in an activity which we now know to be hopeless\textsuperscript{39}.

Williams refuses the invitation to rethink the role of philosophy, which in Rorty's terms becomes a form of cultural criticism, as the type of successor-subject that would enjoy enough commitment to be perpetuated. Even science, driven by the ideal of trying to get 'clearer about the nature of the world', or the 'extra-vocabularic, would suffer.

The sense that one is not locked in a world of books, that one is confronting 'the world', that the work is made hard or easy by what is actually there -- these are part of the driving force, the essential \textit{[emphasis mine]} consciousness of science; and even if Rorty's descriptions of what science really is are true, they are not going to be accepted into that consciousness without altering it in important ways -- almost certainly for

\textsuperscript{38} Bernard Williams, Ibid., p. 31.
\textsuperscript{39} Bernard Williams, Ibid., p. 33.
the worse, so far as the progress of science is concerned... a dreadful problem confronts the pragmatist: whether his ideas can be, in their own terms, 'true' at all. For the pragmatist to say that his formulations are true presumably means simply that they work out... the scientist's sentences keep them going -- and that, for the pragmatist, is all that can matter40.

Rorty is convinced that this self-image, cultivated through the Enlightenment heritage of metaphysical/foundational thinking, can be superceded. He envisages a poeticized culture where an individual "accepts chance as worthy of determining her fate"41. Rorty argues that we need to drop the idea that there is something extra-vocabularic which underwrites our acceptance of vocabularies. But Williams thinks that there is something "essential" about representationalism to the continuing pragmatic success of science.

As Jane Heal writes,

Williams' plausible claim is that a state of myself which I could knowingly and consciously produce at will could not be taken by me to be one in which I accurately represent an independent world; I can only do that by having my state determined by the world and not by myself. But since Rorty's view is that the idea of 'independent reality' on which Williams' argument trades is itself unfortunate and due for the philosophical chop, he is not going to be moved by these considerations42.

40 Bernard Williams, Ibid., p. 31.
42 J. Heal, "Pragmatism and Choosing to Believe", Reading Rorty, ed. A. Malachowski. Basil
Williams' claim must be that there is an essential connection between the external authority of a world and scientific inquiry. Yet it seems that one can separate the motivation that scientists actually have, as a contingent matter of fact, from the product of science. Williams needs an independent way to justify this example of 'essentialism'. Yet it seems unlikely that empirical grounds will be sufficient for him to do so. If there is no essential connection between the prime motivation for science and its product, then Rorty is safe, on pragmatic grounds, to speculate on and work with alternative authorities that are useful in other areas of endeavour, such as self-creation, without endangering the pragmatic success of science. On the other hand, Williams could argue that science's position vis-a-vis other parts of our vocabulary is so strong that what functions as authority for it will strongly tend to function as authority for other parts. This would result in the tendency to block the speculation in and experiment with other authorities Rorty recommends so long as science's product retains the powerful use it has for us.

If 'independent reality' requires that the world is intensional, and 'speaks' to us in the form of true propositions being 'underwritten' by the real properties of the world, then Rorty will reject independent reality. "The world does not speak. Only we do"43. How could one recognize the difference between hearing what the 'world' is saying, and 'speaking for it ourselves'? Rorty writes,

'I want to claim that "the world" is either the purely vacuous

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notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone: those planks in the boat which at the moment are not being moved about\textsuperscript{44}.

Suppose we begin with the idea that the 'world' is an external, purely extensional authority. This secularized, 'de-deified' view is a claim emblematic of Enlightenment metaphysics. Williams takes the 'consciousness of science', that is, the idea that science is really getting closer to the real nature of the world, as a necessary motivation in the explanation of the success of science. If Rorty's program eliminates the idea that science is justified in holding this self-image, then his elimination of representationalism is in direct conflict with his pragmatism, since changing the consciousness of scientists, Williams claims, will 'almost certainly' negatively affect science's pragmatic success.

Were Rorty to give pragmatic reasons for the elimination of representationalism, they would have to be of the form that the 'world', an external, purely extensional authority, has stifled scientific (self) creation, that the dragging anchor of such a metaphysics has left science further behind than it would otherwise have been. But it would take a Herculean scientist to be able to show this -- mere instances of slowness to change, for example, would not suffice.

"The world can, once we have programmed ourselves with a language, cause us to hold beliefs"\textsuperscript{45}. To need to believe that 'an

\textsuperscript{44} R. Rorty, "The World Well Lost", \textit{The Journal of Philosophy} 69, 1972, p. 663.

independent world' is 'grounding' one's beliefs is to accept a theory of justifying a belief that depends on the 'non-cognitive underwriting the cognitive', a connection to the extra-vocabularic. Williams thinks that without such a connection, commitment to a vocabulary will suffer. But Rorty has an available story here, too. The work is 'made hard or easy' by the blind impress. This does not commit one to believing that the blind impress becomes sighted.

Where the 'independence' of reality is construed to mean that there is a world that has a nature independent of our descriptions of it, Rorty rejects it, but when the 'independence' is construed as being a product of different descriptions that are possible, Rorty can accept it without modification of his position. An important thing to remember is that this causation is not intentional -- giving the world an independent role does not requires an independent metaphysical agency. To think that is to at least personify, if not deify the world; "something we ought to respect as well as cope with, something personlike in that it has a preferred description of itself." Yet to say this is not to rule out the possibility that working on the best vocabulary for describing that non-intentional set of causes may be 'hard or easy' because of those causes. In short, Rorty has a way of describing how our experience with the world appears to us, and his position only requires that he reject the idea of a world that privileges a vocabulary as the 'one that gets it right'. "Only if we have some such picture in mind, some picture of the universe as either itself a person or as created by a person, can we make sense of the idea that the

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world has an "intrinsic nature". The world should not, argues Rorty, be an authority that produces a scheme of commensuration for all vocabularies. As we will see in the section on Dewey in chapter three, an independent role for the world need not require a metaphysical conception. It can be seen as a set of constant functions with which our vocabularies interact.

Notice, however, when the 'world' plays a role in the evaluation of the effectiveness of different vocabularies in making our work 'easy or hard', the world is no longer is left as a nomological dangler. The external realm is granted a causal role, but is that really a role unless it is accompanied by the role of explanandum? And if the role of explaining of how vocabulary production is easy or hard is given to the world, does the world really remain stripped of authority for our vocabularies? If our vocabulary has more terms of reference than other possible vocabularies and that difference becomes the justification for preferring our vocabulary to an alternative, then it is no longer the case that the world functions only as a nomological dangler and the world will thereby have some authority for our vocabularies. If there is only a opaque causal relation available between us and the world, the world can play no pragmatic role. So Rorty either chooses a form of idealism or a real role for what is external to vocabularies. In chapter three, reasons will be offered for Rorty to choose the latter horn of this dilemma.

In short, the preservation of a non-idealist pragmatism requires holding onto the world as an authority for our vocabularies. This claim

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will be supported further in chapter three, section one. Can we hang on to the idea of pragmatism without retaining the concept of action - cognitively causing events and being cognitively effected by the world? If we are not caused by an external world and do not effect it can we hold onto the notion of action? Does not the idea of 'works' required at least two terms, some thing that is desired and some thing that satisfies that desire? Reasons for this way of characterizing the requirements of pragmatism will emerge later\textsuperscript{48}. But recasting Williams in this more general way points to a conflict between Rorty's pragmatism and 'vocabularism' that is based on a presupposition of pragmatism, what we will have reason to call the 'metanarrative of pragmatism', not just, as Williams offers, empirical propositions about the motivational states of scientists.

\textsuperscript{48} See Chapter Three "The Metanarrative of Pragmatism".
Section Summary

The world, truth, transcendent functions like reason, and normative ideals such as good, and 'works better', are translated by historicists into commitments held at a time and place.

This is a psychological, empirical analysis of these functions and ideals. When authority is taken to be translatable to commitment, there is an available analysis of how there can be a difference between "what is true" and "what is believed to be true by a particular individual". The former is "what my peers believe" or what is "believed by the community". However, since historicists reject an external authority for belief, this account of authority, (what beliefs that the community is committed to) is an Internal or intra-vocabulary, or cognitive authority. Such authorities can be strong authorities and when commitment to them is very strong, they are regarded as the 'only' authority -- if an authority is to have the properties of an authority, it must give the right answers, and thereby be singular or exclude other 'authorities -- this is why even Internal authorities can function like a "God-Concept". When the authority of the community is taken to be final, then the agent within this sort of community is led to see this community as the only authority. A deified Internal authority becomes cultural solipsism. So, it is an empirical possibility that the internal-to-belief authority of the "community" can be just as powerful as the authorities used by the Enlightenment. Getting rid of external authorities, such as the world, for beliefs does not rid us God-Concepts.

The Enlightenment and the onto-theological view of authority, saw the authority for belief as being the passive, extensional, representable world. When the agent is very strongly committed to this authority, it too leads to a deification of the world. This attitude expresses itself as realism and/or materialism, etc. While this view is
metaphysical, it need not be any more or less prone to
deification than the anti-metaphysical internal authority
position. So if the onto-theological view is rejected by Rorty
as a limit on the 'contingency of authority', in other words, as
a limit on self-creation, then the internal authority of the
community is not, by any form of conceptual entailment, an
improvement. Should the onto-theological be replaced by the
Cognitive-Theological?

When Rorty translates talk of the "world" into "a name for the
objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone -- "those planks in
the boat which at the moment are not being moved about"49 -- he is
giving an account of the world in terms of the commitments held by
members of a community at a particular time and place. Rorty's
remark that 'truth is a property of sentences' is, then, to be taken to
mean that it is now somewhere within vocabularies that the authority
for distinguishing true from false beliefs and/or utterances exists. In
the Enlightenment model, for example, authority was external to
agents and their beliefs. But if the extreme historicist position is right,
then authority can only come from other beliefs.

In the Enlightenment model the formation of beliefs through other
beliefs is the method of justification, but the process of justification
was always accountable to an external authority, usually the world.
Thus it was possible to see some beliefs as justified, but still not true,
that is, justified, but not underwritten by the external authority. On the
extreme historicist position Justification and Authority are collapsed.
There can be mistakes, such as when a particular agent is led to

believe something that is not held by the community as true, but here
the authority is internal to the realm of belief. There is no external
authority that stands to the communities' beliefs in the same way that
the community stands to the particular agent. Putnam marks this
difference by saying that true beliefs are only 'rightly assertible', but to
the extreme historicist, there is nothing beyond 'right assertability'. If
Rorty, as the pragmatist, sees no pragmatic difference between 'right
assertible' and 'true', then he is content to call rightly assertible
beliefs "true". There can, thereby, be a difference between what is
'intra-subjectively' [by the relevant community] thought to be true and
what the particular individual thinks to be true'. As Putnam puts it, the
Cultural Solipsist is a direct analogue of the "realist in that it accepts
an objective difference between what is true and what is merely
thought to be true"50.

If the community really does function as an authority then it must
have certain properties. It must be authoritative, that is, it must rule
on which beliefs are acceptable, and which are not. To perform that
function, it must rule in a way that allows agents to pass from the state
of entertaining the idea that a belief is true to the state of believing
that a belief is true. To perform that function, the community must
commit agents to their beliefs. If the community is to perform that
function, it must be seen as holding the right answer.

In light of the function of authority, then, there will be a strong
tendency of the community to exclude other authorities so that it can
be seen as the single true authority. If it is not seen as the single true

authority, then it is not functioning as the authority for belief, it does not explain how agents become committed to their beliefs. If the world is authoritative for our beliefs, then 'what the community believes' is authoritative because it is an index of beliefs that are found to be useful by large numbers of agents testing their beliefs on that external to belief realm. But if the extreme historicist is right, authority cannot be shared with this external realm, for to allow that explanation would put the authority in the world and the authority of the community could be explained in terms of the likelihood that 'what the community believes' mirrors that external authority. To allow this interpretation of the authoritative role of the community would place us in the old representational model and our historicism could only be moderate at best. So for the extreme historicist, the community must be the single source that produces commitment to beliefs. So, it is an empirical possibility that the internal authority of the community can be just as powerful as the authorities used by the Foundationalist/Enlightenment model. So getting rid of external authorities, such as the world, for beliefs does not rid us of God-Concepts. If the community is to function as an authority concept, then the fact that it is 'finite and contingent' cannot undermine its capacity to commit agents to their beliefs. If it can, then it is not functioning as an authority for those individuals.

Given this analysis of the properties of an authority, it is the case that if the community is to be the authority for belief, it must function in the way that that the extreme historicist has pictured it. It must
exclude other 'authorities' if it is to be authoritative. It must be, analogously to the "world" in "Enlightenment scientism", something 'God-like', ...which in turn was a survival of the religious need to have human projects underwritten by a non-human authority. If the community is to play the role that the "world" plays in "Enlightenment scientism", then it must have these 'deified', God-concept, properties. So even if we move authority from the world to an "internal-to-belief" realm, using 'what the community believes', we do not escape from 'God-concepts'. As a matter of empirical fact, there is a tendency for authorities to exclude other authorities, for that is how the function of authority operates. If so, then where is the pragmatic advantage (in terms of self-creation) for eliminating external authorities?

If we eliminate the external realm as the authority for belief, then, if the function of authority (committing agents to their beliefs) is to be sustained, there will be a strong empirical likelihood that the community will become Culturally Solipsistic (exclude other authorities).

A further difficulty of allowing the community to serve as the authority for belief will emerge in chapter three when we consider the terms that must be in a vocabulary rich enough to coherently describe pragmatism. Will an authority internal to agents and their beliefs be sufficiently contrasting to allows the idea of 'works' to be sustained?

We turn now to examining the role of the Contingency-belief in the psychology of the ironist to confirm that Rorty's ironist could not exist

in a Cultural Solipsist community. We will then be able to conclude that Rorty's position must be different from the position that Putnam ascribes to him. To keep the ironist in place, Rorty cannot be an extreme historicist, a Cultural Solipsist.
Using one of Rorty's contemporary influences, Donald Davidson, and Davidson's theory of action, we will turn to the issue of whether Rorty's ironist could exist in the Cultural Solipsistic community. Davidson distinguishes a state where agents are considering the desirability of an action from a further state where the agent decides that the desirable characteristics of an action are sufficient to act upon. This latter state requires an "all-out" judgement to the effect that "This action is desirable". This all-out judgement is a necessary condition for intentional action to occur. With this action theory machinery in hand, an account of Rorty's systematic irony can be given. There must be a tension that develops between commitment, and as Rorty says, the 'contingency of commitment'. For this tension to occur, there must be a robust account available of 'other vocabularies' and the ironist's attraction to these other vocabularies. This is something that the extreme historicist position cannot supply.

An action is ironic when it is an action that frustrates the agent's exercise of goal-functionality. This can happen in the ordinary sense of irony, or, as Rorty shows, systematically. Ordinary ironical acts may occur because we are in ignorance of the fact that the means we have chosen will actually produce the antithesis of the intended goal or ignorant of the fact that the goal we have chosen will itself be producing an antithesis of more powerful goals. Irony thus results not only in what was unintended or merely not desired but in what is disliked by the agent. When our goal-functionality is used so that it frustrates our goals we have ordinary irony. When, however, in the very formation of our intentions to act, our beliefs cause us to lose commitment to our goals (but we are nevertheless causing the events which are means to these 'goals'), we have used our goal-functional process to eliminate the function of goals. In this case of irony we get the antithesis of what we want, we get goal-
dysfunctionality. This is systematic irony and produces the 'ironic condition' which characterizes Rorty's ironist.

The member of a Cultural Solipsistic community sees the community as the single authority. The upshot of this view of authority for belief is that commitment is achieved, the 'all-out' judgement arrived at, without the need for a single authority that is external to agents and their practices. 'What the community believes' is the single, internal to agents and their practices, authority. This is why Putnam argues that it is 'indistinguishable from realism'. Because the authority for the Cultural Solipsist is the internal-to-belief community, there is no decommitment as a result of the absence of an external authority, and therefore, psychologically, there is no difference between the Cultural Solipsist or the representational realist in terms of being able to arrive at the 'hypothetical' judgement. So, the Cultural Solipsist fails to be ironic, since the Contingency belief has no effect on their commitment. If Rorty, in order to save the concept of the ironist, must accept some form of moderate historicism and reject extreme historicism, then we have very telling evidence that he must be a moderate historicist.

As an example of the function of the contingency belief, we will consider why Rorty thinks that, in our society, irony should be 'privatized'.

There is a reason why critics of Rorty have been perplexed about the type of historicism that Rorty holds. When we look to Rorty's picture of an 'ideal liberal society', we find that he divides it into ironist intellectuals and non-ironist non-intellectuals. These non-intellectuals have no doubts about their beliefs even though they see themselves as contingent through and through. They are socialized in such a way that the Contingency-belief does not cause them to have doubts. It seems, then, that Rorty pictures a society where the intellectuals are moderate historicists, and thereby have the necessary conditions for irony to obtain, and the non-intellectuals do not.
To help settle the issue of whether Rorty is a moderate or extreme historicist, we need to focus on the idea of irony. To understand the type of irony that Rorty has in mind, which is a systematic variation on standard intention formation, we must first look at some aspects of action theory, including intention formation.

Davidson writes,

Let us call judgements that actions are desirable in so far as they have a certain attribute, prima facie judgements. Prima facie judgements cannot be directly associated with actions for it is not reasonable to perform an action merely because it has a desirable characteristic. It is a reason for acting that the action is believed to have some desirable characteristic, but the fact that the action is performed represents a further judgement that desirable characteristic is enough to act on - that other considerations did not outweigh it. The judgement that corresponds to, or is perhaps identical with, the action cannot, therefore, be a prima facie judgement; it must express an all-out or unconditional judgement which, if we were to express it in words, would have the form like 'This action is desirable'.

Irony requires the recognition that there is a need for, and a lack of, an single authority that has the properties necessary to sustain commitment, or, to put it in Davidsonian terms, to make the 'all-out

judgement'. The Contingency-belief, that 'all could be other than what
is at present believed and one cannot dissolve these doubts', is the
product of this recognition. Following Davidson, we might describe
these cognitive states as lacking the 'all-out'\textsuperscript{53} judgement property. In
that event the intention which causes the action has not been as fully
rationalized as it might have been. The information which forms the
final intention requires a judgement which may be quite different from
judgements of earlier, less informed, states. Without that final all-out
judgement, according to Davidson, an intention is not formed. In that
case an action cannot have then occurred since an event is an action
for him if and only if there is at least one true description of that event
under which it was intentional\textsuperscript{54}.

If we are ironists, then even with respect to our 'final
vocabularies'\textsuperscript{55}, we are "keeping the seriousness of its finality while
letting itself express its own contingency... [our final vocabulary]
constantly dismantles itself and constantly takes itself seriously"\textsuperscript{56}.
For Rorty, this "meta-stable"\textsuperscript{57} state, the possibility of ineradicable
doubts or truly vacillating attitudes caused by the awareness of the
contingency of all commitments, is caused by the lack of a way to
further justify the terms in our final vocabularies and a feeling of
attraction to different, competing final vocabularies. He writes;

\textsuperscript{54} Donald Davidson, "Actions, Reasons and Causes" and "Agency", Essays on Actions and
\textsuperscript{55} Our final vocabularies, we recall, are fundamental motivational terms that comprise our
deepest commitments. Rorty gives examples such as 'God', 'England', etc. If we are called on to
justify our allegiance to such terms, Rorty notes that we can, at best, give only circular responses.
\textsuperscript{56} R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. 112.
\textsuperscript{57} R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. 73.
(1) she has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2) she realizes that argument phrased in present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve those doubts.\(^{58}\)

Condition two follows from Rorty's anti-metanarrative position: There is no scheme of commensuration that allows us to conclude that a vocabulary is the best.

there is no standpoint outside the particular and historically conditioned and temporary vocabulary we are presently using from which to judge this vocabulary... giving us the idea that intellectual or political progress is rational, in any sense of "rational" that is neutral between vocabularies.\(^{59}\)

speaking a language... is not a trait a man can lose while retaining the power of thought. So there is no chance that someone can take up a vantage point for comparing conceptual schemes by temporarily shedding his own.\(^{60}\)

The function of external-to-belief authorities like the 'world' has been to cause commitment to one's final vocabulary. The elimination of such external authorities leaves one without any resources to perform this function. Condition (3) repeats why this state of decommitment is ineluctable:


insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that she is touch with a power not herself. Ironists who are inclined to philosophize see the choice between vocabularies as made neither within a neutral and universal metavocabulary nor by an attempt to fight one's way past appearances to the real, but simply playing off the new against the old"61.

"Ironism, as I have defined it, results from awareness of the power of redescription"62. The main tool that ironists have available in this capacity is the Contingency-belief, the idea that our final vocabularies are the product of contingencies that could have been otherwise combined with the feeling of attraction to different, competing vocabularies. Given that our fundamental motivations can be traced back to these fundamental, motivational cognitive items, casting doubt upon their justifiability while at the same time holding that nothing can serve to dissolve those doubts creates the 'meta-stable' state of contemporaneous commitment and de-commitment.

The main exercise of the ironist's powers of redescription is directed at others.

The ironist tells them that the language they speak is up for grabs by her and her kind. There is something potentially very cruel about that claim. For the best way to cause people long-lasting pain is humiliate them by making the things that seem most important to them look futile, obsolete, and powerless.63

The focus of the powers of redescription can be set on the final vocabulary shared by members of a community, too.

The ironist takes the words which are fundamental to metaphysics, and in particular to the public rhetoric of the liberal democracies, as just another text, just another set of little human things... Her liberalism does not consist in her devotion to those particular words but in her ability to grasp the function of many different sets of words.64

When the focus is turned within, the power of redescription, (which can be liberating for those who are trying to shake themselves free from an inherited, 'blindly caused' set of fundamental motivants) now turns on the motivants that are the present springs of action.

When the all-out judgement has been made impossible because our fundamental goals themselves have been brought into doubt, we have the irony Rorty speaks of. If this 'all-out' judgement is a necessary condition of intentional action -- as Davidson puts it, "an assumption without which I would not have the intention"65 -- its lack guides us to explain the behaviour of the agent in terms other than intentional action. Without the all-out judgement in place something other than intention explains our behaviour- we quasi-act. For Davidson, behaviour is a (standard) intentional act only if there is an intention which includes the all-out judgement.

65 Donald Davidson, "Intending" Essays on Actions and Events, Oxford University Press, p. 100.
an intention is a judgement that an action of a certain sort is desirable... something I think I can do, and that I think I see my way clear to doing, a judgement that such an action is desirable not only for one or another reason but in light of all my reasons ... is an intention.\(^{66}\)

However, whenever an intention has a relation to the terms in our final vocabulary, the "assumption" which I would have if my act were standard, i.e. "This act is 'compatible with/required by' the fundamental motivations expressed in my final vocabulary", is missing for the ironist. If the agent "acts" anyway, the action proceeds without certain unities of the self that would obtain if that "assumption" did obtain.

To perform an action is, on my account, to hold that it is desirable to perform an action of a certain sort in the light of what one believes is and will be the case. But if one believes that no such action is possible, then there can be no judgement that such an action consistent with one's beliefs is desirable.\(^{67}\)

In short, Rorty's ironist cannot achieve the all-out judgement, at least with respect to actions that involve terms in our final vocabulary, because of the Contingency-belief. The ironist can never satisfy the conditions for the belief that this is the best thing to do here and now and still be ironical. The all-out judgement cannot be made.

When, in the very formation of our intentions to act, our beliefs cause us to lose commitment to our goals (but we are nevertheless

\(^{66}\) Donald Davidson, Ibid., p. 101.

\(^{67}\) Donald Davidson, Ibid., p. 100-101.
causing the events which are means to these 'goals'), we have used our
goal-functional process to diminish the function of goals. In this case
of irony we get the antithesis of what we want, we get goal-
dysfunctionality. This is systematic irony and produces the 'ironic
condition', or the 'meta-stability' which characterizes Rorty's
ironist. If 'ironic' agents are going ahead and behaving without the all-
out judgement in place, then the event caused is non-intentional and,
on Davidsonian grounds, thereby not an action. How should such
events be properly described? The description would have to wait
upon the diagnosis of the causation. If the causation occurred because
of the strength of one attitude or another, then the explanation of the
behaviour is perhaps a form of compulsion; cognitive causation that is
not controlled by beliefs. If no beliefs are immune from irony, then we
cannot "hold that it is desirable to perform an action of a certain sort
in the light of what one believes is and will be the case", in other
words we cannot make the all-out judgement, and therefore we quasi-
act. This, of course, is a serious problem for a pragmatist who is also
an ironist, and we will return to the problem in chapters three,
section four and the conclusion of chapter four.

For now, we recognize that Rorty is committed to keeping irony in
his view, and our present task is to show that he cannot manage to do
this and be an extreme historicist. Putnam is clearly right in
suggesting that the Cultural Solipsist can have an equal amount of
commitment to beliefs thought to be underwritten by the authority of
the community as the Realist can have to beliefs thought to be

69 Donald Davidson, Ibid., p. 100-101.
underwritten by an external authority. The reason for this is that if the community really is functioning as authority, then it has the property of giving the 'right answer'. To do this, it must exclude other authorities. The issue now becomes sharpened. If the Cultural Solipsist is as equally committed to their beliefs as are realists, then how could a Cultural Solipsist be an 'ironist'? Why would the 'contingency of their community' provide them with any reason to doubt 'what is believed by their peers'? This lack of a 'means to doubt' is, as we will see, problematic if Rorty really is a Cultural Solipsist. "Ironists have to have something to have doubts about, something from which to be alienated\textsuperscript{70}.

Either the Contingency-belief has a causal function, or it does not. If it does not, then Putnam would be right and Cultural Solipsism is Rorty's position. However, if the Contingency-belief does not have a function, then the possibility of the systematic irony that characterizes the ironist seems to be precluded.

Cultural Solipsism involves the elimination of 'true-belief-underwritten by an external authority' and the reduction of 'true belief' into 'historically specific standards of right assertibility according to the norms of the community'. This Cultural Solipsist's internal authority keeps commitment, and thereby truth, intact and allows members of the community to make the 'all-out' judgement and action proceeds normally.

The Contingency-belief has no function for the Cultural Solipsist. How can we understand 'the attraction of other vocabularies' when they must be constructions out of the host vocabulary? There are no

\textsuperscript{70} R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. 87-88.
extra-vocabularic grounds, such as a representable world, that allows us to cut across our historical, vocabularic uniqueness and find common ground. The Enlightenment's idea of Truth was only a moment in the history of the 'rightly assertible'. Further, if there are no common functions across vocabularies, there is no metanarrative available that transcends and commensurates the advantages and attractions of 'other vocabularies'. Without using an external authority, or transcendent functions across different vocabularies, how could we understand objections to 'what my peers believe'? Why, then, would the Cultural Solipsist have a reason to feel less committed to rightly assertible beliefs than Enlightenment community members to the Enlightenment's true beliefs?

The member of a Cultural Solipsistic community sees the community as the single authority. The upshot of this view of authority for belief is that commitment is achieved, the 'all-out' judgement arrived at, without the need of an authority that is external to agents and their practices. 'What the community believes' is the single, internal to agents and their practices, authority. This is why Putnam argues that it is 'indistinguishable from realism'. Even though the Cultural Solipsist does not believe in a form of metaphysical realism, there is no decommitment as a result of the absence of an external authority, and therefore, psychologically, there is no difference between the Cultural Solipsist or the representational realist in terms of being able to arrive at the 'all-out' judgement. So, although the Cultural Solipsist does not have a problem with being 'unable to make
the all-out judgement, the Cultural Solipsist fails to be ironic, since the Contingency-belief has no effect on their commitment. If Rorty, in order to save the concept of the ironist, must accept some form of moderate historicism and reject extreme historicism, then we have some very telling evidence that he must (should) be a moderate historicist.

If the Contingency-belief is responsible for producing irony, then the Contingency-belief must cause us to be decommitted to our final vocabularies. Yet if the paradigm of justification that Rorty brings along to succeed the Foundationalist/Enlightenment project is extreme historicism and thereby eliminates foundationalist aspirations, and replaces it with the authority of the historically conditioned, contingent settlements reached by the community, then a problem emerges. Why would we be in a state of irony because of the Contingency-belief? If it is true that no foundationalism can work, that is, there is nothing extra-vocabularic that can explain our commitment to a vocabulary, and that all that can serve as an authority for our beliefs is the contingent consensus of the community, then the Contingency-belief should have no impact on our commitment. To recall Davidson, the all-out judgement would be satisfied. Given the extreme historicist account of authority, the Contingency-belief would not function in a way that would de-commit the believer, since the Contingency-belief is presupposed in the extreme historicist picture.

Ironist theory, which uses the Contingency-belief in the service of the "realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being
redescribed" 71 can have a corrosive effect on those aspects of our lives that we do not want redescribed. For Rorty, liberal institutions are to be protected, and that is why, through his public/private split, he believes that Ironist theory "can be privatized, and thus prevented from being a threat to political liberalism" 72 It seems that the Contingency-belief is at odds with the type of commitment that Rorty has, and wishes to encourage, towards liberal institutions. ("Nothing is more important than the preservation of these liberal institutions" 73) Thus, there is a need to keep the Contingency-belief, and the Ironist theory that it produces, away from the public realm of liberal institutions.

"Progress", then, would be the creation of an ideal liberal society where individuals would not be socialized into a Enlightenment paradigm of justification and thereby would not be decommitted in virtue of the Contingency-belief: "[S]omeone 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 74.

The process of de-devinization 75... would, ideally, culminate

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75 Note that Rorty believes that getting rid of external authorities would have the property of eliminating 'god-concepts'. If the argument in the previous chapter is correct, the relation between internal authorities and god-concepts can contingently be as strong as the relationship between external authorities and god-concepts.
in our no longer being able to see any use for the notion that finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings might derive the meanings of their lives from anything except other finite, mortal, contingently existing human beings.76

There is a means available to explain why critics of Rorty have been perplexed about the type of historicism that Rorty holds. When we look to Rorty's picture of an 'ideal liberal society', we find that he divides it into liberal ironist intellectuals and non-ironist non-intellectuals. 'Commonsensically nominalist and historicist', these non-intellectuals have no doubts about their beliefs even though they see themselves as contingent through and through. They are socialized in such a way that the Contingency-belief does not cause them to have doubts. It seems, then, that Rorty pictures a society where the intellectuals are moderate historicists, and thereby have the necessary conditions for irony to obtain, and the non-intellectuals do not.

In the idea liberal society, the intellectuals would still be ironists, although the non-intellectuals would not. The latter would, however, be commonsensically nominalist and historicist. So they would see themselves as contingent through and through, without feeling any particular doubts about the contingencies they happened to be. They would not be bookish, nor would they look to literary critics as moral advisors. But they would be commonsensical nonmetaphysicians, in the way in which more and more people in the rich democracies have been commonsensical.

nontheists. They would feel no more need to answer the questions "Why are you a liberal? Why do you care about the humiliation of strangers?" than the average sixteenth-century Christian felt to answer the question "Why are you a Christian?"... Such a person would not need a justification for her sense of human solidarity, for she was not raised to play the language game in which one asks and gets justifications for that sort of belief.  

Given that 'we'78, as in those people who are not socialized in the 'ideal liberal state', have a use for the Enlightenment's idea of foundational beliefs, (to commit us to our vocabularies/To allow the all-out judgement to obtain) we need to ask the ask question that Rorty poses for himself: "Is the absence of metaphysics politically dangerous?"79. The answer, for Rorty, is that in our public rhetoric we must suppress the Contingency-belief, and the ironist paradigm of justification that it produces.

But even if I am right in thinking that a liberal culture whose public rhetoric is nominalist and historicist is both possible and desirable, I cannot go on to claim that there could or ought to be a culture whose public rhetoric is ironist. I cannot imagine a culture which socialized its youth in such a way as to make them continuously dubious about their own process of socialization. Irony seems inherently a private

78 Rorty agrees that our culture is still under the spell of the foundationalist aspirations of a metaphysical program: "our own familiar, and still metaphysical, liberal culture..." R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. 87.
matter. On my own definition, an ironist cannot get along without the contrast between the final vocabulary she inherited and the one she is trying to create for herself. Irony is, if not intrinsically resentful, at least reactive. Ironists have to have something to have doubts about, something from which to be alienated.\(^\text{80}\)

Towards this end of keeping ironism privatized, Rorty says that "we need to distinguish between redescriptions for private and for public purposes... my private purposes, and the part of my final vocabulary which is not relevant to my public actions, are none of your business"\(^\text{81}\). Implied by this protection of the private activity of redescriptions is a recognition that there should be limits to redescriptions in the public realm. We should not, Rorty prescribes, redescribe ourselves into letting the state take any further control over the private realm. In light of the possible effects that redescriptions can have on the institutions that Rorty has a commitment to maintaining, Rorty recognizes that the Contingency-belief, and the ironist theory that it supports, should be kept privatized. If the Contingency-belief did not de-commit, then these moves would be without pragmatic purpose. As Rorty is pragmatist, we have further evidence for the conclusion that he is a moderate historicist.

In summary, Rorty envisages creatures like us in the future except they are not socialized into requiring beliefs which share the function

of the Enlightenment's idea of foundational beliefs, that is, committing us to our vocabularies. These sorts of creatures would not be decommitted by the Contingency-belief. At present, we are the types of creatures who are decommitted by the Contingency-belief. For creatures like us, then, the Contingency-belief can be politically dangerous by de-committing us to our liberal institutions. Therefore Rorty suggests that a public/private split be invoked. With such a split in place, the Contingency-belief and the ironist state of decommitment is privatized. This allows, Rorty thinks, for the Contingency-belief to function beneficially in the pursuit of redescribing ourselves, in other words, the Contingency-belief can help us act on projects of self-creation. Importantly, it also protects public liberal institutions from the negative effects of a decommitted society.

Rorty is prescribing how the Contingency-belief will fit into an ideal society, and also prescribing how, for now, the operation of the Contingency-belief should be limited for the sake of the liberal institutions that he believes must be protected. Perhaps the Contingency-belief is necessary for the freedom to be a self-creator, but given the danger it poses for our current allegiance to liberal institutions, he proposes a provisional public/private split.

A critical question that emerges at this juncture is whether Rorty is entitled to say that he is "content to treat the demands of self-creation and human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable".82

82 R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. xv In conversation at UBC, March 1994, Rorty clarified this
when, at the same time, he denies that there is a metanarrative available to justify this public/private split. If he is an extreme historicist, where will he find the trans-public/private metanarrative he needs to justify the public/private split? If, on the other hand, we find a metanarrative betrayed within Rorty's views, then the justification of the public/private split may be secured by making reference to the requirements of the metanarrative. If the criterion of coherence is of value to Rorty, the acceptance of a metanarrative may be the most effective means available to him to justify this public/private split. Given that the split is important to his liberalism and his pragmatism, and that the resources required to produce a metanarrative would be available to him were he a moderate historicist, we have more evidence to believe that he should favour a moderate historicism.

Some beliefs, such as the belief in a common authority, function to get agents to become committed to other beliefs. The ironist is equipped to undermine the causal function of such beliefs by redescribing them in a way that they lose their causal function. In light of this property of ironists, it seems that they are not likely to share the belief in a community-based authority that is internal to agents and their beliefs. If this is so, then we have more evidence to suggest that Rorty does not hold the extreme historicist position. No ironist would be able to endure such an authority for very long without yielding to the temptation to redescribe such an authority.

comment by admitting that 'he should not have used the word 'incommensurable' at this juncture in his book.
Given that Rorty speaks as a member of the class of ironists, it is unlikely that he would hold a position where the entire realm of belief was not 'up for grabs'.

All any ironist can measure success against is the past - not by living up to it, but by redescribing it in his own terms, thereby becoming able to say, "Thus I willed it"... The generic task of the ironist is the one Coleridge recommended to the great and original poet: to create the taste by which he will be judged. But the judge the ironist has in mind is himself. He wants to be able to sum up his life in his own terms.

We can see, then, that to keep irony Rorty cannot be an extreme historicist. This culturally solipsistic position is not rich enough to give a robust account of other vocabularies, and thereby the de-commitment caused by attraction to other vocabularies, which is needed for irony, will not obtain.

The question which remains is whether the contingency-belief is now capable of allowing us to be ironical about all portions of vocabulary. If there is a metanarrative, then there may be some parts of our vocabulary that we cannot describe our way out of, and therefore cannot view with irony. I shall argue in chapter three, section four that what Rorty identifies as our "final" vocabulary does not contain the "last" words in our vocabulary. Once the metanarrative of vocabularies that are pragmatic enough for Rorty's purposes is articulated, there will exist a deeper layer in any sufficiently self-conscious vocabulary which is required for the very idea of describing. That layer will be

beyond the scope of irony.
A Pragmatic Translation of the Transcendent, Regulative Function of Reason

Section Summary

A moderate historicist position that can give an translation of the Enlightenment's idea of the transcendent, regulative function of reason is provided to offer a way for Rorty to meet the criticism of Putnam. This position, which eliminates the Enlightenment idea of ahistorical truth, leaves open the possibility of criticizing existing practices on the normative dimension of "works" and "works better". This pragmatic translation of the transcendent, regulative force of 'reason' in terms of a 'sociologized' account of vocabularies succeeding each other on the normative dimension of 'working better' will be offered to Rorty. Placing pragmatism at the centre of this metanarrative allows us to fill in a theory of 'proper commitment to beliefs' on Rorty's behalf. Such a theory clarifies what Rorty might mean when he claims to have superceded the metaphysical framework that has set the limits on traditional epistemological theories, or traditional theories of proper commitment to beliefs. The pragmatic ideals of 'working better' or 'more pragmatic' are examined as a means for explaining how different vocabularies succeed each other. While such an account seems to lead Rorty out of the problems raised by the Cultural Solipsism argument, and explains how different vocabularies may succeed each other and be judged, they do so at the cost of betraying a metanarrative. Such a betrayal reveals that a system of commensuration, a means of ranking different vocabularies on the same set of normative ideals, is possible within Rorty's vocabulary, despite his repudiation of such an idea. Although such a position is incompatible with

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84 Such concepts, like truth or reason, are transcendent insofar as they are not reducible to particular, historical communities. They are found to occur across these communities. These concepts are regulative insofar as they provide a means to criticize the practices of existing communities. Together, these features make committing the 'naturalistic fallacy' possible. One can say 'X is good', if X is approved by a given community, but if there are transcendent, regulative concepts available, one can always ask if the community is justified in thinking that 'X is good'.
Rorty's 'Anti-metanarrative stance', (it allows for the commensuration of different vocabularies and it gives rise to certain 'contingent necessities') the pragmatic gain, in light of the problems with 'Cultural Solipsism' is argued to be worth the cost.

Putnam writes

"But if all notions of rightness, both epistemic and (metaphysically) realist, are eliminated, then what are our statements but noise-makings? What are our thoughts but mere subvocalizations? The elimination of the normative is attempted mental suicide."85.

The Cultural Solipsist eliminates the normative, regulative, transcendent function of reason. "What my peers believe" is used as the means to give an account of 'proper commitment to a belief', but "What my peers believe" is not itself subject to evaluation by standards that stand to the community as "What my peers believe" stands to each particular individual. "It makes it impossible to think that there is something which stands to my community as my community stands to me"86.

Eliminating this transcendent, regulative function of reason insulates us within a Culturally Solipsistic predicament. 'What my


peers believe' serves as the historically specific authority for our beliefs. Without transcendent standards that allow us to meaningfully question these de facto beliefs, and without an authority for belief which is properly external to agents and their beliefs, the available accounts of 'truth' are restricted to terms and relations within particular, historically conditioned vocabularies their users. Thomas McCarthy treats Rorty as a Cultural Solipsist when he offers these counterconsiderations against a position that eliminates transcendent, unconditioned truth.

"Though never divorced from social practices of justification, from the rules and warrants of this or that culture, truth cannot be reduced to any particular set thereof. We can and typically do make contextually conditioned and fallible claims to unconditional truth (as I have just done); and it is this moment of unconditionality that opens us up to criticism from other points of view. Without that idealizing moment, there would be no foothold in our accepted beliefs and practices for the critical shocks to consensus that force us to expand our horizons and learn to see things in different ways. It is precisely this context-transcendent, "regulative" surplus of meaning in our notion of truth that keeps us from being locked into what we happen to agree on at any particular time and place, that opens us up to the alternative possibilities lodged in otherness and difference that have been so effectively invoked by post-structuralist thinkers"87.

This criticism, and Putnam’s, depend on the idea that Rorty must give an eliminative, rather than a translationist, account of the transcendent regulative function of reason. If Rorty translates the transcendent, regulative function of ‘reason’ in terms of ‘openness’, then he will betray a ‘metanarrative’, despite his repudiation of such an idea. A sociologized account of this ‘openness’ may actually be offered by Rorty, and anyhow seems available to him: The pragmatic goals of ‘working better’ or ‘more pragmatic’ can be a means for explaining how different vocabularies succeed each other. Rorty rejects the idea of vocabularies succeeding each other on the basis of their performance on an epistemological test, such as those suggested by the realist’s ‘ocular metaphor’ of better ‘mirroring’. To accept such a framework would involve countenancing an authority which is external to agents and their beliefs. However if we drop such criteria, there are still alternative grounds for explaining/justifying why some vocabularies succeed each other. Suppose, instead, we simply follow Rorty’s lead in his discussion of metaphysics and ‘natural kinds’ and say that different vocabularies succeed each other on the basis of strategies within or between various contingently existing practices.

More generally, all the traditional metaphysical distinctions can be given a respectable ironist sense by sociologizing them—treating them as distinctions between contingently existing sets of practices, or strategies employed within such practices, rather than between natural kinds.88

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Practices discard and adopt vocabularies based on their usefulness for such practices. A vocabulary is adopted because it works, is useful, it is discarded when a different vocabulary works better, is more useful.

Reading Rorty as a moderate historicist, one could argue that he has the resources to give a translation (rather than an elimination) of the functions that Rorty's 'warranted assertability' view, according to Putnam, precludes: Rorty writes

Sellars would interpret "warranted assertible in our conceptual framework but not true" as an implicit reference to another, perhaps not yet invented, conceptual framework in which the statement in question would not be warranted assertible.89

On this line of thinking, one could translate the function of 'reason' or 'unconditioned truth' by reminding oneself that truth 'according to one's cultural peers' is only true for a time, and the 'transcendent regulative' function of truth could be brought into the picture through the revisability of 'our truths' by making reference to a new set of truths on the horizon. However, unless we have some account of why these new sets are superseding old sets, we are unable to see whether Rorty has avoided Putnam's line of argument. Is Rorty really a moderate historicist?

Rorty agrees that there is a "certain kind of sociological fact that needs explanation -- the reliability of standard methods of scientific inquiry, or the utility of our language as an instrument for coping with the world"90. Realists take this sociological fact as evidence that we

are getting a better picture of the world, and if this option is taken, the world becomes the extra-vocabularic basis for choosing between vocabularies. This form of realism, is in direct conflict with Rorty's insistence on rejecting the impulse to "have human projects underwritten by a non-human authority"\textsuperscript{91}. Rorty prefers to 'sociologize' the explanation of why certain vocabularies enjoy more pragmatic success than others and believes that he, and other opponents of the realist explanation of this sociological fact will have "a story to tell about the causal effects upon our ancestors of the objects spoken of by our present theory. He too can describe how these objects helped to bring about justified but false descriptions of themselves, followed by equally justified, incompatible, and slightly better descriptions, and so on down to our present day"\textsuperscript{92}. This sociological account of how theories change and progress is rendered in intra-vocabularic terms: 'true sentences about the world' are ""the world" as known by that theory... the world as known to the science of the day"\textsuperscript{93}. In short, Rorty appears to be content to leave the world as a theoretical dangler\textsuperscript{94}, since there seems to be no means available to discover if our expression, say, "Molecules exist" really is true, that is, really refers to molecules in the world. The success of science, if it can be explained in both realist and anti-realist terms, does not give us, Rorty argues, sufficient reason to accept a realist explanation of

\textsuperscript{93} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 287.
\textsuperscript{94} This move, however, is problematic when seen against the backdrop of the requirements of pragmatism. See Chapter Three, "Pragmatism".
progress. For if one doubts that 'molecule' really refers to something extra-vocabularic, in the world, Rorty believes that there is little we can do to quell that doubt. We could try rewriting the history of science so that "even the most primitive of animists talk about, for example, the motion of molecules. We do not thereby assuage his fear that molecules may not exist, but then no discovery about how words relate to the world will do that". For Rorty, the sociological fact of scientific progress in predicting and controlling the 'world' does not require that we bring the world in, through an explanation of scientific progress as a better 'mirroring' or representation of the world.

The representational realist, or 'mirroring', position captures the transcendence of the regulative normative concept of reason/truth by interpreting the revision of theoretical machinery as part of the open-ended process of getting at 'the world', or reality. Rorty gets openness by predicting that the continuation of the history of science will be shaped by the same sorts of causal processes that produced the character of scientific inquiry up to the present. In other words, theories will be changed and modified in light of better theoretical machinery. The difference between the representational realist and Rorty's position turns on whether the self-image of the sciences should be seen as 'getting closer to reality' or 'building better, more pragmatic, tools for prediction and control'. Rorty will, of course, choose the latter. If "better" or "more pragmatic" stay in Rorty's picture, then openness, instead of the closed Cultural Solipsism, seems to be available to Rorty.

But if 'more pragmatic' or 'better' are ideals that explain how different vocabularies will succeed our present vocabularies, then a metanarrative, a means to rendering vocabularies commensurate, seems to be implied. "Sellars-Putnam-Rosenberg"\textsuperscript{96}, for example, have, through their different terminologies, a way to answer the question "What guarantees that our changing theories of the world are getting better rather than worse?"

All three want a Wittgensteinian meaning-as-use theory to handle what I have called the problem of "pure" philosophy of language, and a Tractarian picturing relation to handle epistemological problems\textsuperscript{97}

Rorty does not want to follow Sellars along this line. To do so would bring in a representational metanarrative which would allow us to commensurate language games. That is, the commensuration of different vocabularies would be possible through their performance on the criterion of their success at picturing an extra-vocabularic world. This would "have human projects underwritten by a non-human authority"\textsuperscript{98}. Although Rorty may concede a metanarrative, and be a moderate historicist, it is clear that he does not want to admit\textsuperscript{99} that the world can function as an external authority.

Rorty is not invoking a metanarrative based on something which is 'beyond time and change', but he is, from the resources of vocabularies

\textsuperscript{96} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 296.
\textsuperscript{97} R. Rorty, Ibid., p. 296.
\textsuperscript{98} R. Rorty, Op Cit., 1989, p. 52.
\textsuperscript{99} Against the idea that Pragmatism can be rendered properly without a robust conception of the world, see chapter three, section one.
themselves, betraying the ground of a metanarrative through the
trans-vocabularic concept of 'works' and 'works better'. In other
words, there is a 'story' [metanarrative] about how we evolve our
languages on pragmatic grounds. Rorty can escape the Cultural
Solipsist predicament, but only at the cost of betraying a
metanarrative.

Such a translation (usefulness instead of truth or reason) does not,
as Putnam would put it, "eliminate the normative", since usefulness
will be normatively charged, (that is, regulative) and transcendent,
(that is, not entirely reducible to a particular set of historical
practices). There will be a story available to say that usefulness is an
attribute of vocabularies that have been discarded, in vocabularies that
succeeded them, and in vocabularies yet to be discovered. This
account of how vocabularies succeed each other is historicist, since we
presuppose practices and participants in those practices, but not
Culturally Solipsistic (extreme historicist) since there are sufficient
terms and relations to give an account of other cultures/practices and
practitioners.

Such a sociologized account of openness, where vocabularies
succeed each other on the normative dimension of 'working better',
reveals that a system of commensuration\(^{100}\), a means of ranking

\(^{100}\) By 'commensurable' I mean able to be brought under a set of rules which will tell us how
rational agreement can be reached on what would settle the issue on every point where statements
seem to conflict. These rules tell us how to construct an ideal situation, in which all residual
disagreements will be seen to be "noncognitive" or merely verbal, or else merely temporary -
capable of being resolved by doing something further. What matters is that there should be
agreement about what would have to be done if a resolution were to be achieved. In the meantime
the interlocutors can agree to differ - being satisfied of each other's rationality the while.
different vocabularies on the dimension of whether they 'work' or 'work better', is possible within Rorty's pragmatism, despite his repudiation of commensuration.

On balance, Rorty has more to gain than lose from dropping his anti-metanarrative stance and using this pragmatic account of usefulness to translate the regulative, transcendent function of 'reason'. First, he will allow himself a form of moderate historicism that will extricate him from the difficulties raised by holding a position that is Culturally Solipsistic. He will be able to give an account of other cultures in terms of the common vocabulary functions that they share.

He will be able to avoid the problems that the extreme historicist position produces for his account of irony, too. Usefulness, this translation of the regulative, transcendent function performed in Enlightenment vocabularies by 'reason', makes conceptual space available to the idea of the 'all-out' judgement being satisfied and unsatisfied, and thereby makes the idea of irony possible. That is, an agent can come to believe that their beliefs are the 'best', given a pragmatic construal of this normative evaluation, and since one can also recognize other pragmatic vocabularies (and their attractions) one can also come to have the ironists' 'indissolvable doubts' about one's final vocabulary too.

In the beginning of the next chapter, an account of the properties a vocabulary must have if it is to be able to sustain an account of "works", that is, goal-functionality, will be offered. This account will show how

the presuppositions of pragmatism is rich enough basis to supply us with a defensible metanarrative. It is argued that such an account is necessary if vocabularies are to be seen as archic practices themselves.
Chapter Three: The Metanarrative of Pragmatism

1] The Metanarrative of Pragmatism; The Necessary Conditions for
Goal-Functionality

Section Summary

The presence of a syntactical metanarrative begins to emerge when the nature of certain necessities employed by Rorty are examined. Vocabularies with certain strengths, such as those desired by Rorty, will have to make use of certain syntactical features as well as certain semantical features. The question is raised whether any vocabulary (for which equivalent strengths are desired) must also share these features.

The undertaking here is to identify the fundamental principles of Rorty's position and to correct and expand that position according to those principles. Although I believe that those principles are shared by pragmatism generally, when I speak of pragmatists here, I refer to Rorty's position and leave the implications for pragmatism taken more generally to be argued for directly at another time. When choosing among alternative descriptions, pragmatists tell us to seek which description is "(more) useful" or "works (better)". This activity however cannot be described without assuming that a more basic idea, action, is already in place. Before we self-consciously establish "usefulness" and/or "works" as fundamental evaluative terms, we require a clearer understanding of the basic vocabulary required by any view, such as pragmatism, which separates actions from other events.

Acts are distinguishable from other events by their cognitive antecedents. The cognitive states which are required by any vocabulary that will be able to describe action, goal-functionality, or practicality, includes desires, beliefs and intentions and the processes of their formation. If pragmatists are interested in describing creatures who
describe themselves as we describe ourselves, they will also want to describe how rational and autonomous action are possible. Although I do not develop a comprehensive theory of agency, these cognitive states will be described in sufficient detail so that we can appreciate the underpinnings of a self-conscious pragmatism. I will claim that pragmatism cannot describe its way out of action or goal-functionality nor their cognitive antecedents. Rorty prizes self-creation, yet cannot hold this concept without making room for rationality and autonomy. These concepts must form a part of Rorty's considerable metanarrative, which we may label "the metanarrative of pragmatism".

Although Rorty is silent on the matters described in the pragmatic metanarrative, he cannot describe his way out of these contingent necessities without using these very concepts. How can he describe his way out of his presuppositions of description? If we have describers, we have agents, and if we have agents, we have goal-functionality, and if we cannot describe anything without having the features required for being a describer, we cannot, so long as we maintain the context for pragmatism, avoid the contingent necessities that form the pragmatic metanarrative.

Rorty's critique of the Enlightenment depends on blocking any attempts to fix the content or structure of the self. Rorty's stance on the self has a symmetry with Michael Sandel's recent critique of liberalism's use of the 'self'. Both interpret the quest for the self as a search for common substantive desires or beliefs, and thus for a common narrative. Both accounts overlook the structural or functional properties, the contingent necessities, those things that we cannot describe our way out of without using them at the same time.

We are now in a position to express a fundamental tension between Rorty's pragmatism and his critique of the Enlightenment project. If he wants to be a pragmatist, he needs to have the fully functioning terms to make goal-functional creatures describable within his vocabulary. If he wants to claim that everything can be redescribed, that he
can abandon the vocabulary that is necessary to frame the very idea of being pragmatic, then he must compromise his pragmatism. His anti-metanarrative stance, which was so useful in his critique of the Enlightenment, now threatens his own pragmatism.

For Rorty, the world is the cause of our cognitions without being itself cognizable. This is the "blind impress" of our cognitions. Nevertheless we are somehow capable of understanding that it is the cause of our cognitions. Apparently, then, the world is not entirely uncognizable by us. This causal relation between our vocabularies and the world plays no real role for Rorty. If we cannot describe the world then we cannot get explanation from the causal relations and causation. The world is left dangling without use. On the other hand, if we assume that the world is the cause of our cognitions, then that world must be describable as containing particulars, housed in some particularizing medium such as space and time and capable of change, and that can explain their effects. If Rorty accepts the world as the cause of our cognitions then he should embrace it altogether, epistemically as well as causally.

Once faced with the erosion of his attempt to block an epistemic relation to the world, Rorty has the option to drop the idea of a sufficiently contrasting realm to the cognitive. This could be attempted by claiming that the world is an Enlightenment leftover that he had overlooked, and the cognitive/non-cognitive distinction simply marks a distinction between different parts of our vocabularies. This reduction of the world into vocabularic terms alone -- the world is his vocabulary -- cannot be accomplished however without paying another price. In chapter two we saw that eliminating the world as an external authority for belief leads to cultural solipsism, and the idea of a vocabularic-relative rendering of truth becomes impossible, since we cannot escape the limits of our host vocabulary to give a sufficiently rich account of 'other' vocabularies. Letting go of a sufficiently rich contrast with his vocabulary lands Rorty in the 'cognitivist fallacy', a variation on Moore's naturalistic
fallacy. It is fallacious, as we saw with Putnam in chapter two, to deny that there is any rendering in which some beliefs are authoritative for others but for which there is in turn no non-belief authority.

With the metanarrative of pragmatism, presupposed by any account of practicality, we are able to frame another criticism that results from this attempt to describe actions and agents fully in terms of the functions of belief. Only by putting agents back into a world, which is a sufficiently contrasting realm to the cognitive, can these problems be overcome.

When Rorty makes his case for the contingency or the entirely historical nature of vocabularies, the examples are all on the semantic side. One vocabulary may contain "King and Country" as 'final' or most deeply committing terms, another, "friends and family". As well as these final terms, vocabularies contain semantic constructs in which the meaning of a set of terms are bound together within a single term by rules of "conversational implicature". These constructs give us useful packages of information in an efficient form. Paul Grice gives us an example of such a construction with,

(1) "Smith has left off beating his wife", where what is implied is that Smith has been beating his wife....

The first example is a stock case of what is sometimes called "presupposition" and it is often held that here the truth of what is implied is a necessary condition of the original statements being either true or false\(^1\).
This utterance implies that Smith has been beating his wife and that this implication can be neither detached nor cancelled from any other variation on this sentence without failing to express what the sentence says. An attempt to detach the implication such as "Smith has left off beating his wife but I do not mean to imply that he has been beating her" is "unintelligible". Such pragmatically inert sentences cannot attract the interest of a practical creature, and vocabularies which license their production cannot attract the commitment of creatures like us.

Some information comes in packages in which smaller units are bound together by rules of inference. Rorty's vocabulary, as we shall see, clearly contains just such packages, a salient example of which is the connection between action and pragmatism. Just as the beater cannot have left off beating his wife without having started, an event cannot be an action without an intention as its cause.

These packages of information, so obviously useful, presuppose rules of inference for their packaging. In the examples before us it is the rules of conjunction and/or implication which provide the packaging. Rorty, however, pretty well ignores both the uses of our rules of inference and the important question of their contingency, of whether a vocabulary would function either without our rules of inference, or even granting their historical nature, without any at all.

2 H.P. Grice, Ibid., p. 446.
3 H.P. Grice, Ibid., pp. 446-447.
We may think of rules of inference as part of the syntax of a vocabulary and its function as licensing or prohibiting the movement of information from what in our vocabulary we describe as premise to conclusion. Some theory of this sort about inference must be held by thoroughgoing pragmatists since they see "usefulness" explanatory. But if this is the sort of role inference fills, then a language without this aspect of syntax would be (inferentially) inert. Although the users of that vocabulary might be moved to and from beliefs, as we move inferentially in ours, that movement would be caused by non-cognitive or 'blind' factors. The users of that vocabulary would not be "reasoners" but only "holders" of beliefs. This means that if a vocabulary is to have the uses of inference -- not necessarily our particular, perhaps historically produced rules of inference -- it must nevertheless have rules which perform a certain 'movement-of-information' function accomplished by (our) rules of inference. That function is, at the least, to allow our beliefs to cause others according to certain rules which if followed do not effect the goal-functionality of the derived belief(s). Rorty then might admit that if this crucial set of uses is to be maintained in any vocabulary, it must have within it the device which allows their achievement.

Rorty misses this point -- as revealed by his acceptance of W. Quine on necessity and presumably inference. "Thus for Quine, a necessary [or inferential] truth is just a statement that nobody has given us any interesting alternatives which would lead us to question it"5. Quine's

account makes the necessity of a statement contingent upon it never being brought into question by an 'interesting alternative'. For Rorty, as we can surmise from his other views, for some description to be "interesting" is for that description to attract commitment.\(^6\) In short, necessity is relative to interests. However, no pragmatist can lose certain necessities, or find some dependencies no longer interesting, without losing his interest in "usefulness", "works", in short, without losing his interest in pragmatism. Pragmatists who wish to keep "works" and "usefulness" in their vocabularies are interested in those events named "actions" which are describable as having agency as their cause. As long as Rorty continues to find pragmatism interesting, he will also be committed to find interesting the terms, which will be set out below, needed to describe action.\(^7\) This set of related terms will constitute the metanarrative of pragmatism. It is, of course, only contingent that Rorty finds pragmatism and its constitutive vocabulary interesting, and therefore it is only contingent

\(^6\) It is on that basis, after all, that it can be predicted that Rorty will become committed to the metanarrative of pragmatism, since pragmatists are 'interested' in pragmatism, and they will, if they wish to be coherent in their commitment, interested in what is means to that goal. The means to that goal will, as we will find below, include a commitment to including in their vocabulary the terms needed to describe a goal-functional agent, a creature capable of practicability.

\(^7\) When I claim that there are certain things a pragmatist such as Rorty cannot describe his way out of, it may occur to some to ask whether that limitation on description may not be generalized to include any position. If the generalization actually held so that no position could describe their way out of those same things which a pragmatist such as Rorty could not, the asymmetrical status of that pragmatism would thereby be portrayed, echoing the claim that theirs embraces all positions. While I cannot pursue this argument without showing that all positions have some account of "works", and therefore all of the vocabularic dependencies required to explain that idea, I believe (but postpone trying to prove) that such an argument could be made.
that these relations and terms will be necessary for Rorty. What is linked by necessity may be relative to vocabulary users' interests historically. Necessity itself, however, the existence of that function is relative to interests of vocabulary users *qua* vocabulary users and not their particular historical differences. However for pragmatists, those who are interested in "works" and "usefulness", these terms and relations needed to describe action are required if we wish to keep an interest in pragmatism. Our interests may shift away from action to matters concerning how, say, the wind produces certain effects. If this happens, then we will no longer need to maintain the necessary connection between agency and action. But then we would no longer be such pragmatists. More importantly, for our purposes, we would have not eliminated necessity. The only way to do that is to rid vocabularies of rules of inference, a vital function to goal-functional creatures and therefore to vocabularies as useful to action. This suggests that there is a rather large syntactical metanarrative about vocabularies which Rorty must recognize but has ignored.

I turn now however to the more interesting question, and one which Rorty takes on directly, of whether he must admit a semantic metanarrative. My claim will be that Rorty's pragmatism is a construction of a set of items which includes events, causation, intentions, beliefs, desires, success and failures of actions, a world and more, all bound together by rules of inference -- a package with interdependencies. Moreover, I shall argue that for Rorty these items are not merely the content of his "final vocabulary" but must on his view be in the final vocabulary of any vocabulary capable of describing
practical creatures. Rorty is committed to a metanarrative of all narratives.

In placing "works" at the bottom of his explanatory machinery, Rorty may be seen as showing a commitment to an idea which "works" presupposes -- action. Can there be a pragmatism that does not retain the terms for a concept of action? Is it possible to be a pragmatist, to be practical, to be developing better tools, without cognitively causing events and being cognitively effected by the world?

The idea of "Usefulness" has two aspects. First, there is the historical interpretation that a particular culture may give it. This culture finds Euthanasia useful, another culture does not. Second and more important to our enterprise is the structural account of usefulness, which more than one culture/vocabulary may share, when the idea of usefulness is subtracted from the particular historical content, let us say, in which it may have developed. This decontentified (or as Rorty might put it, "thin") idea of usefulness is important here because that is where a narrative to which Rorty, if not all, pragmatists must be committed: The metanarrative of pragmatism.

The uses of words are actions, and "vocabularies", a term of art used by Rorty and others, are collections of rules for the uses of words: rules for actions. It is always useful in understanding an action to make use of the description which is in terms of the intention that was its

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8 There may be some idealist versions of pragmatism that may not share the entire metanarrative that Rorty, who eschews idealism (or at least wishes to keep the world in his vocabulary) is committed to holding. A critique of an idealist version of pragmatism is offered below.
cause. Vocabularies are important because of the importance we attach to their causes and the sorts of effects those causes can have. The same is true for actions which are not the uses of words. Let us look, then, at this set of descriptions which would put actions and therefore pragmatism at the centre of vocabularies.

Pragmatists who wish to keep "usefulness and "works" in their vocabularies assume agents and their actions and thus a theory of intention formation. The latter is needed in order for actions to be differentiated from those events which are not caused by intentional states and thus will not be attributable to our desires, beliefs and intentions nor relatable to the topics of responsibility, blame and other moral discourse.

These intentional states themselves have a structure and function which accommodate the process involved in their formation. Ideally, the structure of an intention contains sufficient information about, or the descriptions of, the event the agent will/may (ceteris paribus) cause. This information is put in terms of the means chosen

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to the goal intended. And practical reasoning is the name of the process by which this identifying description is concatenated as "information" in the intentional state. It is not controversial that intentions are such states of agency\textsuperscript{10} nor that these states are at least sometimes formed by a cognitive process which determines the information which is accepted by the cognitive state which can be sufficient for action. Chief among the elements of this process is belief. And we may think of this element as an information receiver and passer-on. Nothing sinister for anti-representationalists lies hidden in this idea of information\textsuperscript{11}. Apart from this informational function, practical systems such as we (could there be agents which did not have these functions?) have a function which can take up and pass on information not only to other informational or cognitive states but to non-cognitive states as well. Without this last aspect, agents could not act on the world in just those ways which through the intended means cause the intended goal.

In short, then, we have the function which beliefs perform and that which intentions and/or desires perform.

It is possible that intentions may be caused by a process other than

\textsuperscript{10} Only those who would eliminate the vocabulary of agents and actions altogether would quarrel with the relevant parts of what agency theory entails for pragmatism. But even they retain the functions if not the full vocabulary of pragmatism; to go further would also eliminate pragmatism.

\textsuperscript{11} Yet. Perhaps this is still too ominous. If representationalism must be taken to imply that there is a world that has a discoverable essence that is passively represented by 'knowers', then nothing contained in this thesis has anything to trouble anti-representationalists. However, it will be argued that a world that is sufficiently in contrast to the mental must be something with independent, functionally describable properties. This Deweyan view of the world (see the section on Dewey in chapter three) need not trouble anti-metaphysical pragmatists.
practical reason. They could be, as it were, "parachuted" into us directly as the effects of Rorty's "blind impress". Such a system would still be practical since it would cause an event which is intended to be a means to its goal; but it would not be rational. With a "parachuted" intention, reasons, or relevant beliefs, for the formation of the intentional state do not exist. What exists as antecedent for the "parachuted" case is a "blind", non-cognitive "impress". Where reasons operate, however, relevant beliefs about how to be goal-functional and other cognitive states were at work and a system which so forms its intention is accordingly rational as well as practical\(^\text{12}\).

Not just any information, any beliefs, may be used and the system still be rational. Clearly, the system cannot be thought practical unless it embodies the syntax of means and goals and other functions in virtue of which it is goal-functional. Practicality just is goal-functionality. If agents are successful at cognitively causing the events which will satisfy their goals, then they are goal-functional. Similarly, then, the information which beliefs must pass on in order to qualify as rational must be information which one is justified in believing to be goal-functional. The idea that goal-functionality, or practicality, is authoritative with respect to beliefs -- is what determines their truth and therefore is the goal of Reason -- is one of the main insights of pragmatism. As Dewey put it, "Knowledge is power to transform the world"\(^\text{13}\). What beliefs contribute to goal-functionality is of course

\(^{12}\)There is no need, of course to believe that these descriptions, "rational", "practical", etc., are not perfectly naturalizable. See, for example, P.G. Campbell, *Rational and Irrational Agency*, Ph.D. Thesis, UBC, 1994.

limited to the function which belief can supply. The ideal of that function is named rationality and is achieved in action when beliefs, or information passing, is goal-functional. Since it cannot be known prior to the act whether the reasoning will be actually goal-functional, the ideal for reason in intention formation is to proceed in accordance with beliefs (tried) about goal-functionality, i.e. with justified beliefs. In that case the process is rational.

A vocabulary which places at its centre the conception of an agent which can realize its goals, i.e., can act (cause) successfully on its intentions; identify the event(s) it will cause in order to realize those goals, i.e., have beliefs about means which can (in)form its intentions; form its own beliefs, as well as have them; form goals, as well as have them, is a vocabulary that places at its centre a creature that is consistent with the way that we describe ourselves -- a goal-functional system; an agent.

If such an agent may, in addition to merely having the belief function of information transfer, form its own beliefs guided only by the requirement that it be goal-functional it will not only be capable of means-end rationality, (which although still practical is limited by its pre-existing goals), but will also be capable an epistemic openness. If that agent can, in addition to merely having goals, form them by the use of beliefs such as these, it will, with the other features sketched above, not only be capable of goal-functionality, but of autonomy of belief and desire.

We, however, do not for our purpose, need a full-blown or detailed theory of agency and action\textsuperscript{14}. Our purpose is to show that Rorty's

pragmatism, despite Rorty's silence on the matter, must sit on the complex underpinnings of agency and action. Rorty's pragmatism cannot describe its way out of the idea of goal-functionality and agency without thereby describing its way out of an interest in what it is to be practical. And no pragmatism which prizes freedom and self-creation can describe its way out of rationality and autonomy—those particular processes of goal and intention formation founded on belief. Rorty cannot escape these concepts—they constitute his considerable metanarrative. Furthermore, part of that metanarrative is obviously a theory of the core self, the contingent necessities of what we are if we are able to describe ourselves as goal-functional creatures.

A clarification of what is meant by an "account of the self" is in order. Michael Sandel's criticism of Rawlsian political morality, for example, takes the idea of an "unencumbered self" as conceptually incoherent. His argument for this conclusion depends on an equivocation between personal identity and 'the self itself'. Starting with the Kantian conception of the self, which Sandel sees reappearing with slight alterations as the ground of Rawls' normative enterprise, he writes

No empirical end, but rather a subject of ends, namely a rational being himself, must be made the grounds for all maxims of action...what is important to see is that the "we" who do the willing are not "we" qua particular persons...but we qua participants in what Kant calls "pure practical reason", "we" qua
participants in a transcendental subject\textsuperscript{15}

This is the Kantian metanarrative of the self. However, Sandel then slips into claiming that this concept of the self cannot be rendered compatible with our particular experience of ourselves as individuals with an identity.

...Can we view ourselves as independent selves, independent in the sense that our identity is never tied to our aims and attachments? I do not think that we can, at least without cost to those loyalties and convictions whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons that we are— as members of this family or community or nation or people, as bearers of that history, as citizens of this republic....\textsuperscript{16}

Sandel's equivocation on whether the issue is an account of the 'self itself' or an account of what it is to be a particular self leads him to reject the Kantian idea of "...a self understood as prior to and independent of purposes and ends..."\textsuperscript{17}. But if we are aiming for a metanarrative of the self, we cannot expect it to include those features that make us the particular individuals that we are. The contingencies that give us a particular identity will be "...aims and interests I may have at any moment..."\textsuperscript{18} and the contingencies that produced those aims and interests. The metanarrative of the self is not the narrative of "...the particular persons that we are..."\textsuperscript{19}. The metanarrative of the


\textsuperscript{16} Michael Sandel, Ibid., p. 86.

\textsuperscript{17} Michael Sandel, Ibid., p. 86.

\textsuperscript{18} Michael Sandel, Ibid., p. 86.

\textsuperscript{19} Michael Sandel, Ibid., p. 86.
self is an account of that without which each of us could not be the types of creatures that we are.

In another context, Rorty labels Sandel "...an acute contemporary critic of the liberal tradition..."20. Does he come to this judgement by overlooking this equivocation in Sandel's critique? Does Rorty make the same equivocation? In paraphrasing the argument of 'philosophers' as opposed to poets, Rorty writes: "...The mistake of poets is to waste words on idiosyncrasies, on contingencies - to tell us about accidental appearance rather than essential reality... Only poets, Nietzsche suspected, can truly appreciate contingency. The rest of us are doomed to remain philosophers, to insist that there is ...one true description of the human situation, one universal context of our lives..."21. Here the equivocation emerges. It is unnecessarily disjunctive to believe that the appreciation of the metanarrative of pragmatic creatures blinds one to the narrative of the lives of particular goal-functional creatures. Appreciation of the metanarrative may actually enhance our ability to see narrative possibilities more comprehensively.

The above was meant to show that for Rorty's pragmatic vocabulary there is, as a contingent necessity, a conception of the self which cannot be abandoned without abandoning pragmatism. If words and descriptions are deeds then there must be a way the self is in order for words to be deeds. If describing 'is' a a proper doing, is goal-functional, then agency, belief and intention formation are presupposed and no acts of describing can describe their way out of

them. (Although we could be, as Rorty is, silent on the matter.)

All vocabularies re consistent with Rorty's pragmatism, whatever differences they may have, and whether or not they harbour the conception of goal-functional systems and their actions self-consciously, will be unable to reject those notions, indeed will be primed to accept it as the uses of vocabularies are considered actions and the users, agents. When the time comes in which the uses of vocabularies are considered events without that certain difference in their etiology, none of the questions raised by Rorty or other pragmatists of the sort that he is will even be phraseable.

We now have a self which will persist through time, no matter what else history may bring, so long as there is description and/or vocabularies. But now there is also for that time the idea of a world in our vocabularies.

**The World Embraced (Not Lost)**

If actions are to be more than descriptions, then Rorty has the idea of a world in his vocabulary. It is the idea of a realm that has a sufficiently rich contrast with cognitive states. Rorty says his world is related by causation to our cognitive states and therefore to the vocabularies they cause. But this world does not have, we might say, an epistemic relation to the cognitive realm. The world cannot be "recognized" for Rorty. Thus it cannot be the function of our beliefs to give us information about this world. That would be a mirroring, a representational function for beliefs - and the world would thus be authoritative for at least some beliefs. Their truth would consist in the provision of information about that world. Truth for Rorty does not,

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22 An expression used by Rorty in conversation, March 1994, at UBC, to indicate his opposition to representationalism of any sort.
however, reside in the world. The representational function for belief is to be eschewed; the world does not figure dominantly in the belief/knowledge relation; knowledge.belief is not about anything. The world, however, is a causal factor, the blind impress of our beliefs.

Now this is a Draconian position. In his attempts to keep the world from having any role in the determination of the truth of beliefs Rorty must limit the relationship between them severely. Rorty insists that there is no way in which we may say "The world is..."; it cannot be described. Nevertheless he wants to hold there is a world with causal relations to vocabularies (through our cognitive states). This admission, however, (to call it a description would be too quick) gives us access immediately to certain descriptions of the world. It must be a realm of particulars, housed in a way that makes particularity possible and capable of change, similar in those respects to the cognitive states it may cause and be effected by. Further, it allows us more articulated descriptions of these world particulars in terms of the cognitive effects they are believed by Rorty to cause. If I believe that $p$, then the world had an item in it of which it may be said that it caused and therefore had the properties which explain the causation. But these descriptions will arise only if one allows causation between the world and our cognitions and an actual role for causation such as a basis for explanation. A parsimonious pragmatist who allows for concepts and constructs only if they have some usefulness or "workability" would involve causation only if it had such a use. But such a use can only arise if it is relatable/manifestible in some description other than the bold claim that causation between the two realms is the case. Otherwise that description has no connection and has no use. Neither then would the world, as a term in that useless relation, have
a use.

If, then, Rorty wants the idea of a world in his vocabulary -- the idea of something other than his vocabulary -- he must embrace it and provide it with a use. That use will at least be as explanans and explanandum depending on which direction the causal relation runs. Otherwise he has a pragmatic dangler on his hands.

To allow the world, something independent, constant in function and sufficiently contrasting our cognitive states need not require us to lapse back into an Enlightenment-styled representational realism. Anti-metaphysicians, like Dewey\textsuperscript{23}, had a view of the world that met those conditions. However, we will turn now to see what is in store for Rorty if he decides to drop the world altogether.

The world eschewed

This argument is driving the point that if Rorty lets the world in an inch (i.e. through causation), then he lets it in a mile (i.e. lets it function explanatorily so that it is of some pragmatic use). In recognition of this Rorty could let go entirely of this idea of two equally contrasting fundamental terms within his vocabulary admitting that it was an Enlightenment leftover which he had missed. Or he could claim that the idea of the world is not one of an extra-cognitive or extra-vocabularic realm; rather it marks a distinction entirely within his vocabulary and makes its reference entirely within the terms of that vocabulary. The first alternative simply drops the word "world" from his vocabulary and ultimately becomes a variant on the second.

The second alternative would land Rorty with a cognitivist (or

\textsuperscript{23} See the next section of this chapter.
idealistic) picture. "To be is to be cognized", or barbarically, *vocabularized*. Everything in the realm of discourse is reducible to belief and/or vocabularies.

There are problems with this position for Rorty if he wants to retain certain other parts of his discourse. We saw in chapter two that if all terms belonging to a vocabulary are explicable and justifiable entirely in terms of that vocabulary -- if, that is, the vocabulary is its own authority -- then cultural or vocabulary solipsism follows. One cannot speak of other vocabularies in a sense which provides an equally rich contrast with one's own. The idea of 'other vocabularies' comes down to merely descriptions within the host vocabulary. The idea that truth is relative to vocabularies is not then describable, except in this insufficiently rich sense. It seems that Rorty cannot hold in place his cognitivism and vocabulary-relative view of truth if he lets the idea of a sufficiently rich contrast with the cognitive go.

A less striking problem is that Rorty cannot claim that the idea actually expressed by the word "world" can be translated within the terms available in his cognitive-based vocabulary. On the alternative before us, Rorty would claim that "the world" may be the authority for our beliefs (vocabularies) but that "the world is belief". True beliefs (vocabularies) would be those which were sanctioned by others - the authoritative ones. As Putnam saw, this is a version of Moore's naturalistic fallacy, what we might call the cognitivist fallacy. It is fallacious to deny that there is any rendering in which certain beliefs are authoritative for others but for which there is in turn no authority. Rorty, as we saw in chapter two, could, as a cognitivist, accept that the idea of the world is not the idea in common use. He could claim the commonly used idea is an Enlightenment, metaphysical remnant in
which the contingency of the end point of justification is not properly recognized. I am claiming that the rejoinder fails to see that the issue is whether ultimate authority for our beliefs can reside in belief and pragmatism/agency be useful.

Two final points on the status (in a pragmatism) of the idea of the world as containing or constituting an equally rich contrast to the cognitive. Where our vocabularies and beliefs are taken to be constitutive of the world, there will be no need for a two-function [the function of desire and the function of belief] description of agency in the vocabulary of such a cognitivist pragmatist. If this exclusive cognitivism works then the belief function which causes information to be accepted or rejected, passed on or out, would be sufficient. The desire and intention functions which can accept information and be causal of its satisfaction through its effect on non-beliefs as well as beliefs, is unnecessary. In a world of nothing but beliefs, nothing else should be required. "Actions" become beliefs, or become descriptions.

But in this attempt to describe pragmatic systems or agents in this single function way loses the conception of motivation or anything other than relative strengths of belief. What you want or intend becomes just what belief you will cause. Our "motivation" can be only to cause beliefs. We can have no possible contrasting motives.

It is hard to believe that Rorty would countenance such a radically dried up notion of agents and their worlds. On the contrary, all indications are that he intends to work with a robust pragmatism. Yet if he is to take this option, eliminating the possibility of the world playing an explanatory as well as a causal role, then his program is an idealist redescription of pragmatism. Instead of following this revisionary view of pragmatism into idealism, Rorty can maintain most
of his anti-metaphysical commitments by taking a position, similar to Dewey's, where the world is an independent realm, sufficiently contrasting the cognitive (and thus making sense of a two-function theory of action) that is more or less constant in function (thus functioning explanatorily as well as causally) but not necessarily knowable in itself (thus consistent with his anti-metaphysical stance).

"Usefulness", it has been argued, presupposes a goal-functional system (which we are) capable of goal-formation and realization of that goal through causation within a world which includes, but is not comprised of that system. A goal-functional system is in a real sense in a world; and it must stand in or satisfy a relation to that world which allows realization of its goals within that world. The ideas then of agency (a goal-functional system) and the realization of goals and a world in which both can be housed are co-relative, unable to exist in separation. In the next section of this chapter, we will turn to a pragmatist, John Dewey, who clearly does allow the world a role.

So, we put Rorty and his agent vocabulary users back into a proper world since it is best expressive of the commitments he would least want to let go. This is a world in which agents exist along with others who are equally richly contained and with other objects equally rich in the particularity required for causal relations to be capable of inherence among all inhabitants.
Section Summary

According to Dewey, there are two views of the world and each pairs with two approaches to knowledge. The contemplative model has a spectator passively representing the independent world. The experimental model offers a functional description of the world. "In one case we are dealing with something constant in existence, physical or metaphysical; in the other case, with something constant in function and operation. One is a formula of independent being; the other is a formula of description and calculation of interdependent changes." The contrasting picture which leads into knowledge as contemplation, has the world with an ahistorical, independent essence(s) "accessible only to reason and ideal in nature..." Any program of philosophy that contributes to a conception of knowledge as static, which began with the ancients and continued throughout the Enlightenment, is to be rejected as a model for the dynamic role that 'reconstructed', pragmatic philosophy should play. Seeing the world in terms of functional descriptions leads, hopes Dewey, to a more operative, experimental approach to philosophical endeavour; "rationalizing the possibilities of experience, especially collective human experience". If the world is already given, inquiry turns to finding only relations between what is known instead of finding ways to add to the stock of knowledge. For Dewey, philosophy, properly reconstructed "would be a logic of discovery, not argumentation, proof and persuasion." Knowledge is

power to transform the world" and to attain it requires us to interact with that realm rather than contemplate and draw out the \textit{a priori} relations between the parts of something "readymade and final". According to Dewey, philosophical energy can be more fruitfully directed if we avoid the puzzles of epistemology, the relations between mind and world, subject and object, "which assumes that to know is to seize upon something already in existence". This 'spectator' model of knowledge leads to an 'atomization' of experience, on the empiricist side, and the 'mythological' categories that allows us to synthesize these "isolated particulars" on the rationalist side. Pragmatism eschews these extremities and stipulates that the cognitive states 'truly' described as "empirical" require both purposeful interaction with matter and a cognitive apprehension "clothed in language, not in physical nakedness". The social shaping of our cognitivity, brought about in our youth through the inculcation of "interpretive concepts" in social currency, are "...categories" of connection and unification as important as those of Kant, but empirical, not mythological. So the community is a part of the authority for knowledge. Without the contribution of the categories which allows the world to enter the cognitive in the form of descriptions, we would be left with only the "necessary stimulus", sensations, which must be organized and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textcite{Dewey1929a, p. 288}
\item \textcite{Dewey1929a, p. 325}
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\item \textcite{Dewey1929a, p. 330}
\item \textcite{Dewey1929a, p. 312}
\item \textcite{Dewey1929a, p. 316}
\item \textcite{Dewey1929a, p. 316}
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
connected through these socialized categories before they can really be the "true stuff of experience"\textsuperscript{35}. "When the isolated and simple existences of Locke and Hume are seen to be not truly empirical at all but to answer to certain demands of the theory of mind, the necessity ceases for the elaborate Kantian and Post-Kantian machinery of \textit{a priori} concepts and categories to synthesize the alleged stuff of experience"\textsuperscript{36}. Dewey's reliance on the categories produced by our socialization allows him to resist the ahistoricity in Enlightenment, or the spectator view, of knowledge. However, the interaction with the world which produces the 'necessary stimulus' is taken to be the "primary fact, the basic category"\textsuperscript{37}. So the world is also part of the authority for knowledge. With these two components comprising authority, Dewey is able to account for the contingency of knowledge -- our categories of interpretation, or as Rorty would put it, our vocabularies, are contingent products of time and chance and yet a necessary condition for the possibility of experience. There is a way to explain how different vocabularies succeed each other on the dimension of working better and this normative is not cast in purely vocabularic terms. Our vocabularies work better when they are more effective methods of "active control of nature and experience"\textsuperscript{38}. Our interaction with the world is a test of our control of 'nature'. Assigning a role to the world and our vocabularies in the explanation of authority avoids the culturally solipsistic predicament by giving an authoritative role to something that is not reducible to our vocabularies at a time and place and at the same time leaves room for alternative vocabularies.

\textbf{Therefore the anti-metaphysical, anti-epistemological aspect of pragmatism need not lead into the}

\textsuperscript{35} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 315.
\textsuperscript{36} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 315.
\textsuperscript{37} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 314.
\textsuperscript{38} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 330.
elimination of the world as playing a role in determining the acceptability of belief. But if the world is to play this role, contrary to Rorty and Dewey, an epistemic relation to the world is unavoidable. It is not epistemology in the sense that the spectator view would have it, a relation between a subject and an unchanging, ahistorical object. It is an epistemic relation in the sense that our sentences about the world describe the functional rather than essential properties of a realm that sufficiently contrasts the cognitive.

John Dewey, Rorty's pragmatist forefather, offers two ways to describe the world;

In one case we are dealing with something constant in existence, physical or metaphysical; in the other case, with something constant in function and operation. One is a formula of independent being; the other is a formula of description and calculation of interdependent changes.39

Seeing the world as something with 'independent being' naturally leads to a "contemplative" model of philosophical thought. The inquirer takes the role of a passive spectator who attempts to mirror this realm and then proceeds to contemplate the a priori relations between the various constituent parts of an independent world. This is achieve by dialectically manipulating beliefs. The contemplative model posits that as creatures we are shaped by the process and result of representing the order given by a divine intelligence like God or a divinized faculty like Reason. The contemplative model views "the world as... a fixed and comprehensive Mind or Reason... the effect of

the objective theological idealism that had developed out of the classic metaphysical idealism\textsuperscript{40}.

In contrast Dewey wants a model that shifts our attention away from final ends that are given by orders that are beyond our capacity to reshape. "It was not until ends were banished from nature that purposes became important as factors in human minds capable of reshaping existence\textsuperscript{41}. This shift intends to put the emphasis on the "conditions of achievement"\textsuperscript{42} rather than the process of demonstrating the essences of the world from metaphysical speculation.

It will regard intelligence not as the original shaper and final cause of things, but as the purposeful energetic reshaper of those phases of nature and life that obstruct social well-being.\textsuperscript{43}

Dewey individualizes this intelligence and prefers the "experimental" model. Francis Bacon is considered to be the intellectual prophet of this model. Bacon acted as an antidote to the metaphysical, \textit{a priori} theorizing that predated Dewey's 'active reshapers' and his agenda of "ever-renewed progress"\textsuperscript{44}. The contemplative model continued to resist changing from contemplating what is known to learning what experimentation can teach us.

\textsuperscript{40} John Dewey, "Some Historical Factors in Philosophical Reconstruction", from \textit{Reconstruction in Philosophy}, Ch. 2, Ibid., p. 297.
\textsuperscript{42} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 307.
\textsuperscript{43} John Dewey, "Some Historical Factors in Philosophical Reconstruction", from \textit{Reconstruction in Philosophy}, Ch. 2, Ibid., p. 298.
\textsuperscript{44} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 290.
In any case, learning meant growth of knowledge, and growth belongs in the region of becoming, change, and hence is inferior to possession of knowledge in the syllogistic, self-revolving manipulation of what was already known - demonstration. In contrast with this point of view, Bacon eloquently proclaimed the superiority of discovery of new facts and truths to demonstration of the old.\textsuperscript{45}

When Dewey says "discover", he does not intend to convey the idea that the world is fixed and independent of our descriptions of it. This sort of association with the word "discovery" is unfortunate, since it is in direct opposition to Dewey's dynamic view of our capacity to shape the world, through our vocabularies, into something that serves our new and self-created ends. "Man is capable, if he will but exercise the required courage, intelligence and effort, of shaping his own fate"\textsuperscript{46}. Dewey, like Rorty, believes in and values self-creation. Dewey and the reshapers represented by the experimental model, speak about the world only in terms of its effects on us. However, the world would not be entirely ineffable and changeable. Dewey thinks we can speak of the world as "...something constant in function and operation..."\textsuperscript{47}.

In Dewey we find the will to reconstruct philosophy so that it can keep pace with the appetites and temperament of a more creative reshaper of nature.

\textbf{It will regard intelligence not as the original shaper and final}

\begin{footnotesize}
\textsuperscript{45} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 289.
\textsuperscript{25} John Dewey, Ibid., p. 296-297.
\textsuperscript{47} John Dewey."The Scientific Factor in the Reconstruction of Philosophy", from \textit{Reconstruction in Philosophy}, Ch. 3, Ibid., p. 299.
\end{footnotesize}
Dewey's 'reconstruction of philosophy', in essence, shifts our attention from the contemplative to the experimental model of inquiry.

For Dewey, "Knowledge is power to transform the world" and to attain it requires us to interact with that realm rather than contemplate and draw out the a priori relations between the parts of something "readymade and final". The experimental model begins with the relation between the creature and the environment.

The organism acts in accordance with its own structure, simple or complex, upon its surroundings. As a consequence the changes produced in the environment react upon the organism and its activities. The living creature undergoes, suffers, the consequences of its own behaviour... Certain important implications for philosophy follow. In the first place, the interaction of organism and environment, resulting in some adaptation which secures utilization of the latter, is the primary fact, the basic category.

Dewey allows this interaction between creatures and the world to be

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the 'basic category', but it is, at most, a 'means to' rather than a 'source of knowledge. When, for example, an infant puts its finger into a flame, the resultant sensation itself is not yet 'experience'; "...the doing is random, aimless, without intention or reflection. But something happens in consequence... the reaching and the burn are connected. One comes to suggest and mean the other. Then there is experience in a vital and significant sense\(^{52}\). Experience, for Dewey, is cognitive. The world does not confront us directly through 'raw sense-data'. "Sensations are not part of any knowledge, good or bad, superior or inferior, imperfect or complete. They are rather provocations, incitements, challenges to an act of inquiry which is to terminate in knowledge\(^{53}\). Dewey argues that when the empiricist "atomism of sensations disappears... the necessity ceases for the elaborate Kantian and Post-Kantian machinery of \textit{a priori} concepts and categories to synthesize the alleged stuff of experience. The true stuff of experience is recognized to be adaptive courses of action, habits, active functions, connections of doing and undergoing; sensori-motor coordinations\(^{54}\). Instead of Kant's universal conditions of possible human experience, Dewey chooses to interpret the "categories" as historically specific.

The conceptions that are socially current and important become the child's principles of interpretation and estimation long before he attains to personal and deliberate control of conduct. Things come to him clothed in language, not in physical

nakedness, and this garb of communication makes him a sharer in the beliefs of those about him... Here we have "categories" of connection and unification as important as those of Kant, but empirical, not mythological55.

By his rejection of Kant56, Dewey eschews a metanarrative of the self. The categories of connection and unification are "socially current and important", not trans-vocabularic and trans-historical. Our particular 'categories of interpretation', as necessary conditions of cognitive experience, have a primary role in shaping each cognitive moment. Dewey stipulates that the cognitive states 'truly' described as "empirical" require both purposeful interaction with matter and a cognitive apprehension "clothed in language, not in physical nakedness"57. Our cognitions are shaped in two ways, one brought about in our youth through the inculcation of "interpretive concepts"58 and the other, by our purposeful interaction with the world.

In the experimental model, the active reshaper does not confront the world as a fixed realm of essences that is metaphysical and timeless in its nature. The world is constant only in terms of its

55 John Dewey, Ibid., p. 316.

56 It is the rejection of the universality of the conditions of experience that distinguishes Dewey from Kant. He agrees with Kant, against "sensationalist empiricism", that "...the temporal and spatial qualities are as much given in experience as are particular -- in fact, as I have been trying to show, particulars can only be identified as particulars only in a relational complex". John Dewey, "The World as a Logical Problem" Essays in Experimental Logic, Dover Publications, Inc., New York, 1953, p. 292

57 John Dewey, "Changed Conceptions of Experience and Reason", from Reconstruction in Philosophy, Ch. 4, Ibid., p. 316.

58 John Dewey, Ibid., p. 316.
functions and its 'nature' is a combination of our categories of
interpretation interacting with these constant functions. Cognizers
contribute their categories of interpretation. Without the contribution
of the categories, which allows the world to enter the cognitive in the
form of descriptions, we would be left with only the "necessary
stimulus", sensations, which must be organized and connected
through these socialized categories before they can really be the "true
stuff of experience". "When the isolated and simple existences of
Locke and Hume are seen to be not truly empirical at all but to answer
to certain demands of the theory of mind, the necessity ceases for the
elaborate Kantian and Post-Kantian machinery of a priori concepts
and categories to synthesize the alleged stuff of experience".
Dewey's reliance on the categories produced by our socialization allows
him to resist the ahistoricity in Enlightenment, or the spectator view,
of knowledge. However, the interaction with the world which
produces the 'necessary stimulus' is taken to be the "primary fact, the
basic category".

To respect matter means to respect the conditions of
achievement; conditions which hinder and obstruct and which
have to be changed, conditions which help and further and
which can be used to modify obstructions and attain ends. Only

59 The world, for Dewey, exists in this way. See also John Dewey, "The World as a Logical
where he argues against the idea that the existence of the world is should be seen as a problem.
60 John Dewey. "Changed Conceptions of Experience and Reason", from Reconstruction in
Philosophy, Ch. 4, Ibid., p. 315.
as men have learned to pay sincere and persistent regard to matter, to the conditions which depends negatively and positively the success of all endeavor, have they shown sincere and fruitful respect for ends and purposes. To profess to have an aim and then neglect the means of its execution is self-delusion of the most dangerous sort.63

The world or matter has been de-divinized, but is still shown "sincere and fruitful respect"64. The "dogma of fixed unchangeable types"65, a leftover from the theological transformation of ancient philosophy, is abandoned, but the world as a set of functions, the cause of our cognitions and the testing ground of our vocabularies remains. To allow the world to function authoritatively for our beliefs does not require that we see it, as the theologians or their ancient predecessors did, in terms of a fixed set of essences. A sufficiently rich contrast to the cognitive realm does not require a set of ahistorical essences. The contrast can be rendered in terms of the functional description of those constant causes which are independent of the mental. Rorty gives the impression that the contrast can be made out only by allowing a robust metaphysics into the picture, but following Dewey, the contrast can be made out in functional descriptions rather than metaphysical, timeless essences.

With these two components comprising authority, Dewey is able to

account for the contingency of knowledge - our categories of interpretation, or as Rorty would put it, our vocabularies, are contingent products of time and chance and yet a necessary condition for the possibility of experience and knowledge. There is a way to explain how different vocabularies succeed each other on the dimension of "working better" and this normative ideal is not cast in purely vocabularic terms. Our vocabularies work better when they are more effective methods of "active control of nature and experience". Our interaction with the world is a test of our control of 'nature': "...only consequences which are actually produced by the working of the idea in co-operation with, or application to, prior existences are good consequences in the specific sense of good which is relevant to establishing the truth of an idea". The world, those prior existences that are not 'ahistorical essences', but rather, constant functions, is to play an authoritative role in the determination of truth and knowledge.

Assigning a role to the world and to our vocabularies in the explanation of authority avoids the culturally solipsistic predicament by giving an authoritative role to the world, something that is not reducible to our vocabularies at a time and place. At the same time giving the world an authoritative role leaves room for alternative vocabularies, different ways of categorizing and interpreting which are "intelligently thought-out possibilities of the existent world which may

be used for making over and improving it." Different vocabularies can be distinguished as more than 'constructions out of the host vocabulary' -- they become different constructions for interacting with a world that is independent of our descriptions.

Keeping the anti-metaphysical aspect of pragmatism does not require the elimination of the world as playing a role in determining the acceptability of belief. Contrary to Rorty and Dewey, if the world is to play this role, however, an epistemic relation to the world is unavoidable. It is not epistemology in the sense that the spectator view represents it, a relation between a subject and an unchanging, ahistorical object. It is rather an epistemic relation in the sense that our sentences about the world describe the functional rather than essential properties of a realm that sufficiently contrasts the cognitive. Dewey overestimated the revision that his experimental model of inquiry involves. In order to give the world a role and to let it function in a way that makes causation meaningful, then the world explains the cognitions that it causes. Why don't these sorts of descriptions amount to an epistemic relation to the world? Although Dewey's prolonged attack on traditional 'Epistemology/Metaphysics' and Rorty's trenchant continuation of that attack have given us reason to doubt traditional metaphysical moves, it does not follow that they have superceded epistemology. Did psychology require a name change when the

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69 See chapter two.
70 I am not alone in thinking that Rorty has evaded the subject of epistemology. C. Taylor, "Rorty in the Epistemological Tradition", Reading Rorty, ed. A. Malachowski, Oxford,
theory that justified frontal lobotomies was abandoned? Epistemology does not have to be eliminated simply because the relation between subject and object is not that of a passive subject mirroring something "readymade and final".

For Rorty, as we have seen, commitment to beliefs, not a relation to the objects to which our beliefs refer, is the touchstone of 'truth'. The question "What is your final justificatory stand?" has become "Where are your propositional attitudes planted?" The world, for Dewey, is a realm where we experiment and test our descriptions. But instead of allowing an epistemic connection between us and the world, Rorty thinks that the only materials we have to judge the acceptability of our beliefs is by looking at our other commitments. Rorty writes,

I shall end this chapter by going back to the claim, that has been central to what I have been saying, that the world does not provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors, that we can only compare languages or metaphors with one another, not with something beyond language called "fact".

Rorty's approach lands us in the 'cognicentric predicament'. If the

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72 In an earlier article, Rorty writes I want to claim that "the world" is either the purely vacuous notion of the ineffable cause of sense and goal of intellect, or else a name for the objects that inquiry at the moment is leaving alone: those planks in the boat which at the moment are not being moved about. "The World Well Lost". R. Rorty, The Journal of Philosophy, 69, 1972, p. 663.
only way that we can evaluate our beliefs is through other beliefs, then inquiry becomes dialectical not experimental. Dewey allows the world to be "...something constant in function and operation..." and experiments can be performed on that realm. But Rorty wants to block the recognition of any constants about the world, and about us.

But if we could ever become reconciled to the idea that reality is indifferent to our descriptions of it, and that the human self is created by the use of a vocabulary rather than being adequately or inadequately expressed in a vocabulary, then we would at last have assimilated what was true in the Romantic idea that truth was made rather than found75.

If Rorty is embracing full contingency, then there will not be constants about either us or the world. For Dewey, at least, the world is 'constant in function' and this allows him a way of speaking about it and an authoritative role for the world in determining the usefulness and thus, the acceptability of beliefs. Rorty, as we have seen, lets the world dangle without a use.

In the first section of this chapter, we saw from the 'metanarrative of pragmatism' that there are some properties of creatures capable of rational, autonomous goal-functionality, or practicality, that are also 'constant in function'. Rorty believes neither the self or the world are constant in function, and this complete embrace of contingency leaves his vocabulary without the contingent necessities needed to give an

account of action.

In Dewey we have another part of the narrative of pragmatism. The importance of contingency is in place, for the 'socially current categories of interpretation' are a necessary condition of experience, and colour it in important ways. However, unlike Rorty picture, Dewey's experimental model has an authoritative role that the world plays in determining the acceptability of beliefs. This realm can only be described in terms that our categories of interpretation allow, but its independent constant functions allow us to make sense of our descriptions, our experiments, 'working' and 'working better'.

Our pragmatists cleave to contingency. So a theory which maximizes contingency while keeping the contingent necessities needed to describe practicality should be attractive to them. Rorty sees contingency everywhere. Agents, their beliefs and vocabularies are contingent, and, he thinks, there is no story to tell about them upon which history or contingency does not freely operate. They are themselves the progeny of contingency. As for the world, another term needed by a pragmatist vocabulary, the arena within they must locate agents and their doings, it acts for them as the very river of contingency. But the world too has no story which must be told of it. It is what we make of it according to Rorty. "The world does not speak. Only we do". And when we speak for it, the world does not "provide us with any criterion of choice between alternative metaphors".

Dewey differs from Rorty on how the concept of the world works.

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76 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 6.
77 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 21.
according to pragmatism. Both agree it is the arena in which actions, including vocabularies and all other goal-functional items are tested. For Dewey, however, the world is thus the arena of what is possible in goal-functionality, or action. We, as agents, are the goal-wielders and the world's functionally describable properties can explain both our successful and unsuccessful performances. For Dewey, the set of beliefs we amass from this interaction is a form of knowledge. Knowledge, albeit only knowledge of the functional contribution or resistance of the world, is possible. Only an unnecessarily restrictive definition of epistemology can prevent us from calling this a thin epistemic relation between agents and the world. Rorty, on the other hand, seems not even to countenance this thin epistemic relation. For him the world is apparently not even describable in functional terms. There is no way, even in functional terms, to say that there is a way that 'the world is'.

But this position in which the world is held to be the cause of vocabulary by the thread of the causal relation alone cannot be sustained by any pragmatist who is interested only in ideas that 'work'. This relationship, since it yields no descriptions of the world, fails a crucial pragmatic test: no descriptions - no use. Alternatively, if this sole relationship does generate descriptions then some epistemic relation is admitted. The world is held to have a separate, albeit functional, nature to which the descriptions allowed must accord or fail.

So the pragmatism that avoids idealism and maximizes contingency gives us the world and a thin cognitive connection to it. This maintains
a flourishing role for contingency since it is we, the goal-functional creatures, who set the epistemic agenda. The questions of the world are always and only raised by us in the terms which constitute our cognitivity. To the extent that cognitivity is different among individuals and/or groups, the questions differ as will the answers. We have no basis, as Dewey points out, contra Kant, to insist on a basic set of categories which will inform all of our questions and perceptions of the world. Cultural solipsism cannot arise in such a picture.

While unbridled contingency may hold for some categories of knowledge and perception -- or of vocabularies (as shorthand) -- it cannot hold for those who wish to have a vocabulary that is able to describe an agent, or an action. Since vocabulary use is action, there are limits to contingency if there are vocabularies, since without actions, there can be no vocabularies. There are contingent necessities within vocabularies and contingent necessities that must obtain if there are to be vocabularies.

Summarily then, any view which justifiably uses pragmatism needs a conception of actions as distinguishable from events. And even if that view seeks contingency wherever it may be found, that view will find itself with a vocabulary which contains at least the following distinct but, of course, interacting working items.

1] A world of, for example, events.

2] In that world, there will exist agents. Otherwise, there can be no production of events which are distinct in virtue of being caused by agency. Such events are described as actions and vocabularies.

3] Causal relations between all members of that world.
4] Descriptions of [1] and [2], since if they are terms in the vocabulary, they will have such uses and connections in the vocabulary.


6] The entailment of a metanarrative which describes the necessity of [1]-[5]

Armed with this vocabulary and its self-conscious entailments, its metanarrative, we may now proceed to look at the normative issue central to Rorty's concerns, the protection and furtherance of liberal institutions.
3] How the Metanarrative of Pragmatism Connects With Basic Rights

Section Summary
With this description of an autonomous, rational, goal-functional agent who shares a world, an equally rich contrasting realm to the cognitive with other agents, we have a set of contingent necessities available on which to build our normative enterprise. Postponing the question of whether we should actually protect these features which are presupposed by pragmatism, we turn now to the implications of 'what we are' for an account of basic rights. When the components of an autonomous, rational, goal-functional agent are analysed, we can draw tight connections between these features and the protections offered by the familiar core of liberal non-interference rights to freedom of thought, expression, association, the press and religion. Because these rights are useful for protecting the processes and functions identified by the metanarrative, they can be justified in a manner that is not available to other rights such as distributional rights arising out of accounts of distributional justice. When it is claimed that liberal rights must show each of us equal respect, the content of the nature of the self that emerges from the pragmatic metanarrative can articulate what it is that is shown equal respect. In this way, the metanarrative of pragmatism can be seen to play a deepening role in liberal theory that Rorty has been unable to produce.

On the basis of the metanarrative of vocabularies that are rich enough to describe pragmatic creatures, "what we are", we turn now to questions concerning the content of "what should be the case". That
is, what does "what we are" tell us about "what should be the case"?

The metanarrative of pragmatism describes the structure of what it is to be a practical agent. This 'thin' description of the core self that must be in place for practicality to be describable may appear to be too abstract an idea to justify any substantial normative content. When introduced to this idea, the very defensibility of this metanarrative may lead readers to suspect that its uncontentiousness is a sign of its emptiness. However, it will be shown that protecting the process of goal-functionality can explain and justify a set of 'liberal' basic rights. A set of normative implications will be drawn from the requirements of protecting the processes involved in goal-functionality. In section four of this chapter, we will address the issues raised by the possible acceptance of these rights as part of a political morality. However, before we face the task of arguing for the acceptance of these rights, an analysis of which rights are implied by the desire to protect our goal-functionality, or what normative consequences we will be asked to accept, is in order.

Some terminology is required. A right is a 'justified or valid claim' held by the individual, that has a certain threshold weight against collective considerations. Rights that are useful in

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adjudicating conflicts have some assignable weight or rank when they come into conflict with other goals. For our purposes, two levels of rights are required. "Basic" rights will have enough weight to outrank all but the most urgent social goals. "Derivative" rights are valid claims that give rise to duties unless those duties conflict with basic rights.

To avoid the suspicion that we are helping ourselves to an Enlightenment idea of rights, such as the property rights that John Locke thought were a dictate of "natural reason" and God, let us consider what a naturalized account of rights would be. If there are we-intentions (this is phrased conditionally since we defer the argument that these rights should be accepted until the next section of the chapter) that are in operation in a society, then there are two messages signalled by the use of 'right' to describe a we-intention.

First, rights are held by individuals (the new idea of group rights will be discussed below) and second, serve to limit the legitimate use of state power or to invoke the use of state power in light of the content of the right. A mobility right, for example, makes state action that impedes mobility illegitimate and/or requires the state to take action to remove an impediment to mobility. In short, a non-Enlightenment translation of a 'right' is just a commitment, widespread enough to be properly considered a we-intention, that is of sufficient (comparative causal) strength to outweigh all but the most urgent we-intentions.

Related to the idea of rights is the idea of freedoms. For example

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the Canadian Charter\textsuperscript{82} describes the limits of state power in terms of a set of Rights and Freedoms. Although no real rationale is offered for this distinction, we might pause to consider two senses of freedom which map onto these different ways in which an individual's valid claim, a right, may be recognized. Freedom, as in "freedom to...", or as Isaiah Berlin put it, "Positive freedom", is the purview or range of goals that we can intelligently consider. That is, it is believable that those goals are non-actual and causable by us. The other sense of freedom, Berlin's "Negative freedom"\textsuperscript{83}, which is the sense that we will use when describing non-interference rights, is the property of operating standardly or without impediment, as in "The object fell freely" (i.e., it did not hit any other objects, it was not held up by a parachute, etc.).

When we are within the vocabulary of rights, 'freedom' is usually used in the negative sense. Perhaps the Charter uses the positive sense of freedom when it, for example, lists certain education 'rights' in one's native tongue as a 'right' that emerges once there exists a population exceeding a certain threshold\textsuperscript{84}. Such a rights is a right that requires the government to do something, to provide a service, rather than simply refrain from interfering.


\textsuperscript{83} Isaiah Berlin, "Two Senses of Liberty", as Berlin wrote,"The sense of freedom in which I use this term entails not simply the absence of frustration but the absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities." Quoted in Ronald Dworkin, Taking Rights Seriously, Harvard University Press, Harvard, 1977, p. 267. As Dworkin put it on the same page; "I have in mind the traditional definition of liberty as the absence of constraints placed by a government upon what a man might do if he wants to."

If we are articulating which rights are implied by the we-intention to protect the features of practical creatures that are identified by the metanarrative of pragmatism, we need to recall the features that are constitutive of autonomous, rational goal-functionality. The distinction between basic and non-basic rights will be made by looking at the requirements for action, intention formation and desire and belief formation. These are the essential features of goal-functionality and will be the basis of our separation of basic from non-basic rights. Other rights, such as positive rights to certain services, will not be essential to our goal-functionality and will thereby not be basic rights.

The structural properties of rational, autonomous goal-functional agents include the following functions:

1] Belief: States that are capable of accepting and transferring information. Beliefs are (informational) states which are involved in intention formation at their output end and with perception and exchanges with other beliefs at their input end. For a goal-functional or pragmatic system beliefs are ideally functional or true when their contribution to the formation of an intention is explanatory of the success of an intentional action; i.e., when they are goal-functional; and they are false when the failure in goal-functionality is ascribable to them.

2] Desire (motivation) and intentions. These states are at least capable of accepting information and causing events. When we have a desire to cause some event that has the properties identified by the
content of the desire (a goal) and the contributing belief states such that we believe that we will produce the means to a goal and we have reached a threshold state of causal readiness, then we have an intention. An intention\textsuperscript{85} is successful or goal-functional, or an act is intentional, when the change in the world is explicable in terms of the causal role of that state and the change in the world occurred as it was described/represented in the intention. Practicality, or goal-functionality, is the process where agents cause the events which are means to various ends.

3] Rationality; is a certain cognitive means to goal-functionality. It is a normative function which controls the other cognitive functions; for example, the believability of beliefs and the desirability of desires. In short, rationality is either commitments or theories at a level which can function to control other cognitive states. Rational practicality is the process whereby the means to various ends are normatively evaluated. Since it cannot be known prior to the act whether the reasoning will be actually goal-functional, the ideal for reason in intention formation is to proceed in accordance with (tried) beliefs about goal-functionality, i.e. with justified beliefs. In that case the process is rational. Ideally, rationality is that process whereby certain beliefs control other beliefs and desires so that they are goal-functional.

4] Autonomy: If an agent can, in addition to merely having goals due to

\textsuperscript{85} Immediate as opposed to future intention.
other causes, form them by the use of beliefs, it will, with the other features sketched above, not only be capable of goal-functionality, but of autonomy of desire and similarly of desire. Rationality can operate on the process of cognitive goal-formation too. When that is the case, agents will choose their goals in light of commitments or theories and we may say that they are rationally autonomous. Rational autonomy is the choice or creation of goals through the use of normative beliefs. [We are reminded, then, that our descriptive enterprise is modular in nature, capable of describing goal-functional creatures, rational goal-functional creatures, and autonomous, rational, goal-functional creatures.]

With this numbered summary of the features of autonomous [4], rational [3], agents [1&2] we move now to the connections between the metanarrative of pragmatism and the protection of this process. As I have already said, arguments addressed to the actual acceptance of these rights will be advanced in the next section of this chapter.

If we were to become committed to protecting (equally) agents with properties [1-4], then we can see the justification for rights to freedom of thought, speech, the press and association. When agents are rational, they will want to form beliefs with the best means available to determine their believability, which requires access to the widest commerce of beliefs. The commerce of beliefs cannot be restricted, whether through suppression of speech, the press or association of persons, without leaving agents with an inferior means
available to assess the believability of their beliefs, or the desirability of their desires. Since thought, speech and association cannot be restricted without restricting this means (the widest commerce of beliefs), such freedom is to be protected if we are to protect this feature of rational, autonomous, goal-functional agents. If religion is pictured as a source of belief options, it too can avail itself of this justification, and freedom of religion can be justified in light of the protection of the belief-forming (and thereby desire and intention formation) mechanism of creatures like us. The protection of existing religious beliefs and the formation of new ones is, in our time, primarily a protection of narrative beliefs and their formations. In other times more than narrative beliefs were thought to be protected by the assurance of religious freedom.

Although [1-4] dovetail on this issue, out of particular concern for the desire function [2], we can see the justification for the right to [the pursuit of] happiness. Notice that the protection of [2] implies the protection of freedom of action, which is the means to the satisfaction of desires, but does not give one the rights to have those desires satisfied. Actual desires are not part of the metanarrative, they are a part of the distinct particularity that gives us a personal identity, a narrative for our lives. Furthermore, such a provision, providing for the satisfaction of our desires would go around the process of goal-functionality, that is, it would deliver the satisfaction of the agent's desires rather than protecting action, the means through which each could act in the pursuit of the satisfaction of those desires themselves.

No matter what particular content agents' desires have, agents will
want to have the means to pursue those desires protected. No such commonality can be found for any set of de facto desires that agents may have at a particular time and place nor therefore for the satisfactions that such desires will require. Of course some desires may have, in comparison, a kind of commonality and permanence that other desires will not have, given the types of biological requirements that we find ourselves with as humans. This distinction is useful for a theory of needs. However, our needs are not essential to our natures as describers and it is possible to think that we could describe our way out of them. Imagine this example, adapted from H.L.A. Hart\textsuperscript{86}, where creatures are able to receive their sustenance from breathing the air. Or, less fantastically, imagine the South Seas Islanders who enjoy the absence of scarcity in matters pertaining to food. These sorts of creatures or Islanders would not need the protection of a positive right to a minimum amount of food. They could be goal-functional without requiring such a protection. So protecting the means to pursue happiness, such as freedom of action, can be seen to connect directly with our nature as rational, autonomous, goal-functional creatures. We cannot, however, trace the right to a threshold level of the satisfaction of our desires, such as a welfare entitlement, to this metanarrative alone, it must also be supplemented with some narrative details to fill out the justification. This difference in justification, however, in no way precludes obtaining a historically conditioned solidarity around a package of welfare rights. It simply draws our

attention to the difference between rights that can be connected to features that we cannot describe our way out of and rights that connect with extremely important concerns that we have enduring commitments to maintaining. But if we are to take contingency seriously, we must conclude that our needs are not fixed in the same way that our metanarratives are fixed.

Rights to be free of assault, coercion or injury and the right to be free of unjustifiable imprisonment can be traced to and found essential for the protection of [2]. In protecting [2] we protect the output of the cognitive states [1-4] and thereby protection of [2] is required in order to protect [1-4] too.

We see that the contingent necessities which form the thin metanarrative of autonomous, rational, goal-functional creatures can be thickened into a normative program by drawing out, in the vocabulary of rights, the kinds of protections required by all creatures identified by this metanarrative. The thickening shows that the familiar non-interference rights, the familiar core of liberal basic individual rights can be tightly linked to our autonomous, goal-functional core selves. If we are belief/desire forming creatures, it is reasonable to predict that the means to protect those formations will be valued by any creature that is self-conscious of, and wants to protect, their core selves. We will say a little more on this strategy of moving from an 'is' to an 'ought' in section four of this chapter. For now, we only need conclude that respect for the goal-functional process, if it obtained, would require the protections afforded by these non-interference rights.
We cannot expect the transition from the structural properties of autonomous, rational, goal-functional agents to this account of basic rights to be followed by an equally tight transition to actual agreement. However, the liberal tradition may have primed some of us, at this historical period, to make such a transition. H.L.A. Hart writes that the philosophy of government in England and America has evolved into a "new faith",

...that the truth must not lie with a doctrine that takes the maximization of aggregate or general welfare for its goal, but with a doctrine of basic human rights, protecting specific basic liberties and interests of the individuals, if only we could find some sufficiently firm foundation for such rights to meet some long familiar objections...\(^87\)

If we have solidarity, at this historical point, around the idea that a package of individual rights could be justified if we could find some account of our natures that we cannot describe our way out of, then this analysis may contribute to the increase and expansion of a liberal solidarity. This argument takes as its target those who claim that the faith that Hart describes is misguided, since we are contingent through and through. The most philosophically adept member of this "communitarian"\(^88\) group is Rorty, and in countering his claim that


there is no acceptable account of the 'self itself', (and thereby no means available for satisfying the aspirations of the "new faith"), we are providing some renewed 'liberal hope' for the 'new faith' Hart describes.
4) The Metanarrative and the Justification of the Basic Rights of Liberalism

Section Summary

We find ourselves, as particular individuals, with commitments to a vocabulary and terms in that vocabulary which shape our lives. In reminding us of the contingency of our commitments, Rorty emphasizes the contribution that the 'blind impress' of causation makes to this picture, and heightens our appreciation of how history might have impressed very different commitments upon us than the ones we have at present. However, Rorty does not eliminate the possibility of altering that blind impress through the process of redescription, and allows for an account of autonomy or self-creation, where we attempt to track home the "blind impress that all of our behavings bear". However, for Rorty this process does not culminate in a 'discovery' about a set of continuities behind the web of beliefs and desires that each of us are, instead, it is part of an ultimately non-teleological process of description and redescription. When it is countered that there is a metanarrative of the self, a description of what it is to be an autonomous rational, goal-functional agent, a description that describers cannot describe their way out of, it becomes possible to ground an account of political morality upon these contingent necessities. The metanarrative is presupposed in every narrative that describes creatures capable of practicality and some reasons are given to think that this dependency will be, once recognized, causal of solidarity around the basic rights of liberalism. These basic rights are useful for the furtherance and the protection of the basis for narratives of whatever stripe. If we wish to expand the scope of our 'we-intentions', that is, if we want to promote, or to be causal of a wider solidarity, it is more likely that we will be able to do this on the basis of features recognized as shared across the species of describers. If agents are self-conscious of these features, if they recognize that there are descriptions of themselves that they cannot describe their way out of, then
it is more likely that there will emerge agreement to a scheme of rights to protect those features. The metanarrative will not stand in a justificatory relation to all of the commitments we may wish to further in the realm of we-intentions. Metanarratively implied rights do not settle all questions that the narratives of our political lives will raise. It 'plays favourites' with those commitments that protect the structure of goal-functionality. Rorty, who wishes to be a liberal without any metanarrative, will be contrasted with this view. In conclusion, the relative pragmatic merits for the protection and furtherance of liberal institutions between this account and Rorty's account will be compared.

Rorty is a liberal, although his explanation of his liberalism does not rest on any account of what we are, for he rejects that there is a 'self' behind the tissue of contingencies that form our final vocabularies. We just are those vocabularies, or as he puts it, "incarnated vocabularies". To be autonomous is to engage in redescribing the blind impress that chance has given each of us. For Rorty, this redescription does not have a telos such as self-knowledge. However, through redescription we are able to alter this blind impress and this capacity allows us to speak of autonomy and responsibility for our autonomous choices.

...Nietzsche did not abandon the idea of discovering the causes of our being what we are. He did not give up the idea that an individual might track home the blind impress all his behavings bore. He only rejected the idea that this tracking was a process of discovery. In his view, achieving this sort of self-knowledge we are not coming to know a truth that was out there (or in

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here) all the time. Rather he saw self-knowledge as self-creation...

Autonomy is not something which all humans have within them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation and which a few actually do...

If our commitments are not fixed by the blind impress, then we are capable of choosing our commitments, describing our way into some, and redescribing our way into others. As individuals we have responsibility for our intentions, and as a society, for our we-intentions.

Our commitment to some beliefs can be described in terms of their relation to certain other beliefs. Our commitment to the belief that we should attend a lecture can be traced to a belief that the speaker has certain properties which are believed to be desirable. This belief about the desirability of those properties can be traced, in turn, to still further beliefs. Eventually this process alights upon beliefs that cannot be traced to further beliefs. For the Enlightenment, these beliefs were described in foundational terms. Rorty's anti-foundationalism rejects this model. Instead of seeing these beliefs as foundational, he sees them as marking the limit of the cognitive process, they are fundamental cognitive items which form our "final vocabulary". We cannot imagine defending these beliefs on the basis of non-circular

90 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 27.
91 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 65.
All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes...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 non-circular 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. A small part of a final vocabulary is made up of thin, flexible and ubiquitous terms such as "true", "good", "right" and beautiful". The larger part contains thicker, more rigid and more parochial terms, for example, "Christ", "England", "professional standards", "decency", "kindness", "the Revolution", "the Church", "progressive", "rigorous", "creative". The more parochial terms do most of the work.93

Rorty's description of that "small part of a final vocabulary [that] is made up of thin, flexible and ubiquitous terms such as "true", "good", "right" and beautiful"94 will also include "cruelty". It is not a thicker, more 'parochial' term like "...for example, "Christ", "England", "professional standards"... The more parochial terms do most of the work"95. These 'parochial' terms are thicker because they are deeply embedded in their historical context and take their meaning from

93 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 73.
94 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 73.
95 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 73.
their relations to other specific, historically-conditioned beliefs. To use 'England' as a final vocabulary item that explains actions requires that we make reference to "England's" historical relations, the particulars with which it is embedded, to the 'empire', the 'club', the 'class' and the 'school'. The thicker, goal-producing terms, fleshed out with reference to particular historical information, help to explain many of our choices and actions. Good, right, and true are "thin" items in our final vocabularies because the goal-production that they explain is not as particularized to the information found within a specific historical period or group.

To explain how the thinner terms, ideals such as good, right and true, and their contraries, bad, wrong and false, are explanatory of action requires an account of how they interact with the thicker terms in our final vocabulary. The content of what counts as being cruel, the particular examples of cruelty, will be embedded in a particular, historically specific context. It is cruel to send the elderly onto ice floes unless you are a part of a vocabulary that is much different from those of western, liberal democracies. Examples of what counts as true will also not be expressible apart from particular historically conditioned beliefs. These particular examples of cruelty, like particular examples of truth, are relative to vocabularies developed at a specific time and place. What is considered cruel will depend on what a culture takes to be cases of harming and pain causing. However, there is also a structure of how these words work. There is a normative component in truth that, as we saw in chapter two, makes
that concept difficult to naturalize only in terms of actual beliefs that are held to be true at a particular time and place. Similarly, cruelty, as it is also a normative concept, the gratuitous denial of satisfaction and/or gratuitous harming/pain-giving, resists naturalization in terms of the particular beliefs about what counts as cruel at a specific time and place. While the content of what counts as cruelty is relative to a historically conditioned vocabulary -- what members of that vocabulary take to be cases of harm -- the structure of cruelty, how the thin term can take on the content of harm in different vocabularies but still function in the same way, overlaps across different vocabularies. Because of this structural component in the idea of cruelty, like the structural component in the idea of truth, both ideals cannot be naturalized in terms of particular beliefs held at a specific time and place.

Rorty wants a distinction between creatures that can suffer cruelty and humiliation and those that cannot. Further, he does not want to commit himself to a metaphysical essence that underwrites this distinction. Rorty relies on some view of why humans can "suffer a special sort of pain which the brutes do not share with the humans -- humiliation". Of course, Rorty resists any implication that this distinction commits him to a metaphysical conception of what we are. "The liberal metaphysician wants our wish to be kind to be bolstered by an argument, one that entails a self-redescription which will highlight a common human essence, an essence which is something more than our shared ability to suffer humiliation." For Rorty, this

96 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 92.
97 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 91.
distinction does not commit us to a "common language" but instead "just susceptibility to pain"98.

The type of argument that was advanced on behalf of the contingent necessities that must be in Rorty's vocabulary if he is to be able to give an account of "works" can be repeated at this juncture. Rorty is open to just this sort of move when he admits that "...feelings of solidarity [i.e., "we should avoid cruelty"] are necessarily a matter of which similarities and dissimilarities strike us as salient, and that such a salience is a function of a historically contingent final vocabulary"99. There need be no ahistorical necessity, or a reliance on timeless essences to make the point that vocabularies that are rich enough to realize a description of cruelty will require some other terms in their vocabulary. Rorty himself shows an openness to this line of argument when he writes:

It does not matter if everybody's final vocabulary is different, as long as there is enough overlap so that everybody has some words with which to express the desirability of entering into other people's fantasies as well as one's own. But those overlapping words -- words like "kindness" or "decency" or "dignity" -- do not form a vocabulary which all human beings can reach by reflection on their natures100.

There is no need to posit an extra-vocabularic human essence to describe contingent necessities. These contingent necessities form a

98 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 92.
99 Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 192.
100 Richard Rorty, Ibid., pp. 92-93.
metanarrative for each different vocabulary that has the common
capacity to describe certain things. If a vocabulary is capable of
describing 'works', it will have the terms required to distinguish acts
from other events. All vocabularies that have the capacity to describe
pragmatic creatures will 'overlap', or have in common, this distinction.
In virtue of this overlap, there is a metanarrative of practicality.
Analogously, to have the idea of cruelty in one's vocabulary will also
give rise to certain contingent necessities. If cruelty is the gratuitous
denial of satisfaction and/or gratuitous harming/pain-giving, then
there must be a creature or creatures that are describable as having
interests -- some motivations that can be frustrated. If we are to have
ideas like cruelty and practicality in our vocabularies, then there are
sets of ideas to which we are then committed. These
interdependences suggest that there is a core to vocabularies with
certain capacities, a 'core self', for example, but this core self is not, as
the Enlightenment pictured it, a timeless, immutable, human essence.
Instead, it is a set of constant functions that must be in place if we are
able to do things, like speak of cruelty and practicality, within our
vocabularies.

We cannot conclude that the commonality of this idea in
different historically conditioned vocabularies points to the ahistorical
necessity of this concept. Rorty may be quick to remind us that
necessity is relative to our interests. Perhaps we may become
creatures that are not interested in the interests of others. If that
contingent possibility obtains, we may no longer have the terms in our
vocabulary that allow us to speak of cruelty. But if we are interested in
cruelty, we cannot maintain that interest and abandon the self-
description of ourselves as creatures with interests. Further, we
cannot be interested in reducing cruelty without allowing into our
vocabulary the idea of others as creatures who have interests and
whose interest can be affected by our actions. There is no need to
think that we have discovered the timeless "human essence"\textsuperscript{101}, but
this is the "core self" that stands within the vocabulary that is rich
enough to speak of cruelty.

We might, of course, redescribe ourselves in a way that loosens
ourselves from these thick terms, and perhaps, even some of the thin
terms. This sort of autonomous self-creation is something that only a
‘few actually do’\textsuperscript{102}. So we have an account, in functional terms that
Rorty could accept, of what amounts to the process of justification; the
formation of beliefs by other beliefs.

Rorty allows that inferences based on justificatory relations are
possible. Commitments to specific acts can be traced, by patterns of
inference to other beliefs, which in turn can be traced to yet other
beliefs. A long as this process is not seen to terminate in 'self-evident
truths' or 'truths of reason' that might be used in some form of
Enlightenment foundationalism, the inferential patterns found within
vocabularies are legitimate.

If Rorty is right that there can be no account of 'the way the world
is' or 'the way the self is', then there can be no foundationalism that
grounds our final vocabulary upon essential, certain, truths. As a

\textsuperscript{101} Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 192.
\textsuperscript{102} Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. 65.
society, we should not look for charter or "... a lading list which was a copy of the universe's own list... to know the truth..."\textsuperscript{103}, instead, our society should be, as Proust was, "...unashamed of his own finitude..."\textsuperscript{104}. We need "...an increasing sense of the radical diversity of private purposes, of the radically poetic character of individual lives, and of the merely poetic foundations of the "we-consciousness" which lies behind our social institutions"\textsuperscript{105}. What contemporary liberalism needs is a conversation with new vocabularies, the playing off of our institutions against utopias envisaged by those who are trying to work out new vocabularies: "...[M]oral philosophy takes the form of historical narration and utopian speculations rather than the search for general principles"\textsuperscript{106}. The turn, or reform, that political morality should take, is to move away from the foundational project inherited from the Enlightenment towards a historically self-conscious description and redescription through new metaphors so that liberalism can continue to do the good work that it does.

If Rorty is "...content to treat the demands of self-creation and human solidarity as equally valid, yet forever incommensurable..."\textsuperscript{107} it remains to be seen how one is able to adjudicate conflicts when they do occur. He does not want, or have a metanarrative that helps us weigh the conflicting demands of self-creation and solidarity around liberal institutions when they do come into conflict. Without a

\textsuperscript{103} Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 27.
\textsuperscript{104} Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 102-103.
\textsuperscript{105} Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 67-68.
\textsuperscript{106} Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 60.
\textsuperscript{107} Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. xv.
metanarrative that generates and underwrites some normative premises promoting his liberal position, Rorty cannot outflank critics of liberal institutions\textsuperscript{108}.

...a liberal society is badly served by an attempt to supply it with "philosophical foundations". For the attempt to supply such foundations presupposes a natural order of topics and arguments which is prior to, and overrides the results of, encounters between the old and new vocabularies...Instead [she] would drop the idea of such foundations. [She] would regard the justification of liberal society simply as a matter of historical comparisons with other attempts at social organization- those of the past and those envisaged by utopians...This would mean that liberalism could not be justified, and Nazi or Marxist enemies of liberalism refuted by driving the latter up an argumentative wall- forcing them to admit that liberalism has a "moral privilege" which their own values lacked...any attempt to drive one's opponent up an argumentative wall fails when the wall against he is driven comes to be seen as one more vocabulary, one more way of describing things...\textsuperscript{109}.

Either Rorty adopts a metanarrative and explains why the public/private split is something that we should not abandon, or he must allow that self-creators, who prefer Nazism over liberalism, are entitled to pursue their projects of self-creation into the public realm. Rorty eschews the former option and hopes that appealing to the poetic visions of our literary moral advisors will help us to avoid the latter scenario.

\textsuperscript{108} See, in particular, the problems that Rorty has with Foucault in chapter four.

\textsuperscript{109} Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 53.
I also said that literature and politics are the spheres to which contemporary intellectuals look when they worry about ends rather than means. I can now add the corollary that these are the areas to which we should look for a charter of a liberal society. We need a redescription of liberalism as the hope that culture as a whole can be "poeticized" rather than as the Enlightenment hope that it can be "rationalized" or "scientized". If circularity or repetition is ever the right move, then it is not at the points Rorty allows, viz., liberal beliefs about rights, institutions, etc. For Rorty, these institutions themselves are fundamental points of commitment.

Such fragile, flawed institutions, the creation of the last three hundred years, are humanity's most precious achievements...[the best means] ...to Rawls' two principles...[it is] possible that they may vanish by the year 2100 [there is]...nothing to prevent the future being, as Orwell said, "a boot stamping down on a human face forever" Nothing is more important than the preservation of these liberal institutions.

But in the previous section of this chapter I argued that there is a layer of cognitive connection beneath these commitments to liberal rights and institutions - our understanding of what we are as goal-functional creatures or agents. For Rorty, there is no cognitive move to be made in further support of liberalism. For those of us who agree with this

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110 Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 53.
position, there is. For Rorty our having landed in liberalism is an historical accident; for us liberalism is the outcome of not just any history, but of a certain cognitive one with fairly irresistible connections to certain fundamentals of liberalism.

Solidarity, convergence in belief, is an index that tells us that these beliefs are working. Solidarity shows us that these beliefs have been tested and found goal-functional for many agents. So when we encounter the considerable solidarity around liberal institutions, there is evidence that liberal institutions connect with the way agents see themselves and the world. "Liberalism works" because it interacts with the two realms identified in the metanarrative of pragmatism. The world has some constant causal routes. Descriptions do not catch on, do not enter our solidarity, without hooking onto those causal routes. Solidarity around functional descriptions of the world is evidence that these descriptions are beliefs that work for many goal-functional agents. Liberal institutions enjoy a convergence of support because of the way they interact, perhaps even help to express, a functional description of ourselves. Why are the familiar rights to non-interference protections that are a part of the solidarity of so many agents? They are found useful for agents no matter what particular narrative they may be pursuing. In all of the experiments in living undertaken by the diverse set of goal-functional creatures, there are metanarratively describable commonalities, 'contingent necessities', that obtain and are protected by these basic rights. Each diverse

113 See the section on Habermas in chapter four.
experimenter who finds these protections useful adds to the solidarity around these rights. Having made the connection between these rights and a metanarrative of what it is to be a goal-functional creature is adding a further cognitive layer that is instrumental to protecting these liberal institutions. There is more than poetry behind our "we-consciousness".

In contrast, Rorty believes that redescribing the blind impress that history has handed us does not culminate in a 'discovery' about a set of continuities behind the web of beliefs and desires that each of us are, instead, it is part of an non-teleological process of description and redescription. Rorty's elimination of the possibility of discovering the self can be diagnosed as a consequence of the way that he construes 'an account of the self'. As we saw in the last section, a metanarrative of the self, contra Sandel, need not specify any particular desires or beliefs as the goal of its inquiry, instead, the structure in which such beliefs and desires can be realized is the goal of understanding selfhood itself. While this may not be a 'discovery' in the sense that this account of the self exists antecedent to, and independent of our practices. But it is a goal of inquiry, a possible 'discovery', that can be attained by sufficient self-consciousness by those in vocabularies that allow for autonomous, rational goal-functionality. Once achieved, this metanarrative of the self can stand as a cognitive basis for the protection and furtherance of the basic rights that form the core of liberalism.

Unless we are metaphysicians or theologians, it is a contingency
that goal-functional creatures like us have occurred. A biological type like ours might have evolved into creatures who were not goal-functional, surviving perhaps, through some complex set of reactive instincts, uncontrollable through cognitive states. There is, then, no pretension to an ahistorical necessity when we say "creature like us". So when we say that goal-functionality requires something, this is not to be understood as suggesting that there is some ahistorical necessity about this requirement. Rather, it is a relation of necessity arising out of the contingent circumstance of there being selves which, if they are describable at all, are describable in terms of their goal-functionality. It is a historically conditioned necessity whose occurrence is contingent upon the existence of creatures with these properties.

However, once the claim that there is no metanarrative of the self is countered, it becomes possible to give an account of a set of rights that need to be protected if we agree to protect the structure that all creatures capable of practicality share. You cannot be a thinking, describing, language-using, conscious creature and not be goal-functional. If you want to protect what you are, and you are self-conscious about the connection between the metanarrative and these basic rights, can you coherently reject a commitment to those rights?

A contingency that faces us is the gap between the justification of a normative claim and that claim actually being binding on the relevant agents. No theory about 'the best way to live together' can claim to be able to 'wring assent from a stone'\textsuperscript{114}. Rorty is alive to this sort of contingency when he writes that the "overlap\textsuperscript{115}" between our

\textsuperscript{114} Roscoe Pound, \textit{An Introduction to the Philosophy of Law}, 1954.
different final vocabularies may "...not produce a reason to care about suffering..."\textsuperscript{116}. The egoist, engaging in prudential reasoning to the exclusion of the interests of most, if not all, others can resist any premises that have as their outcome a diminishment of the egoist's interests. No argument can force the egoist to care. However, egoists benefit from there being some we-intentions in place. But while the egoist knows that can be advantageous to defect, the egoist cannot have that view become general without a diminishment of his interests. So let us leave the egoist's position to the side, for there is little reason to believe that egoists want their position to be our political morality. Instead, we begin with the fundamental question of political morality, which can be put in this form, "Given that we do want to live together, what is the best way to live together?" Notice that this question, like the very idea of a 'we-intention' itself, implies that the answer must be something that we would be able to reach agreement upon. And if we are trying to get as much agreement as possible, if we wish to have as many individuals signal their willingness to let the normatives so chosen be causal for them, we will try to find some answer that can be agreed to by as many agents as possible. Since the metanarrative is presupposed in every narrative, and this dependency can be recognized, the possibility of agreement to these basic protections is made more likely. Since each agent, despite the diverse nature of their particular narrative, will be using the metanarratively identified features in the pursuit of goals, whatever


\textsuperscript{116} Richard Rorty, ibid., p. 93.
they are, the protection afforded by the implied basic rights will be useful for every agent.

"What is the best way to live together?" is the fundamental question of political morality. If you are committed to protection the kinds of creatures that each of us are, then the related terms required to express what we are must be clarified. If, as a Dewey might say, we are creatures that are autonomous and practical, the implications of agreeing to protect such a creature will lead us directly to the rights identified in the last section of this chapter. The basic rights identified as justified by the metanarrative of pragmatism do not settle all of the questions that that fundamental question raises. It only settles the question of which rights are necessary if we are to protect those features which are necessary for practicality. There may be other things that we wish to protect or further too. The rights implied by the metanarrative of pragmatism, because of their intimate connection with what each of us is (and presumably each of us wants 'what we are' protected) is very likely to get the agreement that such standards require in order to be useful we-intentions. So the metanarratively endorsed rights are a necessary part of the answer to "what is the best way to live together" if we are committed to protecting what we are. A sufficient answer to the question will involve many narrative details about what we happen to value at this historical moment. Therefore no sufficient answer to the question can be drawn from the implications of the metanarrative alone.

This distinction between an account of rights that are a necessary part of the answer to questions of political morality\textsuperscript{117} and answers
from rights alone that are **sufficient** to settle questions of political morality needs a little reinforcing. H.L.A. Hart, in his critique of Nozick, writes

> Even if a social philosophy can draw its morality as Nozick assumes only from a single source; even if that source is individual rights, so that the only moral wrongdoing consists in the wrongs done to individuals that violate those rights...[should those rights be purely, as Bentham called them, negative services of others, |or as we have been calling them, non-interference rights]|?118

Hart believes that Nozick is mistaken in believing that individual rights provide sufficient resources to settle issues raised by the question, "What is the best way to live together?" Hart's diagnosis is on the mark. But Nozick, it should be recalled, is writing at an historical moment when theorists took on the task of providing complete alternatives to the then dominant utilitarian views.

In the conflict between the Egalitarianism of Rawls119 and Dworkin120 and the Libertarianism of Nozick121, a symmetry of justification that is relevant to our distinction between necessary and sufficient answers presents itself. In justifying a Libertarian state, with a minimum of redistribution and a maximum of economic liberty,

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117 Which is all that is claimed for the rights identified by the metanarrative of pragmatism.
Nozick argued for a 'thick' conception of the individual, and thereby, a conception of justice controlled by the implications of his scheme of individual rights. For Nozick, an individual's talents and abilities are morally significant to how the individual must be treated, and this thick concept of the person limited the legitimate range of the state's redistribution activities. As correlative ideas, the 'thickness' of the moral space occupied by the rights of the individual left only a 'thin' area in which the state could legitimately operate. Thus the "nightwatchman state", which exists mainly to protect each individual's rights to non-interference and the orderly transfer of property, is the only state thin enough to fit in the space left by Nozick's thick theory of individual rights. In symmetrical contrast, the basic rights that are justified by Rawls and Dworkin do not include the extensive property rights that add the thickness to Nozick's scheme of basic rights. This 'thinness' in Rawls and Dworkin's basic rights scheme leaves more moral space open for the distributive activities undertaken by the 'thicker' state. The redistribution necessary to achieve egalitarian aims, then, can be accomplished without any violation of individual rights. In the Libertarian scheme, individual rights are thick and the state is thin. In the Egalitarian scheme, the state is thick and individual rights are thin.

Both of these schemes supply theories of both distributive justice and individual rights. Given the influence that these streams of thought in liberalism have had, one might be led to expect that every theory of liberalism would take on the task of justifying both a theory of individual rights and a scheme of distributive justice. As we, and
Rorty, can appreciate, it is a contingency that liberal theory developed this way. While that contingency may shape our expectations about the content that a political morality does advance, it need not control our view of what a defensible liberal political morality must advance. The metanarrative of pragmatism does not imply both a scheme of basic rights and a theory of distributive justice, but it does provide a basis that implies enough normative content to be recognizable as a liberal political morality. Note too that these 'thin' rights exist in the overlap of agreement between Rawls and Nozick. The claim that these basic rights go to a justification that is more fundamental than other normative standards can explain this agreement between these two contrasting theorists, and explains why Rawls thought that in cases of conflict between his first principle (liberty) and his second principle (the 'maximin' criterion of distributive justice), that the first principle is to take priority. A plausible explanation of the fact that agreement on these basic rights is more solid than agreement on distributive justice questions is that these rights connect with more fundamental and common aspects of each of us. There is no need, on this vocabulary based approach, to invoke Enlightenment authorities, and claim that these rights are guaranteed by a foundationalism starting with "natural reason" or "God".

Rorty writes

Expanding the range of our present "we" [the we-intention to be liberals] ...is one of the two projects which an ironist liberal takes to be ends in themselves, the other being self-invention.
(But by "end in itself", of course, she means only "project which I cannot imagine defending on the basis of non-circular argument").

If we are to expand the scope of our liberal we-intentions, it seems probable that finding a justification that picks up on features across the set of describers will promote or be causal of a greater amount of expanding solidarity than justifications that require a shared appreciation of some particular, historical causation.

It is central to the idea of a liberal society that, in respect to words as opposed to deeds, persuasion as opposed to force, anything goes. This openmindedness should not be fostered because, as Scripture teaches, Truth is great and will prevail, nor because, as Milton suggests, Truth will always win in a free and open encounter. It should be fostered for its own sake. A liberal society is one which is content to call "true" whatever the upshot of such encounters turns out to be. That is why a liberal society is badly served by the attempt to provide it with "philosophical foundations". For the attempt to provide such foundations presupposes a natural order of topics and arguments which is prior to, and overrides the results of, encounters between the old and new vocabularies.

The rights to non-interference set out as implications of the metanarrative of pragmatism do not override the results of encounters between old and new vocabularies. They enable there to be the

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conditions where the freedom of expression necessary for such encounters is in place. The rights articulated make it possible to see why it 'should be' so that 'persuasion rather than force' is the rule in liberal society. Although such commitments can be, as they are for Rorty, commitments which rest on no further beliefs, if the metanarrative of pragmatism and its implications are accepted, then liberals can justify these commitments by appealing to the presuppositions of all vocabularies and all describers. If a metanarrative of pragmatism is allowed, then we have a further layer of reasons to justify where our commitments lie. If we wish to expand liberalism beyond the borders of current liberal socialization, as Rorty does, this extra cognitive layer's pragmatic credentials are assured.

Rorty imagines that there will be future intellectuals who will have, as he already has, given up the quest for any further cognitive layer of justification for liberal institutions.

In the ideal liberal society, the intellectuals would still be ironist, although the non-intellectuals would not. The latter would, however, be commonsensically nominalist and historicist. So they would see themselves as contingent through and through, without feeling any particular doubts about the contingencies that they happened to be... Such a person would not need a justification for her sense of human solidarity, for she was not raised to play the language game in which one asks and gets justifications for that sort of belief...124

If we do become the types of creatures who do not ask the kinds of

124 Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 87.
justificatory questions that we, at present, often do, then the relation of the metanarrative of pragmatism will no longer be of any interest. But as a historical contingency, we have been socialized into believing that a justification that can go an extra cognitive layer is a better justification. How else can we explain the popularity of the neo-Kantian political philosophy of Nozick, Rawls and Dworkin? We put people in jail, give and take away opportunities, and tolerate social unrest and economic damage all in the name of the rights that are the core of our liberal institutions. Can we wield such powerful instruments "without feeling any particular doubts about the contingencies that they happened to be..."? It takes a certain lack of self-consciousness to use coercion to achieve some ends, which is an integral part of government, including liberal governments, "without feeling any particular doubts..." about the justification of such measures.

If a pragmatist wants to protect liberal institutions and help them to flourish, and there is an available justification for why those institutions should be preserved, then why would that pragmatist abandon it?

There is, then, an historical narrative available about the attractiveness of rights that protect the goal-functional process. If agents believe that they require a process to get any satisfaction from the exercise of their abilities, it is empirically probable that they will want to take steps to protect that process. When that belief is caused by the recognition that there is a metanarrative which applies to all

125 Richard Rorty, Ibid. p. 87.
members of the set which participate in the common practice of trying to live together, liberals may find their commitment and others' willingness to agree to such protections enhanced by the availability of such a justification. Of course, this degree of self-consciousness may, contingently, not obtain in any given society. But when it does, it seems probable that it would be causal of a greater amount of solidarity around this package of rights. If we wish to widen the scope of our liberal we-intentions, providing a cognitive means for all agents, even those with entirely different socializations, to come to agreement on these basic rights, the metanarrative of pragmatism is a useful tool.

Since it is the case that we cannot expect agreement on everything, it is inevitable and even justifiable to concede to disagreements on those things that do not conflict with the metanarrative. It is a goal of this thin scheme of rights to produce the protection of a maximum range of goal-functionality compatible with a like protection for all. There will be many political concerns and questions that cannot be resolved by the materials of the metanarratively implied rights. If the rights that are identified by the metanarrative of pragmatism really are fundamental, if they are really normative claims that are based on things that we cannot describe our way out of, then this is just what we should expect. As goal-functional creatures, we are very plastic, and our actual goals do and will change dramatically. What does not change is that we are goal-functional, and since that fundamental property of us is only the metanarrative, and not the narrative of our lives, we should not expect it to figure in all of the answers that are grappled
with in the realm of political morality. In those areas left open, issues not settled by basic rights, contingency reigns. Perhaps poets will be the advisors who fill in this content. But if the liberal institutions that are to host such a change are to survive, pragmatic liberals should use the best resources available to keep agents committed to those institutions. To do that job, until our socialization changes into something resembling Rorty’s ideal liberal society, a metanarrative is more useful than poetry.

Room for irony about the types of liberals that we are is available on this view. We may be in a state of commitment to the basic rights, and thereby liberalism, but we may at the same time have ‘indissolvable doubts’ about our commitments to, for example, distributive justice schemes, but find ourselves acting on those doubtful answers nevertheless.

With the thin basic rights in place, we can continue self-creating, enjoying the freedom necessary for such pursuits in the private realm, and extend our self-creation as far into the public realm as the metanarratively endorsed rights allow. Here we have a way to get the pragmatic benefits of contingency, the new descriptions that emerge out of self-creation, without the need for the arbitrary introduction of a public/private split. He claims that the public and private realms are "forever incommensurable". Interestingly, Rorty himself does not think that this public/private split can stand without a further layer of cognitive justification. This is surprising in light of Rorty’s other claim that "I shall try to show that the vocabulary of Enlightenment

\[127\] Richard Rorty, Ibid., p. xv.
rationalism, although it was essential to the beginnings of liberal democracy, has become an impediment to the preservation and progress of democratic societies"\textsuperscript{128}. This appeal to a concept that transcends both spheres, using "incommensurability" and backsliding into the style of justification that he wishes to describe as an "impediment", shows the firm grip that such justificatory practices have on so many of us at this historical moment. Ironically, there is a justification for the public/private split that does not require some essentialist view of the properties that differentiate our public and private vocabularies. They are both, after all, beliefs differing only in the audiences that they are intended to attract. It is the metanarrative of pragmatism that implies that we should protect the belief-forming mechanism of goal-functional creatures, and that in order to do that effectively, we should allow as much room for experimentation as possible compatible with respecting the symmetrical rights of others.

We wondered, in chapter two, if there was anything that is beyond the scope of irony. Since Rorty does not think that he is committed to a metanarrative, he will claim that there is nothing that is deeper than the contingent words that form our particular final vocabularies. Although he finds considerable overlap in our final vocabularies on the importance of "avoiding cruelty", and therefore chooses that 'thin' item to support an allegiance to liberal institutions, he sees no further cognitive resources available to justify why we should not be cruel. Since the basis of Rorty's liberalism is only this contingent belief that 'cruelty is the worst thing that we do', Rorty recognizes that we may

\textsuperscript{128} Richard Rorty, \textit{Contingency, irony and solidarity}, Cambridge University Press, 1989 p. 44.
lose that commitment, for it arose by historical accident and serendipity is keeping it in place. Liberalism, for Rorty, is well within the grasp of irony, and the public/private distinction is a way to keep the serendipitous result of our history in place, but it too is within the grasp of irony. Rorty can't give an account of why 'incommensurability' will suffice as a means to justify protecting this partition in place, since to do so will force him into giving a metanarrative explaining why these two spheres can't be compared. For Rorty, everything is vulnerable to redescription.

Yet we have found something that no describer can describe his way out of, since it is required for the very activity of description itself; the metanarrative of pragmatism. If describing is a "doing", if "words are deeds", then we cannot self-consciously use a vocabulary without also realizing that we are acting. Even the arch-ironists, the master redescribers, cannot redescribe their way out of what is required for description. But if this metanarrative cannot be redescribed away, then it remains in place regardless of the changes that may occur in our final vocabularies. In that sense, it is deeper than our final vocabularies. It is beneath description. At this limit of contingency, there is a border that irony cannot cross. If we cannot describe our way out of the contingent necessities of description, then we cannot use the contingency-belief to produce 'indissolvable doubts' about this metanarrative. Rorty believes he needs the public/private distinction because he thinks that the contingency-belief can be used to describe our way out of anything, including a commitment to liberal institutions. But if the implications of protecting the metanarratively identified
elements of our core selves really are the basic rights of liberalism, then those who are sufficiently self-conscious about the metanarrative of describers, of description itself, will find a limit to the power of redescription, and a deeper cognitive layer to justify their solidarity around the basic rights of liberalism.
Chapter Four; Liberalism

Chapter Summary

We turn now to Rorty's critique of Foucault, Dworkin and Habermas' positions on political morality.

Rorty's critique of Foucault is that his objection to liberalism rests on a "core self". Rorty claims that Foucault's metaphysical remnant of the self is something which has properties that are independent of acculturation and thus can be deformed by acculturation. It has been shown in chapter three, however, that Rorty's own view can pass muster as a describer of contingency within the context of goal-functionality only with his own reliance on a core self. A core self, comprised of the contingent necessities required to describe a creature capable of practicality, is required in the vocabulary to which Rorty seeks commitment. So while Rorty's attack on Foucault's radical rejection of we-intentions is plausible, he cannot consistently criticize Foucault for the mere presence of a core self.

Habermas too is thought to have a metaphysical remnant in his view. Habermas values 'free and open' communication, contingently, as does Rorty, but in addition as a means to an 'end-of-history' convergence. In this writer's view, universal, or even widespread, convergence of belief is a mark of those beliefs 'working' or being goal-functional. What reason do we have to believe that the points of convergence will stop changing and that the convergence will be universal? To know that there will be a finality of convergence, one would have to glean that from the world's essence, as it were -- that it was so and it would continue as it was -- that it itself is nomological. For Rorty this is a representationalist move with a metaphysics behind it. If Habermas is to avoid such charges he should hold, along with the view advanced here, that the functional properties of the world are the testing ground for beliefs. Our categories of interpretation may forever keep improving or changing and that would keep final convergence from obtaining. For that to
be otherwise, one would have to know when one had formed the 'best possible' vocabulary. Changes in the world's apparently 'constant functions' might be undetectable to us at this moment in history. Moreover, the ultimate pattern of the functions of the world may themselves change. Therefore even if the questions remain the same, the answers may change. All we are entitled to believe that we know is what we have gained from testing, interacting with the world through action. There is likewise no apparent reason to believe that convergence of beliefs would become universal through open inquiry. Although Habermas does not explicitly state that the world has an essence, he implicitly relies on that idea when he sets his 'end-of-history' convergence as the criterion of truth. Rorty is right about Habermas' hidden metaphysics, anything so static as an end-of-history' convergence would require that the world be law-like and that we know those laws. Such an anticipation would be based on a metaphysics.

Dworkin protests that he is describing the practices around which contemporary liberal society is convergent. In giving a principled account of this convergence he believes himself to be neutral on metaphysical matters. Rorty may have been misled by Dworkin's earlier writings and be mistaken in diagnosing a metaphysical element in Dworkin's current work. If we take Dworkin at his word, however, a more serious problem emerges. If he is just describing our practices, albeit at a more abstract level than we are perhaps accustomed to, a 'principled' level, what is the prescriptive force of such a description? Should we stay true to our history just because it is our history? If that were the case, we would have never reached the liberal institutions to which Dworkin is committed. Taking convergence as a sign that some beliefs are working does point us in the direction of a further cognitive layer. If liberalism works, if it is a set of beliefs that attracts, and keeps attracting more solid commitment, then we can explain that convergence by reference to the metanarrative. Liberalism works because liberal rights protect the process of goal-functionality. It
hooks onto the functions that comprise the metanarratively describable way that we are and allows us to interact with the world and each other in a way that furthers one of our primary functions, the formation and testing of beliefs.

While Rorty is adept at diagnosing metaphysical tendencies in various writers, he has not sufficiently diagnosed his own hidden metanarrative of pragmatism. The metanarrative does not frustrate Rorty’s main goals, and he need not resist embracing it. It allows for solidarity, since it is presupposed in the very idea of creatures that form beliefs and thus creatures who can converge around beliefs. It allows for contingency, since the properties it ascribes to us are those properties which make it possible for us to change the content of our cognitive states. It even helps to explain why we are driven, in our interaction with a recalcitrant world, to change. Finally, since it does not fix the answers to any but the most basic of our questions, it allows for irony. We will likely always act with an awareness of the contingency of our commitments, with doubts about those parts of our final vocabularies left, as they must be, undetermined by the metanarrative.
Rorty writes approvingly of historicist thinkers:

They have denied that there is such a thing as "human nature" or "the deepest nature of the self". Their strategy has been to insist that socialization, and thus social circumstance, goes all the way down - that there is nothing "beneath" socialization or prior to history which is definatory of the human.

However, some historicists have not become self-conscious enough about the traces of metaphysics in their views. As indicated in the previous chapter, Rorty, through his commitment to a vocabulary that is rich enough to describe pragmatic creatures, also relies on a view of 'the way we are'. Nevertheless, when Rorty turns his attention to diagnosing the 'hidden metaphysics' in other theorists, his acuteness as a critic is clearly demonstrated.

Foucault is, according to Rorty, an "ironist without being a liberal". Like all ironists, Foucault has rejected the representationalist picture which posits a representational relation between beliefs and their justifiers. Instead, he is interested in redescribing truth in terms of the interests that it serves.

Each society has its regime of truth, its "general politics" of truth, that is, the types of discourse it harbours and causes to function as true; the mechanisms and instances which enable one to distinguish true from false statements, the way in

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2 Ibid, p. 65.
which each is sanctioned; the techniques and procedures which are valorised for obtaining truth; the status of those who are charged with saying what counts as true.3

As a prime example of the way in which ironists wield the power of redescription, Foucault takes our discourse surrounding truth and redescribes it as a means of maintaining control. Foucault's analysis of truth pays particular attention to the use of 'truth' by those who maintain and enhance their power through such a concept. In this way, Foucault is concerned with the political dimension of truth rather than its epistemological status. According to Rorty's reading, Foucault, along with other anti-liberals4, posits that the tolerance and pluralism of liberal institutions are a subtle, but successful, means to control and discipline the interactions of members of such societies. Liberalism, it could be argued, is the political morality, the set of we-intentions, which is the least incompatible with self-creation. However, any we-intentions, including liberal institutions, are based on certain points of consensus, and if this consensus or solidarity has some substantive content, it will restrain some individuals from pursuing their projects of self-creation. At times, at least, the values that solidarity and self-creation embody will be inversely related. Rorty wishes to compartmentalize these competing values to the different spheres of public and private activity, but Foucault can be seen as


having a different agenda. Foucault does not want his attempt at self-creation limited by the constraints of solidarity. Rorty cannot escape the complaints of such radical redescribers if the descriptions of self-creation and solidarity are to hold some content. People cannot escape from the process of acculturation without undermining to some degree our present solidarity. Rorty is amenable to compromise, whereas Foucault can be read as if he were not. Foucault's concern for the freedom of individuals to fully self-create is at odds with the contingent liberal solidarity that Rorty is committed to maintaining. Rorty says, "The compromise advocated in this book amounts to saying: Privatize the Nietzschean-Sartrean-Foucauldian attempt at authenticity and purity, in order to prevent yourself from slipping into a political attitude which will lead you to think that there is some social goal more important than avoiding cruelty..."5 What could Rorty say to a social reformer who wishes to privilege self-creation over solidarity? Rorty endorses, "...the poet and the revolutionary [who] are protesting in the name of society itself against those aspects of society that are unfaithful to its own self-image..."6 Is there a 'privileged representation' of 'our self-image' that determines when a critique is too radical? Is their something about our vocabulary which allows us to properly adjudicate conflicts between the public and the private? This would be uniting the public and the private in a single metanarrative which would violate his express claim that the two

6 Ibid., p. 60.
spheres are "...forever incommensurable...". It is not even clear that Rorty can find ground to claim that these two spheres are 'incommensurable' without 'backsliding' (as he would put it) into some metanarrative. As we saw in the previous chapter, without a metanarrative that fixes some normative ground upon which he can defend his liberal position, Rorty cannot outflank critics of liberal institutions. "For reasons already given, I do not think that there are any plain moral facts out there in the world, nor any truths independent of language, nor any neutral ground on which to stand and argue that either torture or kindness are preferable to each other...". Rorty cannot do what he denies can be done, finding some neutral ground upon which to face liberal critics, "forcing them to admit that liberalism has a "moral privilege" which their own values lacked ...any attempt to drive one's opponent up an argumentative wall fails when the wall against he is driven comes to be seen as one more vocabulary, one more way of describing things...". 

While Rorty approves of Foucault's ironism, he does not agree with Foucault's opposition to liberal institutions. In order to criticize Foucault, he reveals a vestige of metaphysics.

Foucault would not appreciate my suggestion that his books can be assimilated into a liberal, reformist political structure. I think that part of the explanation for his reaction would be that despite his agreement with Mead, Sellars and Habermas

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7 Ibid, p. xv.
8 Ibid, p. xv.
9 Ibid, p. 53.
that the self, the human subject, is simply whatever acculturation makes of it, he still thinks in terms of something deep within human beings which is deformed by acculturation\(^\text{10}\).

This 'core self, "deep within human beings which is deformed by acculturation"\(^\text{11}\), is something that can form the basis of a metanarrative, something extra-vocabularic with independent properties which serves to ground Foucault's idea of 'being deformed by acculturation'. Foucault's core self is at least a description of the kind of creature that can be shaped, and thus potentially deformed, by the acquisition of we-intentions. If we-intentions can be impressed on such a creature, its self-creation will be restricted, and thereby such a society will restrict self-creation. Rorty's rejoinder is that Foucault's objection is "typical of contemporary radicalism -- to see society as intrinsically dehumanizing"\(^\text{12}\) and this "longing for total revolution"\(^\text{13}\) should be "reserved for private life"\(^\text{14}\). Despite the plausibility of Rorty's representation and critique of Foucault, the Rorty who can pass muster as a pragmatist and an exponent of contingency should not, as we have seen, criticize others for their use of a core self. As we saw in the previous chapter, without a reliance on a core self Rorty cannot even explain what cruelty is nor why it would be something that we want to avoid\(^\text{15}\). Once the ideas of interests and agency are in place,

\(^{10}\)Ibid, p. 64.
\(^{11}\)Ibid, p. 64.
\(^{12}\)Ibid, p. 65.
\(^{13}\)Ibid, p. 65.
\(^{14}\)Ibid, p. 65.
\(^{15}\)Ibid, p. 65.
providing just such a core, these problems are overcome.

Where Rorty should focus his criticism is on whether Foucault’s position can provide a vocabulary where the idea of revolution is expressible when there is no inculcation of we-intentions. One wonders how vocabularies, collections of rules for the uses of words, would be possible without we-intentions.

2] Dworkin

Although Dworkin has, somewhat tongue in cheek, called his view of liberalism, "Natural Law Revisited"\(^{16}\), the importance of 'divine voices' to liberal theory has long ago passed. Dworkin is interested in describing 'our practices' and they cannot be adequately explained without reference to binding moral principles. His view maintains that 'our legal practices' could best be explained if we posit certain fundamental rights.

Rorty takes Dworkin’s attempt to show the seriousness of individual rights as evidence of the continued existence of a metaphysical component in contemporary liberalism. "Ronald Dworkin and others who take the notion of ahistorical human 'rights' seriously serve as examples of the first absolutist pole."\(^{17}\). Yet Dworkin’s views are built upon an attempt to give the best interpretation of liberalism, not to show how the principles that figure in that interpretation are,

\(^{15}\) See chapter three, pp. 154-158


in some way, representing an "intrinsic human nature" that serves, Enlightenment-style, as an external authority that is represented in our justified normative beliefs. Treating individuals with 'equal respect and concern' is, for Dworkin, the most fundamental conception of equality. We should read 'fundamental', however, in terms of interpretive concepts that are useful for giving a good account of 'our practices', not as 'ahistorical metaphysical absolutes'. Dworkin does not defend his view of liberal equality rights in the same terms that Rorty uses to describe the nonironical quest for certainty; "...an order beyond time and change which both determines the point of human existence and establishes a hierarchy of responsibilities...". Dworkin thinks that if we are attempting to give an account of the principles that cohere and make intelligible the point of our actual practices, we will be led to this conception. The test of his view of liberalism, that it make sense of the diverse strategies that 'liberals' undertake as strategic policies, keeps the authority for our normative beliefs within the realm of belief. He explicitly eschews the idea that the rights he defends have any 'objective' or absolute status.

I have no interest in trying to compose a general defense of the objectivity of my interpretive or legal or moral opinions. In fact, I think that the whole issue of objectivity, which so dominates

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contemporary theory in these areas, is a kind of fake.\textsuperscript{21}

It is a mistake to label Dworkin an "absolutist" for attempting to draw a distinction between the justification of different beliefs. He thinks that there can be a distinction between judgements of taste, such as the preference for chocolate ice cream, and moral and scientific judgements. All of these judgements are theory-laden, there are no brute facts existing independently of theories like "furniture of the universe"\textsuperscript{22}, but the available apparatus, the number of interconnected beliefs, for testing the coherence of such judgements varies in complexity.

Ice cream opinions are not sufficiently interconnected with and dependent upon other beliefs and attitudes to allow a taste for chocolate, once formed, to conflict with anything else.\textsuperscript{23}

Legal decision making, unlike ice-cream purchases, is encumbered by the decisions that figure in the institutional history of the law. Interpreting the institution in order to strengthen a justification is, for Dworkin, an additional theoretical step\textsuperscript{24}.

It is true that these two departments of interpretive convictions are not wholly insulated from each other; my claim is rather that they are, for each person, sufficiently insulated to give

\textsuperscript{22}Ibid p. 173.
\textsuperscript{23}Ibid p. 170.
\textsuperscript{24}Just how important institutional fidelity, "integrity" as he calls it, is to Dworkin's account of judicial decision making is controversial. For a discussion of whether Dworkin should be seen as a relativist in light of his commitment to our particular, historically conditioned institutional history, see Roger Shiner, Norm and Nature; The Movements of Legal Thought, Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1992, p. 300, note 29.
friction and therefore sense to anyone's interpretive analysis.25

Dworkin should be allowed levels of theoretical embeddedness, such as the difference between well-embedded claims about the nature of the legal institution (as opposed to less embedded resolutions to hard cases involving new situations) without having to hold that the nature of the interpretive enterprise is ultimately anchored in some metaphysical bedrock.26 How such frank admissions, such as "I am defending an interpretation of our own political culture, not an abstract and timeless political morality..."27 can be reconciled with the label "absolutist" is a problem best left [perhaps] to ironist interpreters.

In Taking Rights Seriously, Dworkin argued that there can be one right answer, even in hard cases.28 In order to spell out what that one right answer might be, Dworkin invented the heuristic device of Hercules, a wonder judge with mythical powers.

Nevertheless I insist that the process, even in hard cases can sensibly be said to be aimed at discovering, rather than just inventing the rights of the parties concerned, and that the political justification of the process depends on the soundness of that characterization.29

25 Ibid. p. 170.
26 See also R. M. Dworkin, "Interpretive Concepts" Law's Empire, Harvard University Press, 1986 pp 45-86.
With superhuman powers of retention, and armed with an ideal version of Dworkin's principled picture of the law, Hercules is able to give effect to what "...justice requires...". Perhaps it is this way of speaking that fuels Rorty's anti-foundationalist fires; Dworkin gives the impression of 'absolutism' with his talk of discovery in the inventive art of judicial decision-making.

Without any other available textual support for Rorty's charge of absolutism, it appears that Rorty has been lured into the common trap of conflating Dworkin with his superhuman invention. Hercules does not exist and is merely a metaphorical device which allows a Herculean hypothetical critical perspective to focus a deep background of constitutive theory. Dworkin invites judges to actively pursue the Herculean ideal, attempting to give a principled, rights-based justification for all of their decisions, but he does not believe that mortal judges will thereby become Hercules. "But of course, though we as social critics know that mistakes will be made, we do not know when because we are not Hercules either".

Since the explanation of Rorty's description of Dworkin as an absolutist is that Rorty conflates the 'social critic' with Dworkin's metaphorical ideal exponent, there is a kind of poetic justice. Rorty wants to see science; language; and morality in terms of "...the history

of metaphor..."32. If we can diagnose Rorty's misunderstanding of Dworkin project as the failure to distinguish Dworkin the actual social critic from Dworkin's metaphorical exponent, then we may have a symbolic incident that illuminates the shortcomings of privileging the metaphorical over the literal. Are we not limiting the use of metaphor if our myths are taken literally?

A similarity between Dworkin and Rorty on the source of obligation suggests a further reason why Rorty has misidentified Dworkin as a target for his anti-metaphysical program. Solidarity, for Rorty, is

...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 than ourselves as included in this range of "us".33...we have a moral obligation to feel a sense of solidarity with all other human beings34.

For Rorty, solidarity is a "powerful piece of rhetoric"35 that needs to be respected, but disengaged from the theological and philosophical "presuppositions"36 that helped bring it into currency in moral theorizing. It is an example of the ironist accepting certain beliefs even though the ironist recognizes that only circular arguments can be provided for this belief's support.

33 Ibid, p. 192.
34 Ibid, p. 190.
36 Ibid, p. 192.
Expanding the range of our present "we"...is one of the two projects which an ironist liberal takes to be ends in themselves, the other being self-invention. (But by "end in itself", of course, she means only "project which I can't imagine defending on the basis of noncircular argument")\(^{37}\).

Dworkin's views on the issue of political legitimacy and political obligation have a certain symmetry with this line of ironist argument: the best defense of political legitimacy -- the right of a political community to treat its members as having obligations in virtue of collective community decisions -- is to be found not in the hard terrain of contracts or duties of justice or obligation of fair play that might hold between strangers, where philosophers have hoped to find it, but in the more fertile ground of fraternity\(^{38}\).

Dworkin and Rorty have both abandoned the traditional approaches to justifying political obligation in terms of 'rational advantage' or in finding normative premises that mirror the properties of some external-to-belief account of an intrinsic human nature.

[A community of principle makes] the promise that law will chosen, changed, developed, and interpreted in a principled way. A community of principle, faithful to that promise, can claim the authority of a genuine associative community and can therefore claim moral legitimacy -- that its collective decisions

\(^{37}\)Ibid, p. 64, nt. 24.

are matters of obligation and not bare power — in the name of fraternity.39

Dworkin's use of fraternity has structural similarities to Rorty's use of solidarity; both concepts are used to explain political legitimacy; and both are difficult to defend without resorting to circular argument. Dworkin chooses "fraternity" because there is, implied by that word, the idea of obligations that cannot be accounted for in terms of a further cognitive layer, a metanarrative. He resists a contractarian explanation of our allegiance to the "community of principle" because he recognizes that such an account is unlikely to succeed. What reason could one offer an egoist to convince them that they were obligated, not simply obliged, to obey laws that conflict with their particular interests? Instead Dworkin appeals to an intuition that he hopes his readers share; the idea that some obligations, like fraternal obligations, which we seem to be unable to give a further justification, are sufficient to commit us to political institutions.

This explanation of political obligation leads us to abandon the hope of an external authority or a metanarrative that can serve as a deeper cognitive layer to justify our political institutions. The liberal ideal of legitimacy has been internalized: It can be defended only within the context of liberalism and as a choice between different conceptions of how liberalism should understand itself 40.

For the exercise in hand is one of discovery at least in this

40 For an example of how this internalized debate is developing, consult Peter De Marneffe, "Liberalism, Liberty and Neutrality", Philosophy and Public Affairs, Volume 19, number 3, Summer 1990, pp.253-274.
sense: discovering which view of the sovereign matters we
discuss sorts best with the convictions we each, together or
severally, have and retain about the best account of our common
practices.41

Rorty finds the idea of discovery suspect: "...The wrong way is to
think of it as urging us to recognize such a solidarity, as something
that exists antecedently to our recognition of it. For then we leave
ourselves open to the pointlessly skeptical question "Is this solidarity
real?"" However Dworkin protests that he is not asking this further
question, he is just describing our practices, albeit at a more abstract
level than we are perhaps accustomed to, a 'principled' level. In giving
a principled account of this convergence he believes himself to be
neutral on metaphysical matters. Dworkin simply wants us to be more
self-conscious about the particular way that history has shaped us.
Before we decide that "...democracies are now in a position to throw
away some of the ladders used in their own construction..." we
need to be able to describe the content of our practices so that the
self-image that we have collectively invented can continue to provide a
focus for our solidarity. For solidarity to function as a way to keep
 cruelty at bay, we need to answer not whether "solidarity is real", but
rather, "what our solidarity is about". He is articulating a clear picture
of what is entailed by Rorty’s expression, being "faithful to [societies’]
own self-image...". Rorty wants to maintain our commitment to

43 Ibid. p. 194.
liberal institutions, and one way to enhance our commitment is to have a clearer and more persuasive way of describing the normative content that shapes those institutions. Perhaps we have already had the last conceptual revolution that liberalism needs, but working out the implications of that conceptual revolution is a job that still requires more 'free and open encounter'. Rorty writes that "I think that contemporary liberal society already contains the institutions for its own improvement..."45. Isn't one of the institutions of our liberal society a forum for the principled discussion of our practices? Rorty goes on to say that "...Western social and political thought may have had the last conceptual revolution that 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 to be pretty much the last word"46. But partially understood concepts are not enough. Since we use such concepts in the distributions of burdens and benefits, through judicial decisions and legislative initiatives, an elaboration of what those concepts imply will help us understand how we can be faithful to those 'concepts' as situations change. On a more charitable reading, this could be seen as Dworkin's project.

On the other hand, perhaps Rorty has diagnosed Dworkin's disclaimers and decided that Dworkin protests too much. Dworkin does pronounce resolutions to many 'hard cases' and controversial

44 Ibid, p. 60.
issues. We should be in favour of affirmative action; distributive justice should aim at "equality of resources"; etc. In Dworkin's work we find description and prescription. Why should we stay true to our history? Why, besides predictability, is consistency with our history important? Is it just because it is our history? If that were the case, we would have never evolved the liberal institutions to which Dworkin is committed.

Rorty is entitled to believe that Dworkin has a 'core self' that deserves these rights because Dworkin makes claims which presuppose such a concept. However, his work has never specified what the content of that core self is supposed to be. Metaphysical reliances can be acts of omission as well as commission. When Dworkin says that individuals are supposed to be shown "equal respect and concern", Dworkin omits describing the reference of that basic imperative. Until the content of what it is to be a rights-holder is filled in, the claim that we are to be given equal amounts of respect and concern is formal and empty. Of course we can excogitate what properties that it is meant to have through the prescriptive judgements that Dworkin makes. But the implicit reliance on an unarticulated, and thus undefended, concept of the self remains as a metaphysical component in Dworkin's views. Rorty's diagnosis is again on the mark.

If liberalism works and it is a set of beliefs that attracts, and keeps attracting more solid commitment, then we are pointed in the direction of a further cognitive layer. Taking convergence as a sign

that some beliefs are working invites us to explain that convergence by reference to the metanarrative. Liberalism works because rights protect the process of goal-functionality, that is, these rights hook onto the functions that comprise the way that we are\textsuperscript{48}. There is a core self behind liberalism, and it has properties that can be functionally described. Liberalism, and the range of non-interference rights that it includes, allows us the freedom to interact with the world and each other in a way that furthers one of our primary functions, the formation and testing of beliefs.

### 3) Habermas

Rorty and Habermas have no political differences, "Our differences concern only the self-image which a democratic society should have, the rhetoric it should use to express its hopes..."\textsuperscript{49}. Rorty diagnoses a vestige of metaphysics in Habermas' justification of traditional liberal rights. Like J.S. Mill\textsuperscript{50}, the justification for 'free and open encounter' can be traced to the value of the vigorous pursuit of truth.

[Habermas] still insists on seeing the process of undistorted communication as convergent, and seeing that convergence as a guarantee of the "rationality" of such communication. The residual difference that I have with Habermas is his universalism makes him substitute such convergence for

\textsuperscript{48} See chapter three, section three and four.
\textsuperscript{50} Mill has many arguments for the liberty of thought and discussion, but the goal of finding, publicizing and justifying our truth claims unites many of his strategies. J. S. Mill, \textit{On Liberty}, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1978 (first pub. 1859), esp. pp.75-119.
ahistorical grounding, whereas my insistence on the contingency of language makes me very suspicious of the very idea of the "universal validity" which such convergence is supposed to underwrite.\textsuperscript{51}

Habermas is portrayed as valuing undistorted communication as a means to an 'end-of-history'\textsuperscript{52} convergence. Rorty thinks "Habermas wants to preserve the traditional story (common to Hegel and to Pierce) of asymptotic approach to \textit{foci imaginarii}..."\textsuperscript{53}. Habermas is not content to rest an account of truth on the \textit{de facto} consensus of a particular historical time and place. Agreeing that "truth" is a normative concept, the basis for separating a 'false' from a 'true' consensus is characterized in terms of "ideal speech conditions" which afford all participants in this communicative process, "a symmetrical distribution of chances to select and employ speech acts, when there is an effectively equality of opportunity for the assumption of dialogue roles."\textsuperscript{54} Rorty thinks that Habermas does not use a 'preestablished harmony between the human subject and the object of knowledge', and therefore succeeds in "...dropping the traditional epistemological-metaphysical problematic..."\textsuperscript{55}. Habermas agrees that we are in the 'cognicentric predicament', and that "truth belongs categorically to the world of thoughts (\textit{Gedanken} in Frege's sense)\textsuperscript{51,52,53,54,55}

\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. p. 68.
\textsuperscript{53} Ibid. p. 67.
and not to that of perceptions. With his view of 'ideal speech situations', we have a way of capturing the transcendence of claims of truth, and a way out of the extreme historicism that makes truth entirely reducible to beliefs held at a particular time and place. These 'ideal speech situations' are "counterfactual" and rarely, if ever, manifested, but they, and the undistorted convergence of belief to which they are a means, are an "ideal that can be more or less adequately approximated in reality, that can serve as a guide for the institutionalization of discourse and as a critical standard against which every actually achieved consensus can be measured". But Habermas warns, it is not "...an existing concept in Hegel's sense; for no historical reality matches the form of life that we can in principle characterize by reference to the ideal speech situation." This is the foci imaginarus that Rorty identifies. The 'end-of-history' convergence is excogitated from Habermas' consensus theory of truth;

I may ascribe a predicate to an object if and only if every other person who could enter into a dialogue with me would ascribe the same predicate to the same object, In order to distinguish true from false statements I make reference to the judgements of others -- in fact to the judgements of all others with whom I

56 Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien" (Theories of truth), Ed. by H. Fahrenbach, Wirklichkeit und Reflexion. Festschrift für W. Schulz, Pfullingen, p. 232.
58 Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien" (Theories of truth), Ed. by H. Fahrenbach, Wirklichkeit und Reflexion. Festschrift für W. Schulz, Pfullingen, p. 258-259.
could ever have a dialogue (among whom I counterfactually include all the dialogue partners I could find if my life history were coextensive with the history of mankind). The condition of truth of statements is the potential agreement of all others.\textsuperscript{60}

This approach avoids the relativism that is problematic for any theorist who admits that we are in the cognicentric predicament. By taking this approach, Habermas can be harmonized with H. Putnam's assertion that "Reason is, in this sense, both immanent (not to be found outside of concrete language games and institutions) and transcendent (a regulative idea that we use to criticize the conduct of all activities and institutions)"\textsuperscript{61}. Rorty, however, says that he wishes to "replace this with a story of increased willingness to live with plurality and to stop asking for universal validity"\textsuperscript{62}. If Habermas admits that we are not in possession ideal speech situations and that his criterion of truth is counterfactual, then 'living with plurality' appears to be unavoidable. But Rorty adds, "if the idea of human solidarity is simply the fortunate happenstance creation of modern times, then we no longer need a notion of "communicative reason" to substitute for that of "subject centered reason". We do not need to replace religion with a philosophical account of a healing and unifying power which will do the work once done by God"\textsuperscript{63}.

\textsuperscript{60} Jürgen Habermas, "Wahrheitstheorien" (Theories of truth), Ed. by H. Fahrenbach, \textit{Wirklichkeit und Reflexion. Festschrift für W. Schulz}, Pfullingen, p. 219.


\textsuperscript{63} Ibid, p. 68.
According to Rorty, Habermas is not content with a straightforward 'communitarian' theory of truth, where such a theory simply takes the *de facto* convergence as equivalent to truth. Nor does Habermas want to be a metaphysician who justifies the ideal of 'convergence across time' on the basis of a representationalist picture of an independent world. Instead the singularity of his criterion of truth is suspended without metaphysical support. Rorty is suspicious of the attempt by Habermas to steer between these two clear alternatives. Rorty, we recall, is suspicious of the very idea of the "universal validity" which such convergence is supposed to underwrite..."64. Why should the truth be the result of inter-vocabularic dialogue across time? Habermas has pronounced how truth will be determined, but he has distanced himself from the metaphysics which gave a justification for just that sort of approach in the past. Rorty's suspicion that there is a vestige of metaphysics in Habermas is well-founded. Although Habermas does not explicitly state that the world has an essence, he implicitly relies on that idea when he sets his 'end-of-history' convergence as a the criterion of truth.

In this writer's view, universal, or even widespread, convergence of belief is a mark of those beliefs 'working' or being goal-functional. We have no reason, however, to believe that the points of convergence won't keep changing. To know that there will be a finality of convergence would require a reliance on a metaphysical concept, the world's essence. In order to recognize when this end-of-history

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64 Ibid, p. 67.
convergence occurs, a nomological world which could be fixed in a representational relation would be required. Anything so static as an 'end-of-history' convergence would require that the world was law-like and we knew those laws.

By using a trans-historical criterion of truth that envisages an apotheosis as the test of truth, Habermas appears to have dropped the 'epistemological-metaphysical problematic'. He has, however, kept most of the trappings of a foundational program. Habermas could resist Rorty's charge that his view contains a metaphysics and keep free and open inquiry as the engine which produces his desired properties of universality and finality of belief. But if Habermas holds to that de-metaphysicalization, he then cannot explain why those properties should eventuate out of even a concerted and open belief formation. Rorty can explain Habermas' goal as the shadow of an (incompletely) dropped metaphysics. As such, universality and finality are no longer entitled to the status which they are afforded in Habermas' scheme. Once their metaphysical backing is dropped, contingency fills that space. Universality and finality would then be hostage to serendipity.

So Rorty's ability to diagnose metaphysical reliances is once again

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65 Ibid, p. 67.
66 Another explanation of why end-of-history convergence is the predictable end result of open inquiry rather than some form of division is possible through a 'power politics' analysis. Perhaps political ends are transformed into metaphyscial necessities because those in power find such a transformation a good way to achieve their ends. While this explains how a possible non-metaphysically based end-of-history convergence may obtain, it offers no reason to think of this static convergence of belief as any indication of truth.
demonstrated. If Habermas is to avoid such charges he should hold with Rorty that the functional properties of the world are the testing ground for beliefs. Our categories of interpretation may forever keep improving or changing and that would keep universal convergence from obtaining. For that to be otherwise, one would have to know when one had formed the 'best possible' vocabulary. But how could this be recognized without historical hindsight? Moreover, the ultimate pattern of the functions of the world may themselves change. Therefore even if the questions remain the same, the answers may start to change. All we are entitled to believe that we know is what we have gained from testing and interacting with the world through action.

4] Main Assumptions and Conclusions
1] I assume that Rorty first and foremost is a pragmatist, which is to say that, at the least, he places the concept of agency at the centre of his explanations and descriptions, in that if he were to let go of anything in his vocabulary, it would be the last.

2] I also assume that Rorty's preferred vocabulary contains an equally rich contrast, i.e. a non-reducibility, between agents and a world within which agents interact with each other and it.

In the alternative, Rorty might choose, as others have, to let go of the strong agent-world contrast and in retaining his pragmatism become a full-fledged cognitivist or idealist. This choice would produce difficulties for the kind of pragmatism from which Rorty descends and
which he clearly still honours.

3] Hence one of my main conclusions is that Rorty is required to embrace the world with more than just the mere causal relation that he has thrown it. Causation itself cannot be the only strand which connects agents to their world. Two reasons for this are: a) that causation without possible descriptions of one of its relata leaves that term dangling unpragmatically, that is, without any true role of a description-engendering sort within the vocabulary, and, b) unless our cognitions, such as belief, are connected to the world in more than a merely causal way the interaction of agents within it are blind. On this alternative, there could be no useful notion of success or failure of an action, except, again, in idealist terms.

4] In addition to Rorty's use of the world as the "blind impress", a pragmatic vocabulary which supports action also requires a "sighted express" in which the world is effected by action and is known to be so effected. Although it is anathema to him, Rorty must therefore accept that true or useful descriptions of the world are possible, that the nature of the world, a thing distinct from agents' beliefs and desires, plays a role in how things, including our actions, turn out and that there is therefore a place in our descriptions for "how the world is". Truth will not then be strictly internal or a property of vocabularies only.

5] There will be rules within a vocabulary which control the relations between and among descriptions and terms. These rules describe the standard ways in which users of a vocabulary may redescribe matters
while preserving communicability -- and also -- precisely because of
the contrast these uses provide -- allow for creativity or 'interesting'
rule-breaking within a vocabulary. The rules and the descriptions
which employ them will include identities, equivalences, hierarchies
and other relations of terms without which the vocabulary would not
be the vocabulary that it is. Such rules and descriptions identify
particular vocabularies within that class of vocabularies. But there is
also a question about the identity of the class of vocabularies -- about
the descriptions without which a purported "vocabulary" would not be
a vocabulary at all.

There are thus two metanarratives, or two sets of descriptions
without which Rorty's vocabulary would not be the thing it is. The first
has to do with those descriptions his vocabulary uses and the
contingent limits it itself sets on them -- its rules. These descriptions
identify this vocabulary among other vocabularies. The second set
identifies it as qualifying as a vocabulary. The first of these is where
contingency may be said to reign relatively supremely: anything goes;
but only so long as the second set retains its place. A vocabulary may
express any set of interests; that will come out of its particular history.
But if it is not used to express interests, is not expressive of our
agency, it will not be a vocabulary. This condition, contingent as it
itself is, is a necessity within which historical contingencies may cause
differing results so long as we continue to choose to continue talking
about vocabularies as we now do.

Rorty, I believe, is not fully sensitive to the way in which these two
sets of discourse are one dependent on the other and as a result sees only the contingency and not the limits his own discourse shows he must place upon it in order to be the describer, redescriber and otherwise the agent he intends.
Cited Bibliography


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