The Possibility of Irony:
Richard Rorty's Liberal Ironist and the Phenomenology of the Self

David Rondel

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Abstract

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This thesis attempts to test Richard Rorty's ideal character, the Liberal Ironist, against what Charles Taylor provides as various necessary but insufficient phenomenological conditions that allow for the possibility for self-reflection. In the absence of such conditions, Taylor holds, the very idea of a clear identity, a clear sense of *Who one is*, becomes either unintelligible or utterly trivial. After arguing that Rorty's ideal figure is likely to suffer from what we may call an identity crisis, I go on to offer some friendly amendments for Rorty. I claim that his ideal figure is one that should be replaced or augmented such that her specific characteristics and traits mesh more closely with the actual phenomenology of our moral experience. In the final chapter, I attempt to bridge what has to that point seemed like an unbridgeable methodological gulf between the descriptive, phenomenological project of Taylor and Rorty's largely prescriptive pragmatism. This reconciliation takes the form of Wittgensteinian and Deweyan reminders that should like to see both projects (Taylor's and Rorty's respectively) as diverse sets of tools. I conclude, in accordance with a meta-philosophical pragmatism that I deduce from the later Wittgenstein, that one set of tools need not trump another in any philosophically deep or *a priori* manner. My claim, in short, is that both philosophical strategies can be viewed as apt depending only on the philosophical work they are expected to fulfill.

FOR MY PARENTS

Two of the most reflective and philosophical people I know.

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Introduction

> Pragmatism is a matter of human needs and one of the first human needs is to be something more than a pragmatist.
>
> - G.K. Chesterton

> I must create my own system, or be enslaved by another man's.
>
> - William Blake

Richard Rorty's *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*[1] should be read as a sequel to his groundbreaking *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.[2] While the former presents Rorty's charmingly hyperbolic polemics on such subjects as the incommensurability of the private and public spheres of human life, foundationalist morality, as well as his controversial readings of Freud, Heidegger, Proust, Nabokov and Orwell, the conclusions he unflinchingly arrives at should be seen as natural derivations from the main tenets of the latter book. Put crudely, once one gives up on the idea of faithfully representing Reality with their words, gives up on the traditional Cartesian quest of knowing, with presupposition-less certainty, what can be Known, and sets aside Platonism and all of its surrogates (defined as the idea that human beings can cultivate the ability to grasp the external, enduring Truth *out there*), one should, or so Rorty powerfully argues, become a firm and committed pragmatist. One should, after setting aside these traditional concerns, focus on social hope, human solidarity and the various social experiments that might encourage those and other human ideals. One should

indeed be hopeful that the future comes to be seen as a radical improvement of the present, however, one should remain convinced that the "final vocabulary"[3] where these hopes and optimisms are ultimately expressed, gets no closer to anything higher or more otherworldly and thus is no more True or Valid than the hopes and dreams of any other final vocabulary. One should, after these repudiations, treat different ways of speaking as different sets of tools; some better for achieving some human ends than others, but one should scoff at the idea that one way of speaking can accurately map or realistically mirror The *Real World* better or more faithfully than other seemingly exclusive ways of speaking. One should indeed have moral commitments, commitments so profound that they could be seen as "worth dying for," but one should not think that such commitments can be given philosophical grounds, theoretical foundations or that they can be logically deduced from some universal enterprise like Reason, or the will of God. Someone who has followed Rorty this far should see all of her commitments and the vocabulary within which those commitments are irremovably couched, as the result of nothing more than time and contingent chance.

Rorty presents his ideal character of the liberal ironist as someone who has fully and uncompromisingly endorsed this line of thought. The ironist is someone who fulfills three conditions: " (1.) She has radical and continuing doubts about the final vocabulary she uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered; (2.) she realizes that argument phrased in her present vocabulary can neither underwrite nor dissolve these doubts; (3.) insofar as she philosophizes about her situation, she does not think that her vocabulary is closer to reality than others, that it is in touch with a power not herself."[4] Rorty's ironist

is playful about the philosophical impulse for universal, context-independent Truth. She believes with Nietzsche that truth is not something to be discovered but instead that "truth conditions" or the norms that govern meaningfully using "is true" after a sentence are inextricably linked with a vocabulary (a way of speaking) and that there is no such thing as a vocabulary- independent, universally valid claim.[5] She cannot be serious about the quest to provide philosophical foundations, to discover the ahistorical dictates of Reason or to offer non-circular justificatory arguments for her deepest attachments,[6] for she feels with Donald Davidson that there is no way to transcend her current vocabulary and from there, assess the Truth and Validity of *all possible* vocabularies.[7] Truth and Validity, the ironist feels, are only meaningful tools against the background of a particular vocabulary and thus she cannot be serious about the idea of certain claims having an intrinsic superiority over others. Rorty's ironist is "a nominalist and historicist. She thinks nothing has an intrinsic nature [or] a real essence."[8] She will thus take lightly the suggestion that she is relativistic for the label "relativist," she feels, is only one that can be aptly applied to those who still subscribe to a vocabulary where intrinsic natures and real essences represent live and momentous options. She cannot take the accusation of relativism seriously because she is convinced that "relativism" talk will go away once "Objectivity" or "Universal validity" talk goes. The ironist, in short, is Rorty's ideal portrait of the intellectual who has, finally and wholeheartedly, set aside the traditional metaphysical and epistemological problems of Philosophy (capital "P") as well as the distinctions and puzzles commonly brought forth by them.[9]

I want to explore, in what will follow, some conditions for the possibility of Rortian ironism. I will want to do this almost exclusively with Charles Taylor's theory

on the origins of and conditions for a notion of selfhood as a backdrop. That is, I will want to test Rorty's ironist against what Taylor provides as crucial conditions that allow one to construe themselves as having an "identity" or a notion of "self". Taylor takes these various conditions, the detailing of which shall be the concern of Chapter 1, as critical for understanding or reflecting on the question "Who am I?" at all. And so, if Rorty's ironist is to have a sense of self, a sense of "Who she is," as no doubt we should assume she does (or ought to), I will want to explore what this notion of ironic selfhood would consist in, if indeed such a notion is possible. If Taylor is correct, for example, in his claim that an individual's notion of self is parasitic upon some sort of "orientation to the good," it is difficult, at first glance, to decide whether or not Rorty's ironist can have such an orientation or, if she does, whether or not that orientation can be considered adequate in the eyes of Taylor's theory. Looking at Rortian ironism through the lens of Taylor's thinking, a task that the second chapter will be dedicated to, will compel us to consider more carefully whether someone can *actually* become an ironist as Rorty portrays it. It will also encourage a reflection on the worth or desirability of this particular reformist vocabulary; to ask, that is, whether Rorty's ironist is indeed a figure whose adoption would be beneficial. Further, the tension that I anticipate between Taylor's phenomenological account of human selfhood and Rorty's ironist is one that I will parallel, in the third and final chapter, with a disagreement concerning two different ways to read and interpret the later Wittgenstein. This Wittgensteinian debate, I will suggest, is rather analogous to the methodological debate between Rorty and Taylor and, accordingly, by way of my own reconciliatory interpretation of the later Wittgenstein, I shall try to reduce the methodological gap between Rorty and Taylor to a difference

between two diverse sorts of tools. I shall want to argue that the *prima facie* incompatibility between Taylor's account and Rorty's ideal is one that can be mended by first highlighting and then recasting the methodological gulf between the philosophical description characteristic of Taylor's project and the often prescriptive nature of Rorty's pragmatism. All of this will culminate in some friendly amendments for Rorty, amendments that are suggestive of a philosophical strategy that blends the more descriptive analysis of Taylor's phenomenology and Rorty's largely prescriptive pragmatism; a methodological blend that can be seen to emerge, I shall submit, from an inclusive and expedient way to look at the later Wittgenstein. So while this thesis will begin with a somewhat narrow, local problem of contemporary philosophy, it will terminate in a broader meta-philosophical discussion; a discussion, it will be my suggestion, that elucidates more vigilantly what is at stake in the smaller, local problem.

There is one preliminary qualification to be made here. It concerns what exactly *the conditions of possibility*, in the present context, are supposed to be suggestive of. The *prima facie* inclination is to see the slogan *conditions of possibility* as inherently Kantian and thus inherently transcendental. It may seem to some, accordingly, that the very objective with which this thesis shall be concerned will meet firm disapproval from Rorty at the outset. Some might feel, rightly, that Rorty cannot accept a Kantian-styled transcendental investigation into the conditions for the possibility of *anything*. After all, this line of thought goes, once we give up on the notion of intrinsic reality, and the related idea that our various concepts come neatly packaged with necessary and sufficient conditions,[10] one must conclude that philosophical projects that attempt to uncover conditions of one sort or another are deeply and irretrievably flawed. I want to

suggest that the type of *condition seeking* that Taylor engages in, and the type that this thesis, in turn, shall concern itself with, is one that Rorty would have to accept. One can (and should) reject with Rorty, the idea that concepts have necessary and sufficient ahistorical, *Ding an Sich*, conditions; one can reject the related idea explicit in Kant that only a fully *a priori* and therefore "infallible" *Critique* can provide the essential conditions of possibility for one concept or another. Yet even after these rejections, one may still meaningfully assess the various conditions that a certain concept must fulfill. Rorty, of course, cannot accept transcendental conditions of possibility. He cannot accept the idea that human beings, perhaps philosophers more specifically, can transcend their current time and place and, armed with Reason or an understanding of the Will of God or whatever else, accurately account for what *must* be the case if we are to have a clear concept of self, now and forever. Thus the conditions that will be tested on the ironist are of a sort that disregards the Platonic-Kantian endeavor at Truth. They are not attempts to make reference to anything otherworldly, nor do they claim to be inescapable logical conditions. They are, given the way our language works, the various ways we actually interact with one another and the world, the sort of "reminders assembled for a particular purpose"[11] that Wittgenstein pioneered. The conditions that Taylor outlines, then, are strictly *human conditions*; they do not concern themselves with metaphysical or *Ding an Sich* Truth for they are raised from an unapologetically human view, a view that concedes that the various claims at external Reality and Truth made by Plato, Kant and their countless followers, presuppose an impossible vantage point. Even so, the sort of conditions that Taylor details in his work are not banal, wildly unhelpful empirical ones, the sort of which should probably go unmentioned for their sheer obviousness or

triviality. Conditions like: "Caloric intake is a condition for human life." or "Having warm blood is a condition for mammal-hood." are so insipid and plain that we hardly require *anyone*, let alone philosophers to point out or emphasize them. There are, I submit, conditions to be sought that neither aim at the Kantian transcendental nor fall victim to the obvious trivia involved with the sort of empirical conditions I just mentioned. There is a sort of middle ground to be isolated, a middle ground that neither focuses its aim beyond our current *geist* into the realm of the ahistorically "necessary" nor to the realm of the uninterestingly obvious. They are perhaps best described as "ordinary" conditions, the sort of which Wittgenstein described to his readers. They are the sort of things that *actually* inform *our* limits and imagination. They are about our language-games and the grammatical rules, standards, and presuppositions built into them (often without our awareness).[12] Conditions that are exemplary of this "middle ground" are the sort of which Rorty, and anyone else for that matter would have to accept.[13]

For those who are still unconvinced that Rorty would accept the basic strategy of the present thesis, I will list, only briefly, a few conditions of the same anti-transcendental, "middle ground" sort that Rorty himself outlines in his own work.

(1) Rorty endorses a line of thought common to Gadamer, Sellars and Davidson, that *to think at all is to use language*. Equally, in Sellars's words: "All awareness is a linguistic affair."[14]

(2) Rorty agrees with the conclusion of Wittgenstein's celebrated "private-language argument."[15]

(3) Rorty believes that *Objectivity seeking* philosophical views like scientific realism, say, are conditional on the plausibility of 'representationalism'. Since, in Rorty's estimation, there is no reason to believe we could ever demonstrate the plausibility of that condition, he feels, consequently, that there is no reason to pursue *Objectivity seeking* philosophical views.

(4) (Similar to #3 above) Rorty feels that the implausibility of representational theories of language and truth compels us to discard reductionist philosophies. That is, the endorsement of representationalism (or relatedly of correspondence theories of truth) is a condition for the consistent holding of reductionism (taken in a broad and far reaching sense).

In all four of the above examples, we can see that Rorty issues certain conditions. In the first example, Rorty implies that language is a condition for thought. In the second, he suggests with Wittgenstein that a condition for meaning is a dialogical or public and therefore not private *use*. In examples 3 and 4, Rorty implies that certain philosophical positions are conditional upon various assumptions. Specifically, when the idea of a *one to one fit between language and the world goes*, so too do *Objectivity seeking* philosophical positions like reductionism and scientific realism. This is to say that Rorty attaches consistency-preserving conditions to the warranted holding of these philosophical positions (in both cases, conditions he feels cannot and have not been met).

It would seem, in light of all of this, that the initial suggestion (the suggestion that Rorty would not accept the type of *condition seeking* project that Taylor undertakes) is incorrect. It was shown, firstly, that Taylor's conditions are not aimed at uncovering the True, Essential, *in and of itself*, nature of human selfhood and, secondly, that Rorty himself has on many occasions arrived at similar conditions in his own work. Conditions of the sort common to Rorty and Taylor are not transcendental, while at the same time speak to something more interesting and less banal than purely empirical conditions like: "Water is a condition for human life," or unhelpful analytic conditions like: "Monotheism is a condition for Islam." I have been trying to show, by way of some preliminary remarks, that one can set aside the idea common to Plato and Kant, that philosophers have some special ability with which they can *get in touch* with something

otherworldly and human-independent, while at the same time retaining the intuitive idea that certain conditions of possibility are built into the various ways we speak and live. This line of thought should lead one to conclude that it is not "all or nothing," that when transcendental conditions go, only uninteresting empirical ones remain. If I am right, we can eschew the quest for transcendental certitude while focusing on the "for us" conditions that things and concepts, we feel, must fulfill without falling victim to a performative contradiction. We can be historicist, nominalist and anti-essentialist while still finding clarifying value in the idea that concepts come with vital but very human conditions, and that "conditional talk" (using If/Then constructions in our arguments and attempts at persuasion) is a vital 'consistency preserving' component of our communicative lives. To sum up, I have been arguing that we *can* subscribe to the view that concepts have crucial conditions[16] without, in turn, subscribing to transcendental essences. If this seems plausible, it is to a discussion of Taylor's thinking about the modern notion of "self" that we now turn.

NOTES TO INTRODUCTION

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[1] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

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

[3] Rorty defines "final vocabulary" in the following way: "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. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives." Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

[4] Ibid., 73.

[5] Recall Nietzsche's claim that "truth is a mobile army of metaphors." From "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense". In Walter Kaufmann, *The Viking Portable Nietzsche* (New York: American Library, 1981), 46.

[6] Rorty's liberal ironist is "liberal" to the extent that she believes, with Judith Shklar, that "cruelty is the worst thing we do," however, she is convinced that no non-circular justification can be given as a response to the question: "Why not be cruel?"

[7] Davidson writes: "there is no chance that someone can take up a vantage point for comparing conceptual schemes by temporarily shedding his own." Donald Davidson, *Inquiries into Truth and Interpretation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 185.

[8] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 74.

[9] Rorty confines his discussion of his ironist to the 'private' sphere of human life. In the 'public' sphere Rorty calls on us to be liberals. My own emphasis here will be to situate the ironist as a product of Rorty's overall philosophical program, and not to argue, as Rorty himself has done powerfully, that we need not think of our private selves and our public commitments as in need of commensuration. I will not question that we can have private, idiosyncratic projects on the one hand as well as public projects that aim to reduce suffering and humiliation, on the other. Nor that these different types of projects need to be brought together at the level of theory. I will want to assess, rather, whether the liberal ironist as a representative of the ideal post-Philosophical intellectual can actually be realized (that is, whether this figure can be expected to have an adequately robust identity) and whether or not this figure might be plausibly replaced by a better figure.

[10] Rorty's position that concepts do not have necessary and sufficient conditions follows from his membership in the camp commonly called anti-representationalism. Since Rorty believes that there is no description-independent way things really are, the idea that a philosophical inquiry can get at *the correct description* (the description that *fits* or mirrors Reality) is an incoherent idea. In short, if one holds with Davidson that the distinction between scheme and content ("the third dogma of empiricism") is a useless one that ought to be discarded, one will be lead away from essentialism and from the idea that concepts have necessary and sufficient conditions. A *necessary* condition, after all, could only be considered necessary if there was something like what Rorty has hyperbolically called "Nature's own language." If there are only competing descriptions, none of which are faithful mirrors of Reality, the idea of necessity will be seen to be a local, context-relative constraint.

[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1967), #127.

[12] In a recent essay, Taylor has referred to these sorts of conditions as "pre-conditions." See Charles Taylor, "Rorty and Philosophy" in *Rorty: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 158-180.

[13] "Everyone *must* accept" these kinds of conditions simply because we wouldn't know how to plausibly call them into doubt. Like many of the later Wittgenstein's "reminders" these conditions are not philosophically contentious, they do not require deep justifications or philosophical arguments. Rather, they seek to elucidate more clearly, as Wittgenstein himself put it, "what already lies in plain view". Of course, having acknowledged this common sense compulsion leaves untouched the question about whether we should construe these sorts of background conditions as "conditions of possibility" or merely, as Rorty would insist, "causal conditions of actuality".

[14] See especially the introduction to *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982). Here Rorty tries to show how various philosophers, from both the so-called Analytic and Continental traditions, advance this very same point albeit with different emphases. This position is identical with what Wilfred Sellars has called "psychological nominalism."

[15] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 11.

[16] These "middle-ground" conditions I have been speaking about are perhaps closely allied with what are commonly called phenomenological conditions. They are factors and assumptions that are *actually* at work (whether implicitly or explicitly) in our experience. This seems to me a fine parallel, however, we might want to stipulate that the idea that there can be a *logos* associated with *phenomena* is an idea that is residually transcendental and ahistorical. *Logos*, after all, implies that there is a neutral, correct standpoint or method with which to tackle this set of questions.

Chapter 1:
Some Conditions for Selfhood

> ...There really is a sense in which philosophy can talk about the self in a non-psychological way. What brings the self into philosophy is the fact that 'the world is my world.' The philosophical self is not the human being, or the human soul, with which psychology deals, but rather the metaphysical subject, the limit of the world- not a part of it.
>
> -Ludwig Wittgenstein

> We can readily see why in a strong sense certain thoughts are impossible in certain circumstances.
>
> -Charles Taylor

1

The central objective of this first chapter shall be to extrapolate, in some detail, Charles Taylor's account of how we come to be 'who we are'. I shall try to illustrate, as comprehensively as possible, some of the conditions that Taylor sees as crucial for the possibility of a notion of self. That is, I shall want to lay bare what Taylor sees as the decisive, constitutive elements at work in one coming to reflect on the question of *Who they are*?

I begin with what seems to me a general and virtually incontestable condition. Namely, that one's notion of self is inextricably interwoven with moral questions and considerations. For Taylor, this broad condition can be seen as an extension of his claim that a self can only exist against a background of questions and moral discriminations. That is, "Who am I?" is a question that is parasitic on and ancillary to a vast set of qualitative judgments that involve what Taylor calls "strong evaluations."[1] One cannot have a notion of self, for Taylor, without first having made discriminations about higher

and nobler courses of action, about what sorts of lives were worthwhile, fulfilling, good and so on. To be a self, on this view, is to have a position on matters of significance, to stand somewhere, to grade certain courses of action over others. Put counterfactually, if someone lacked a certain set of "strongly evaluative" moral assessments or discriminations, it would be impossible to clearly conceive of their self or identity. The deliberation that I might undertake into the question "Who am I?" already presupposes, in advance, that I have moral positions, that I stand somewhere on *this* moral question, that *this* (and therefore not *that*) matters to me, that *this* is the sort of person I wish to become, and so on. Indeed, without having learned how to play the varied cluster of normative language-games operative in one's form of life, one could not conceivably think of themselves as having an identity. Identity, Taylor maintains, is parasitic upon the ability to make strong evaluations. Maybe this seems trivial, for how could we imagine Jones having a sense of "Who he is" without first seeing Jones as having made certain qualitative discriminations about what sort of life was worth living, what sorts of actions were worthy of praise and blame, about what was significant. If Jones lacked any detectable discriminations of this non-instrumental *strong* sort, it would be difficult to see Jones as having a clear *identity*. What after all, would Jones *identify with* in this case?[2]

There is an old line of thought originating in ancient Greece and preserved in our common sensibility by the dominance of Christianity that sees humans as having a self anyway. The "self" in this tradition is seen as synonymous with the soul. This view suggests that there is some mysterious (perhaps divine) essence to every human being, that every person is born completely unique and original. On this view, one can come to

uncover "who they *really* are," one can *discover* more comprehensively their individual "self," but everyone, whether conscious of it or not, has a unique essence or "self" that exists prior to one's initiation into a form of life and one's having learned how to be a strong evaluator. According to this view, one need not have the set of "strong evaluations" described above as a condition for a notion of selfhood. Someone could be raised in isolation, without language, and still have a self (however utterly opaque the concept would appear to that individual). Selfhood, the view we are here considering insists, is there anyway.[3]

The ontological question of whether or not some mysterious individuating component in each human being exists is not, for our present purposes, important. It is important to show, however, that even those who endorse this Greek or Christian view are themselves, whether conscious of it or not, engaging with the range of questions that Taylor flags as a condition for a notion of self. When someone pledges allegiance to some sort of worldview or lifestyle one is, in the process, taking a stand on the sort of evaluative questions that are described above. Even when one endorses a view where the notion of strong evaluation as a condition for selfhood seems utterly ridiculous, one is by virtue of that allegiance "standing somewhere," discriminating the right from the wrong, distinguishing between better and worse modes of life, grading one worldview over another. I want to suggest that Taylor's first point is sound, for even in denying it, one is validating it. To label an account "wrong" or to criticize a position as frivolous or point missing, is to offer the very discriminatory evaluations that Taylor sees as necessary. That is, the possibility of choosing between different accounts or theories presupposes that an individual has been taught the language of strong evaluation, that

they know how to play the game of judging.[4] This is to say that before one can *take a stand* on a question, one must have first learned what *taking a stand* consisted in; one would require an understanding of what meaningful judging was like. All of this reinforces Taylor's initial claim that strong evaluation, the ability to offer non-instrumental qualitative judgments is necessarily and inescapably operative if and when someone meaningfully poses the question: Who am I?

1.1

In this section I want to discuss, in more detail, the concept of strong evaluation as well as some of the familiar philosophical criticisms usually associated with this sort of view. I would like to show how, perhaps contrary to one's *prima facie* inclination, Taylor's notion of 'strong evaluation' can function quite agreeably within a post-metaphysical, post-epistemological framework.

Taylor's characterization of "strong evaluation" (see note 1) goes beyond mere instrumental rationality. Someone who is a swift and efficient calculator of her ends is not, on Taylor's view, a strong evaluator. So Taylor's strong evaluator is more than a utilitarian or cost/benefit tabulator. She considers more than instrumental means (to various ends) but rather, armed with the qualitative discriminations and assessments mentioned in section 1, she evaluates that certain modes of life or pursuits are better or higher than others.[5] Her discriminations are not attempts to spell out the best means or most efficient techniques to arrive at her ends, they are instead, the sort of discriminations that weigh various ends as better, higher, or more noble than others. Even more, the various discriminations that can be considered "strongly evaluative," for Taylor, must be "rendered valid" by something beyond one's own tastes, desires and

dispositions. They must be assessed as good, significant, or noteworthy by the implicit standards built into the form of life from which they are made. But this is not to misinterpret Taylor as a relativist. Like Rorty's ironist, so far only sketched in the introduction, Taylor is aware that accusations of relativism can only be made intelligible by those who speak as though universal standards or absolute principles are still patiently waiting 'out there' to be discovered. Once one discards the idea that human beings can uncover the Formal *Good Itself* or some other universal source of Goodness, the accusation of relativism no longer makes any sense. To put this point in a slightly different way, a relativist is someone who accepts the age-old philosophical dichotomy between moral absolutism and moral relativism, and ends up choosing or siding with the latter. Someone, conversely, who seeks to eschew the former,[6] can no longer be sensibly labeled relativistic for presupposed in the game where "relativism" talk makes sense, is the contrastive view that there is a non-human, universal essence to the Right and the Good.

Even if the issue of relativism should be laid to rest, as of course not all readers will be convinced, one might still be skeptical about the very notion of "strong evaluation." Indeed, if the quest for a universal morality should be set aside, as Taylor's repudiation of deontological and utilitarian moral models rightly argues,[7] it would seem to connote that there can be no "strong evaluations" at all; it would seem that there can be no *extra* ingredient that makes an evaluation "strong" as opposed to merely a "first order" subjective type of evaluation. In short, without the claim to universality or absolute Truth, this criticism asks, upon what can we then classify moral evaluations as of a "strong" and therefore not merely "first order" sort? The common reply, one

interestingly enough found in both Rorty and Taylor albeit in very different ways, is the insistence that "classification" and "evaluation" (in every case) is carried through with language. That is, to classify or judge at all is to have some set of practices, some language-game(s), where the norms of "classifying" and "judging" make sense. There can be no *pure* classification where these rule-based norms (that inform what we mean by classification in the first place) can be sidestepped or transcended.[8] We cannot take up an unmediated, neutral standpoint by, as Donald Davidson put it, "temporarily shedding our own." Indeed, our social practice- centric norms are all we have ever had. To think that the norms and practices found in our various language-games are not enough to ground our judgments in or upon, is to remain on the hopeless path of Platonic or Kantian Objectivity, a path that both Rorty and Taylor debase as incoherent. To put it plainly, the view that our actual practices and norms cannot provide sufficient justification for our evaluative claims, or that the moral equivalent of something like Thomas Nagel's "view from nowhere" needs to be sought is a view with hopes that cannot, in principle, be met.[9] Simply, once we have set aside the traditional epistemological quests for Platonic Truth and Cartesian certainty, we will no longer look for *anything* beyond our own norms and practices to provide grounds or justification for our assortment of moral and evaluative claims. As Wittgenstein so succinctly put this idea, " In order to make a mistake, a man *must already* judge in conformity with mankind."[10] Or similarly: "If language is to be a means of communication there must be agreement not only in definitions but also in judgments."[11]

Taylor's position on strong evaluation then, begins from what seems to be a very basic and uncontroversial idea; that we just do value certain things as higher, better,

and more fulfilling than other things. A life filled with travel, books, close friends, and love *just is* better than a life that lacked these things. We know it as well as we know anything. Analogously, there is nothing *in the nature of things* that tells us it is better to have been born to the Swedish middle-class than to a poverty stricken shantytown in Burkina Faso, but it just is. To be sure, there may be no non-circular justificatory proof for these claims, (at least of a sort that would satisfy the typical philosopher) but that on its own does not undermine them, for they articulate truths that seem blatantly incontestable to us. What, we might want to ask with Wittgenstein, would it be like to be mistaken about this?[12] What would it be like to discover that the life in Burkina Faso was in actual fact, our most fundamental intuitions to the contrary notwithstanding, better than the Swedish life?

Of course, very much related to the anti-foundational (social practice centric) moral position just sketched, is the idea that evaluations of better, higher, significant and worthwhile ends, are not purely subjective matters. These sorts of evaluations, Taylor rightly insists, must be adjudicated or rendered valid by something other than an individual's tastes, preferences, and desires. Strong evaluations are second order evaluations that necessarily make reference to some sort of *relevant publicity*. They are not, and cannot be, private, idiosyncratic evaluations, rather they are necessarily deemed valid by what Taylor calls a "framework." Evaluative claims of this strong type must be public (or at very least dialogical) inasmuch as language (and therefore meaning and criteria) are public. This contrasts with a subjectivist view extending from Dostoevsky's famous edict: "If God is dead, everything is permitted," which seems to suggest that without God or His surrogates (at any rate some supreme, absolute "giver" of moral

truth) there can only be nihilism or radical subjectivism. This is deeply flawed. Consider the following passage from Taylor:

> [T]hings have significance not of themselves but because people deem them to have it- as though people could determine what is significant, either by decision, or perhaps unwittingly and unwillingly by just feeling that way. This is crazy. I couldn't just *decide* that the most significant action is wiggling my toes in warm mud. Without a special explanation, this is not an intelligible claim. So I wouldn't know what sense to attribute to someone allegedly *feeling* that this was so. What could someone *mean* who said this?[13]

This idea can be extrapolated quite efficiently from Wittgenstein's well-known 'private-language' argument. The idea, common to Wittgenstein and Taylor here and *contra* Dostoevsky, is that since language and therefore meaning is shared, it follows that evaluations about what is 'significant,' if they are to be *meaningful* evaluations, must be rendered valid by the necessarily public norms that give meaning to any and all claims. It is not as though we could use other terms, say, "airplane" and "photograph" in any way *we* privately chose while retaining *their* meanings. How could such blatant misuses remain intelligible? Thus, the position that a life that lacked travel, books, friends, and love was, in some sense, *better* or more desirable, than a life where these things were present (without some sort of qualifying explanation), is as unintelligible a claim as the one Taylor jokingly makes about "wiggling one's toes in warm mud." Our practices and norms *just are* what they are; we require no further attempts at grounding for them, for such attempts imply and re-iterate the Platonic assumption that our social practices require something external and enduring to underpin them. Such attempts imply that *there must be more than 'merely' our practices* to be sought in normative discourse. John Searle expresses the futility of such attempts when he writes:

> The conditions of intelligibility of our practices, linguistic and otherwise, cannot themselves be demonstrated as truths within those practices. To suppose they could was the endemic mistake of foundationalist metaphysics.[14]

We have always judged, evaluated and assessed from within a community of language users. To think that something more is needed to underpin our consensuses about better and worse, is to have blatantly missed the point of Wittgenstein's therapy.[15]

So far, I have tried to outline Taylor's position that a self cannot exist without the making of strong evaluations; that one cannot conceive of their clear identity without having made (non-instrumental) moral discriminations about what was significant, worthy of admiration or what mattered. I tried to show, also, how questions about 'significance' and about the validity of strong evaluations can only be *meaningfully* adjudicated by the inescapably public norms of meaning; that one cannot randomly decide that X is important or significant, for if "importance" and "significance" are to remain meaningful demarcations in our moral lives, as no doubt they should, they must not be misused in this seemingly arbitrary way. I can summarize what I have said so far by translating it into a miniature argument as follows:

(1.) To conceive of one's "self", one must have a certain set of strong moral or normative evaluations.
(2.) Strong evaluations can only be rendered valid by some grammatical convention(s) that are of necessity public (or at least dialogical).
(3.) Therefore, one's sense of "who they are" is parasitic upon others (one's *framework* or *form of life*, more specifically). There can be no purely "private" *ex nihilo* understanding of one's "self".[16]

Having established strong evaluations as the first condition for one's coming to reflect on their self, I want now to turn to some related ideas that are prevalent in Taylor's thinking about the concept of identity. These ideas, all of which are robustly related to

the above characterization of strong evaluations, are what Taylor calls 'orientation in moral space,' and 'inescapable frameworks.'

1.2

If a basic condition for selfhood is the ability to make strong evaluations, it seems to follow that "Who am I?" is a question that can be analogized successfully into a spatial metaphor. That is, if my sense of self is dependant, in part, on *where* I stand on a certain range of moral questions and considerations, than this *where* must involve some proximity to what I perceive to be the good. Why should I stand *here* and not *there* if the place where indeed I do stand does not approximate more carefully the good? To put this point a slightly different way, if my strong evaluations determine, in large part, my identity, then the content of my strong evaluations, if they are not arbitrary and indeed are representative of my "self" must be directed towards what is good. Strong evaluations require, and can be nothing without, an orientation towards the good. If one of my strong evaluations lacked an aim at the good, what *other* incentive might I have for making it? Here we can see that in an important sense, "strong evaluations" and their necessary "orientation towards the good" can be construed as inseparable for why else should I say that I value X and not Y, if I did not take X to be in some sense closer to the good; *better* or *higher* in some non-instrumental sense than its rival Y?[17] Taylor writes to this effect:

> [There is an] essential link between identity and a kind of orientation. To know who you are is to be oriented in moral space, a space in which questions arise about what is good or bad, what is worth doing and what not, what has meaning and importance for you and what is trivial and secondary. [18]

And again:

> Our orientation in relation to the good requires not only some framework(s) which defines the shape of the qualitatively higher but also a sense of where we stand to this. Nor is this question a potentially neutral one, to which we could be indifferent...On the contrary, we come here to one of the most basic aspirations of human beings, the need to be connected to, or in contact with, what they see as good, or of crucial importance, or of fundamental value.....The fact that we have to place ourselves within a space which is defined by these qualitative distinctions cannot but mean that where we stand in relation to them must matter to us.[19]

I can synthesize what has been said so far by saying that one's orientation in moral space encourages them to offer strongly evaluative claims about a host of questions which in turn allow one's self or identity to be colored and animated, for it is these qualitative distinctions that, in part, constitute having a sense of "Who I am." Even more, the idea mentioned in section 1.1, that these qualitative distinctions must be rendered valid by something beyond one's mere tastes and preferences adds to this account, the idea that one requires a "framework" with which to assess claims of one sort or another.[20] Here we can see that Taylor's "framework" serves at least two different functions. The first function, already outlined in section 1.1 and just reiterated above, is that it provides the criteria with which to adjudicate intelligible or valid strong evaluations from those that are unintelligible or invalid. The "framework" in this first sense, can be seen as akin to what I called 'relevant publicity' in the previous section. It can also be seen as similar with what Wittgenstein has coined a form of life. In this sense, "frameworks" provide the criteria for arbitration between moral claims. Taylor describes this function of frameworks as:

> ... a crucial set of qualitative distinctions. To think, feel, judge within such a framework is to function with the sense that some action, or mode of life, or

> mode of feeling is incomparably higher than the others which are more readily to us.[21]

The second role that Taylor's "framework" plays, perhaps a more fundamental role, is that it grants an agent, in the first place, a certain range of options, it demarcates the limits of what can be sought, about what represents a 'live, momentous' hypothesis or an impossibility. In this second sense, one's framework determines the limits of what one can choose. It sets the boundaries of one's moral space, outside of which incoherence or arbitrariness reside. It is one's "framework" then, that provides, firstly, one's range of options, the limits of what one can *meaningfully* value and, secondly, it regulates the standards at work in adjudicating between rival moral claims. Thus, it is what provides us with the possibility of valuing something, say some X, and further it provides the grounds upon which some X can be meaningfully considered of value. Since this is a vital concept in Taylor's work, I will pause to explicate in more detail what exactly a "framework" is supposed to be and how we come to obtain the specific frameworks that we do.[22]

We should understand Taylor's "frameworks" as the set of beliefs, traditions, and language-games that color one's ability to make meaningful strong evaluations. Indeed, one's framework creates the possibility for one to *have* strong evaluations at all. For a very clear and illustrative example of this, consider an imaginary society that lacked the term "courage" or any relevantly synonymous term. It would be difficult to imagine how a member of that society could value what we call "courageous acts." Indeed, a member of our imaginary society suddenly attaching moral worth to what we call courage (or even a particular instance of it), would seem as arbitrary and *ex nihilo* as we suddenly

attaching moral value to "wiggling one's toes in warm mud." From where would this seemingly random moral attachment come? And on what basis could this be seen as an intelligible move? So we can say that the "framework" within which one is initiated creates the limits of what one can value, and in turn creates the limits of *where* one can stand in moral space. Our initiation into a framework then, teaches us to recognize goods, defines our boundaries of moral space inside of which those goods are located, and provides the map with which we can navigate that space.

It is not only that members or actors in a particular framework or form of life require certain terminology in order to value certain things (although that indeed is an integral part of it).[23] An agent initiated into a certain framework also requires an understanding of how to apply a certain moral term. We must know, as a member in a form of life, when a specific act of courage collapses into cowardice on the one hand or plain stupidity on the other. Our imaginary society, if they were to develop the concept of courage, would need to know how to use this term; when a particular instance or action warranted praise on the grounds that it was a "courageous" act and when on the other hand, a particular act was worthy of blame on the grounds that it was a cowardly or overly audacious act. Aristotle's doctrine of the mean has a similar idea behind it; the idea that moral concepts require correct or appropriate, practical application. Our initiation into and participation within our "framework" shows us, if we are competent, how to adjudicate between these extremes and thus to use terms like "courage," and to value particular instances of it appropriately.

I began by showing that the question of one's identity is indissolubly linked with what one values. That is "Who am I?" is question that requires for its answer some

understanding of "What matters to me," "Where I stand on a range of moral questions," "Where I am situated in relation to the good" and so on. This idea lends credence to the view that we see the sense of our lives in terms of a journey, or in Alasdair MacIntyre's apt expression, a *quest*.[24] That is, "Who am I?" is a question that necessarily makes reference to, firstly, my conception of the good, and secondly, *where* I am in relation to that good. Indeed, my feeling that I am far away from the good, or that I have at some point lost sight of it, can offer excellent incentives for wanting to change or refine my life's direction, for re-evaluating 'what is significant,' for re-asking the question *what sort of person do I want to be?*[25] Finally, I showed that in order to have a conception of the good at all (and an orientation within the moral space where it resides) one must be initiated into a framework; a person cannot value certain things without first having been taught the game of "valuing things" and more, one could not understand *how* a certain thing could be valued (or what valuing it consisted in) without having learned their framework's specific, ethnocentric standards of meaning and judgment; standards the sort of which are at work in every language using community. To reiterate the details of Taylor's process: someone is born into a framework that animates the range of things to be valued as well as *how* (and in what) meaningful valuing of those things consists. Only then, can someone have the ability to offer meaningful discriminations about right and wrong, higher and lower etc... (Otherwise, as we saw in earlier sections, those discriminations are random or unintelligible). Once one has learned how to be a strong evaluator (in accordance with the standards operative in one's form of life)[26] one can then turn to one's "self" as an object of reflection. One can then, and only then, see the

question "Who am I?" as an intelligible one; one perhaps that can be legitimately responded to or, at least, one that can be meaningfully considered.

1.3

Taylor's thinking about human selfhood and the necessary conditions he includes in his account may strike some as enormously facile in certain respects. Particularly, one might see the exposition I provided as one that leaves out perhaps the most crucial component of one's coming to reflect on their identity or self. Namely, its immense difficulty and complexity. I concede that the expository account I offered in previous sections does aggravate this intuition. I wish to emphasize, accordingly, that the conditions of (1.) frameworks, (2.) orientation to the good and (3.) the ability to make strong evaluations, are necessary but not sufficient conditions for having a clear notion of self. It is not as though one could consult a checklist, and, after having satisfied the items on the list, have their clear and unambiguous identity appear with a magical and sudden *Voila!* Taylor's account is meant to demonstrate the minimum phenomenological requirements for a concept of self, and not, as perhaps some readers up to this point may have felt, show how simply and painlessly such a concept can come into existence. Taylor's account of the self should not lead one to assume that this is an easy concept to have and to hold. Quite the opposite is the case. I want to emphasize that Taylor does not ignore the immense difficulties and dilemmas associated with defining one's clear identity. Indeed, one could have satisfied the necessary conditions that Taylor isolates and still, (perhaps this is common even) feel totally lost, confused and bewildered about the question of "Who they are;" they could, after having met Taylor's minimum conditions, find themselves in an *identity crisis*, not quite sure about

the details of their life's quest or hesitant about the goods they ought to strive towards. Even further, Taylor suggests, following his teacher Sir Isaiah Berlin, that:

> Human beings are always in a situation of conflict between moral demands, which seem to them to be irrecusable, but at the same time uncombinable. If this conflict is not felt, it is because our sympathies or horizons are too narrow, or we have been too easily satisfied with pseudo-solutions.[27]

All of this serves to illustrate the point, one that perhaps may have been absent in my exposition of Taylor's thinking, that there is no way to ensure or guarantee that one's clear identity or life's quest is sought or achieved. Even more, the constant struggle someone *should* feel between various competing goods is itself part of being a healthy human agent, someone with an adequately wide moral horizon. Indeed if someone failed to be impressed by various moral dichotomies, the sort of which are described by Taylor in the above quotation, we would have good reason to say that this person was lacking or deficient in an important moral capacity, that they were unable to appreciate the significance or moral gravity of these competing demands. To sum up: Taylor's account is not one that provides easy answers to a perplexing question. It is principally a descriptive account aimed at uncovering what is necessarily at work in our coming to reflect on our identity, but makes no claims about what, in each specific, idiosyncratic case, would or could be sufficient for bringing about a clarity of identity. More, that this process of reflection and realization should be easy is by itself, an idea that runs against Taylor's conception of healthy agency. Indeed, the question of "Who I am?" if Taylor is correct, is one that cannot ever be comprehensively responded to in any 'final' or conclusive manner. What is important for Taylor is the idea that the process through which one contemplates and scrutinizes their self or identity is a never ending process; it

is a lifelong enterprise which could be at times painful and disorienting and at others euphoric and liberating. It is a truly massive process that an adequately healthy agent (that is, an agent with adequately wide moral horizons) ought to grapple with for the full duration of her life.

1.4

So far, I have tried to explicate some basic features of Taylor's thinking about the notion of human selfhood. I would like now to turn to some more general remarks about the sort of philosophy that this thinking is suggestive of, and perhaps clear away what might seem to some a fundamental incompatibility between Taylor's and Rorty's respective philosophies.

Taylor is by his own description a moral realist. However, this should not lead one to construe his philosophy as a species of Platonism. He does not advocate the ontological reality of goods, the view that *out there in the world* there exist Goods of different sorts; that goods actually and physically exist, hovering in the cosmos as a caricature of Plato's ontology might suggest. He debunks the merits of this sort of view effectively in his numerous polemics against traditional epistemology and metaphysics. Rather, various goods are *real* for Taylor to the extent that, "[goods] are requirements of 'making sense of our lives'... What better measure of reality do we have in human affairs than those terms which on critical reflection and after correction of errors we can detect make the best sense of our lives?"[28] In other words, Taylor is prepared to call 'real' anything that " you *have* to deal with, what won't go away just because it doesn't fit with your prejudices."[29] This qualification strikes me as an important one because it

can allow us to view Taylor's realism as consistent (non-contradictory at very least) with the anti-foundationalism and anti-representationalism that lies at the center of Rorty's thought. We can agree with Rorty that there is no description independent way that things really are and thus agree also that the notion of Reality As It Is In And Of Itself is one that we can and should do without, while conceding that Taylor's thinking about goods and their situation in moral space is not an ontological theory that runs athwart to these Rortian theses.[30] Despite this qualification, there is a central difference between Taylor and Rorty that emerges here, a difference that perhaps can be best summarized by thinking of the distinction between prescribing and describing, between laying bare *what is already in plain view* and making recommendations to speak differently.

We should see Rorty's ironist, a character to whom we will turn in the proceeding chapter, as one that emerges out of Rorty's vision of a liberal utopia. We should see Rorty's thought, in broad terms, as an attempt to encourage a new direction in philosophy, a direction that, because of the new vocabularies this new direction is parasitic upon, no longer finds use for talk of essences, foundations and condition-less conditions of possibility. We should see Taylor's thought, by contrast, as an attempt at some kind of phenomenology, an attempt to lay bare what is *actually* operative in our lives and experience; an attempt to understand more comprehensively the "pre-conditions" that are at work in our ordinary dealings with others and the world. We should see Taylor as trying to describe our situation in careful detail, thereby offering us "thicker" descriptions of our moral experience and, as we saw in section 1.2 with our imagined society example, grant us the possibility for a widening of our moral space, inaugurating a new and broader set of questions upon which we may confer our strong

evaluations; (A detailed and nuanced phenomenology could, for example, help tender our imagined society in Section 1.2 with the notion of courage and perhaps help facilitate new ways to incorporate this concept into their moral space). More specifically, the kind of historical, descriptive phenomenology that Taylor undertakes can help widen our ability to conceive of new goods, new directions in which to strive. In short, this kind of philosophy can, if we are lucky, enrich our sense of "self," our sense of what is worthwhile, our sense of what is significant. It can add rich, subtle and complex features to our life's quest.

Analogously, we also should see Rorty's philosophy as one with potentially enriching qualities. We should see his polemics against reductionism, representationalism, and Realism (capital "R") as being guided by his own liberal hopes and dreams, by his vision of a utopian future that is a glorious improvement of the present. Thus we should not see his portrait of the liberal ironist as in direct conflict with Taylor's reflection on selfhood. We can see both projects as engaged with different questions, employed for different purposes. Thus, I do not want to argue that Rorty's ironism is *necessarily* incompatible or opposed to Taylor's phenomenology. Utopian dreams and descriptive accounts, after all, need not get in each other's way any more than, say, *prescriptive* politics and *descriptive* botany need interfere with one another. Taylor's and Rorty's are different projects, employed for different reasons, thus I will not argue for one at the expense of the other, as the discussion of Wittgenstein in the third chapter will reveal.[31] Rather, I will try to assess the plausibility of the suggestion that we might be able to *actually* become Rortian ironists. If 'ought' is to imply 'can' as I firmly believe it should, I want to explore whether one *can* become an ironist as Rorty

urges we ought to.[32] This is to ask; can one come to view their "self" as, perhaps among other things, a Rortian ironist? Is it plausible to suppose that someone could *actually* stand *where* the ironist is supposed to stand and make the strong evaluations that a Rortian ironist must make? To phrase all of this in another way: Is Rorty's utopian character one that may, given the phenomenology of our actual moral experience, plausibly be realized? And if so, would the realization of such a character be valuable?

NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

[1] Taylor defines strong evaluation as: "discriminations of right and wrong, better or worse, higher or lower, which are not rendered valid by our own desires, inclinations, or choices, but rather stand independent of these and offer standards by which they can be judged." Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity,*(Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 4.

[2] Maybe we could see Jones' identity as being shaped by this indifference. That is, *Who Jones is*, we might think, is in part defined by his lack of strong moral discriminations. We might think things like: "Jones is removed" or "Jones is not passionate" and so on. In short we might see Jones' lack of moral conviction as indicative of "Who he is". This point only serves to reinforce Taylor's claim about the inescapability of 'strong evaluation'. That is, we could only construe this indifference as integral to Jones' identity if we saw this indifference as itself the result of Jones' strong evaluations. We would have to see his indifference in positive terms, as the result of his moral deliberations; that he had decided that the life of "not caring" was in some sense better or higher than the more typical life of strong moral and political commitment. If not, *how Jones felt* or *Where Jones stood,* and thus *Who Jones was* could be entirely arbitrary and random.

[3] This view is, I think it fair to say, fairly common. Often people speak about "*finding* themselves", or "*discovering* their purpose", "discovering their life's path" and so on. This implies that "Who I Am" is a question that had an answer before I learned how to phrase the question, that I had a "self" independent of my quest to discover it. Indeed, religious language is also rich with expressions that imply the same ontological, unconditional existence of a "self" or a soul.

[4] Someone could argue that theories or accounts can be chosen with other considerations in mind, perhaps pragmatic or instrumental reasons. Even in those cases, someone

would still require some kind of strong evaluation in order to legitimate those considerations. That a pragmatic approach is good cannot be so deduced from within pragmatism itself. Its goodness must be deduced by a second order non-instrumental evaluation. Instrumentalism taken as an end is an incoherent notion for it cannot answer the second order question: *Towards what should we be instrumentally efficient?*

[5] Daniel Weinstock has aptly called Taylor's "strong evaluation": " a second order reflection upon [one's] desires, whose practical deliberation is guided by 'a language of evaluative distinctions' identifying certain types of actions as base, noble, courageous, etc., rather than simply by calculations of the probable outcomes associated with the pursuit of given desires." Daniel M.Weinstock, "The Political Theory of Strong Evaluation" in James Tully, ed., *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 173.

[6] For Taylor's repudiation of traditional epistemology and his rejection of universal moral models see his essay: " Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophical Arguments*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

[7] Taylor does seem to believe in some sort of human ontology and teleology. Despite this faith, his philosophical project is one that advocates the discarding of representationalism and foundationalism. His moral philosophy (despite having the title "realism") is one that considers as incoherent the Kantian idea of the *Ding an Sich*. In short, Taylor's moral thought is social-practice centric and focuses on the various phenomenological background conditions of moral experience more than it does upon uncovering essences or universal norms. For this broad picture of Taylor's philosophical motives see his "Overcoming Epistemology" in *Philosophical Arguments*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995), 11.

[8] "Pure" classification, as I have characterized it, would require some sort of adherence to representationalism or a correspondence theory of truth. If we eschew the idea that some of our descriptions can *fit* or *mirror* Reality, we will no longer think that we can 'get things *really* right', classify things faithfully as they are independent of us. We will give up on the idea that some of our descriptions can fit with what Rorty has called "nature's own language" and will see all classifications as *our* tools, employed for a reason or use.

[9] Objectivity in this Nagelian sense cannot in principle be reached for we have no criteria or *checklist* to consult when testing for otherworldly Objectivity. In short, even if we magically achieved it, we could not ever know it. What would learning that we had accessed "Objective Reality" be like? How would such a vantage point differ from our current one?

[10] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G.E.M Anscombe and G.H von Wright, ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), #156. (Emphasis added)

[11] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), #242.

[12] See Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* for his view that doubting (and thus the quest for philosophical foundations) comes to an end with certainty.
Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G.E.M Anscombe and G.H von Wright, ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972).

[13] Charles Taylor, *The Malaise of Modernity*, (Toronto: Anansi Press Ltd., 1991), 36.

[14] John Searle, "Rationality and Realism: What is at Stake?" *Daedelus* 122, no.4 (Fall 1992), 80.

[15] Of course, we can and do evaluate and criticize our practices, arguing sometimes that certain practices ought to be replaced by others, or that some practices are needlessly cruel or unfruitful and so on. This type of criticism, we should remember, is itself a social practice and does not *transcend* the social practices it criticizes. On this view, critiquing social practices is just one more social practice which is no more external or philosophically objective than other social practices.

[16] This idea, which has its original home, perhaps, in Wittgenstein's famous private language argument, points to the idea that there can be no purely private, *ex nihilo* understanding of the self. That is, although the distinction between the 'private' and the 'public' that Rorty makes is a helpful one, it is a distinction, perhaps like most distinctions, that is rather fuzzy with a great deal of overlap. Thus privately ironic 'self-makers' must, this line of thought goes, make reference to the publicly shared norms of meaning and value. Indeed, they must do this before 'self-making' is even in principle possible. On this view, the ironist like anyone else, requires a framework or moral horizon against which various choices and ideas become intelligible.

[17] Remember that strong evaluations are not instrumental. That is, my valuing X as opposed to Y means that I take X to be higher, nobler, more significant, or more worthwhile than Y. This is not a calculative evaluation.

[18] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 28.

[19] Ibid. 42.

[20] I read Taylor here as advocating something very similar to Wittgenstein's "forms of life". In fact, although I will not press this point here, I think that Taylor's use of "framework" can be substituted with Wittgenstein's "form of life" while retaining the full thrust of his arguments.

[21] Charles Taylor *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 19. I should add that the use of the term "incomparably" in this passage arises in reference to Taylor's discussion of 'hypergoods'. I should like to completely avoid discussing hypergoods and so, if some readers are troubled by the suggestion that various courses of action are "incomparably higher" than others, it will suffice to take this passage with a grain of salt. This passage, despite all of this, still functions well to elucidate the concept of a framework.

[22] Hans-Georg Gadamer makes a similar point about frameworks when he writes: "Long before we understand ourselves through the process of self-examination, we understand ourselves in a self-evident way in the family, society, and state in which we live. The focus of subjectivity is a distorting mirror. The self-awareness of the individual is only a flickering in the closed circuits of historical life." Hans-Georg Gadamer *Truth and Method* (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1994), 276.

[23] Taylor stresses the idea that 'articulation' of the goods towards which we strive is an integral part of enriching our sense of our life's quest. See especially chapter 3, "The Ethics of Inarticulacy" in *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 53-90.

[24] See Alasdair MacIntyre's *After Virtue*, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1981). I think that MacIntyre's term "quest" is an excellent one for it implies that one can more or less carefully meet the demands of this mission. That is, it is a term that highlights, to the extent that one's 'self' is parasitic on moral evaluations, the prospect that one can fail or succeed, take a wrong turn or stay on course. This account emphasizes the anti-subjectivist point that an individual can more or less successfully meet the demands imposed upon one by the details of their life's quest.

[25] To add a non-philosophical aside, I think that the familiar term "mid-life crisis" is exemplary of one's uncertainty or re-evaluation about where they stand in relation to the good. One's realization that they are growing older is perhaps a catalyst for this kind of doubt. For as one sees that her years are indeed numbered, she may re-assess whether or not her life *quest* has been, to that point, fruitfully sought or whether, perhaps, she has veered away from it or, that the quest with which she has been consumed was perhaps of the wrong sort.

[26] This does not mean, of course, that someone could not come to value something different (even antagonistic) to what the majority in her "framework" valued. It means simply, that one must first learn the games of "meaningfully valuing" and "making strong evaluations" before this is, even in principle, possible. Taylor writes to this effect: "Each young person may take up a stance which is authentically his or her own; but the very possibility of this is enframed in a social understanding of great temporal depth, in fact, in a "tradition". *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 39.

[27] Charles Taylor, *Philosophy in an Age of Pluralism: The Philosophy of Charles Taylor in Question* James Tully, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 213.

[28] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 57.

[29] Ibid. 59. (Emphasis added)

[30] I think that Rorty would readily acknowledge the kind of realism that Taylor offers. Rorty might think that 'realism' is an unfortunate title for this common sense view, but he would agree with the main crux of the position. As Rorty has said, realism "gets interesting" only when it refers to a Kantian *Ding an Sich*. Taylor's "realism," of course, refers to no such thing.

[31] It seems plain to me that certain philosophical projects do not compete with one another. It would be silly, I think, to be forced to choose between, say, Rawls's theory of Justice and Quine's indeterminacy of translation thesis. The two are not comparable in any significant way. Although the Rawls and Quine example probably overstates or exaggerates this point, I wish to draw the same general idea between Rorty's Liberal ironist and Taylor's phenomenology of the self.

[32] Of course, as I outlined in the introduction, this 'can' does not speak to the ahistorical, transcendental conditions of possibility. Thus perhaps my question might be better characterized as whether Rortian ironism would have the ability to strike us as what William James called a 'live momentous hypothesis'.

Chapter 2:
Richard Rorty's Ironist

> I call people of this sort "ironists" because their realization that anything can be made to look good or bad by being redescribed, and their renunciation of the attempt to formulate criteria of choice between final vocabularies, puts them in a position which Sartre called "meta-stable," never quite able to take themselves seriously because always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change, always aware of the contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies, and thus of their selves.
>
> - Richard Rorty

> Do you call it doubting to write down on a piece of paper that you doubt? If so, doubting has nothing to do with any serious business. But do not make believe; if pedantry has not eaten all reality out of you, recognize, as you must, that there is much that you do not doubt in the least.
>
> - C.S. Peirce

> Doesn't one need grounds for doubt?
>
> - Ludwig Wittgenstein

2

We saw in the preceding chapter some of the conditions that Taylor flags as crucial in order for one to develop a clear conception of one's self. Before we turn to an assessment of the ironist's ability to fulfill these minimum conditions, I would like to pause to explain in more detail, Rorty's characterization of his ironist. I begin with an importantly related notion, what Rorty calls a "final vocabulary."

Endorsing Rorty's anti-representationalism has certain consequences. Most notable perhaps, is the consequence that accepting this view makes it impossible for one to think of their utterances (their language more generally) as faithful mappers or mirrors of the world. As we saw earlier in the introduction, this belief lies at the center of Rorty's philosophy; its crux is succinctly characterized by Hilary Putnam when he writes:

> [E]lements of what we call 'language' or 'mind' *penetrate so deeply into what we call 'reality' that the very project of representing ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language-independent' is fatally compromised from the start.* Like Relativism, but in a different way, Realism is an impossible attempt to view the world from Nowhere."[1]

This passage from Putnam echoes a decisive difficulty that propels Rorty's thinking about his ironist. Namely, if we cannot *represent ourselves as being 'mappers' of something 'language-independent'* then what may we represent ourselves as? And more importantly, what is the best method to employ in adjudicating between these different representations? Put in a slightly different way, once we discard the idea of truth by correspondence to reality and eschew the similar idea that descriptions are deemed *better than others* by virtue of their more faithfully *fitting* with the thing described, in what way are we to construe the words we use and the claims we make with them?

In responding to this dilemma Rorty utilizes the Wittgensteinian analogy of *language as tools*. If we stop thinking of our "true" descriptions as correct, faithful accounts of what is *out there* in the world, that is, as "accurate representations of Reality," Rorty argues, then we should only think about them in terms of what they do for us, how well they facilitate our rather diverse needs for "coping." Descriptions, in this anti-representationalist sense, can only be seen as better or more desirable than other

rival descriptions if they serve us in ways that their rivals cannot. That is, the worth of a particular description is inextricably bound to a use or purpose. No one description can be endowed with an intrinsic superiority over others for once correspondence to reality and accurate representation go, so too does the idea of *the world*, or *Reality* adjudicating between competing descriptions. All of this makes it pointless to ask, for example: " Is the carpenter's or the particle physicist's account of tables the *true* one,"[2] for if neither account can capture Reality more exactly, than we must only ask which of the two accounts would better serve certain purposes in certain contexts.

Someone who accepts the *words as tools* analogy will have little trouble sympathizing with the following passage from Rorty:

> 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. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's "final vocabulary." It is "final" in the sense that if doubt is cast on the worth of these words, their user has no non-circular argumentative recourse. Those words are as far as he can go with language; beyond them there is only helpless passivity and resort to force.[3]

Someone who accepts Wittgenstein's analogy will not think that "final vocabularies," like *any other* set of words, can map or mirror the world better or more accurately than other words or vocabularies. And so, perhaps, one might follow Rorty in thinking it desirable to become an ironist, someone who " has radical and continuing doubts about the vocabulary she currently uses, because she has been impressed by other vocabularies, vocabularies taken as final by people or books she has encountered."[4] This is to say, after the repudiations of accurate representation and truth by correspondence, perhaps someone should no longer see "the search for a final vocabulary as (even in part) a way

of getting something distinct from [that] vocabulary right." [5] The ironist makes light of claims that *certain* final vocabularies get something distinct from themselves right or are intrinsically superior to other final vocabularies. She cannot take such claims seriously because she has given up on the idea that *any particular* vocabulary can speak to something beyond itself, that it can get in touch with something otherworldly or stand outside of its own *geist.* Instead, the ironist "faces up to the contingency of his or her most central beliefs and desires...[and] abandons the idea that those central beliefs and desires *refer back to something* beyond the reach of time and chance."[6] Someone who came to construe their words as tools (that is, instrumentally, in conjunction with their needs, desires, hopes or wants) would be compelled to be open-minded about the words they used (their final vocabulary). They would be open to the idea that better, more efficient tools might be available, that they may find replacements for their current tools; the sort of which facilitate their needs more comprehensively. To this end, Rorty's ironist is constantly in search of better, more useful tools; redescriptions that can accomplish new and innovative tasks. "Ironists hope, by this continual redescription, to make the best selves for [them]selves that [they] can."[7] The seemingly obvious retort: *Best selves in light of what*? is one to which I will return in a later section. For now, I would like to reflect on the sense of self or identity that a Rortian ironist is likely to have.

2.1

We saw in the previous chapter Taylor's insistence that someone could not conceive of their clear identity without having first made 'strong evaluations' about the qualitatively superior, higher, more worthwhile and so on. Here I want to ask: Can Rorty's ironist have such a set of strongly evaluative judgments?

Indeed, the ironist, as Rorty depicts her, *has* moral commitments. She cares for things, values certain pursuits as higher or better than others. She is opposed to the idea, however, that such commitments can be given grounds, foundations or can be justified in purely "rational" terms. An ironist takes her complete set of commitments (moral or otherwise) to be the result of nothing more than the combination of language-games she was taught to play. That is, she is constantly reminding herself that things could have turned out differently, that in another possible world, a world where she was taught to play different language-games, she could have, indeed *would* have, had different (even antagonistic) moral commitments. Rorty's ironist is always reminding herself of the fragility and complete contingency of these commitments.

But this 'facing up to contingency' forces the ironist to wobble on *where she stands*. She can never assert *where* she stands in relation to the good with the moral force of non-ironists because she thinks it important, necessary even, to constantly remind herself that any particular good is only situated as it is because of contingent, historical circumstances. She cannot vehemently oppose the Nazis, as powerfully as non-ironists can, for she realizes that the 'strongly evaluative claim' that insists the Nazis are appalling is itself only the delicate product of time, place and chance. She reminds herself that the final vocabulary where the loathing of the Nazis is articulated could have been different, and thus speaks to nothing more philosophically solid than the rival vocabulary that construed the Nazis as deserving of admiration. Rorty himself, while quoting Sartre, points out how uncomfortable this predicament could make someone:

> When the secret police come, when the torturers violate the innocent, there is nothing to be said to them of the form "There is something within you which you are betraying. Though you embody the practices of a totalitarian society which

> will endure forever, there is something beyond those practices which condemns you." This thought is hard to live with, as is Sartre's remark:
>
> Tomorrow, after my death, some men may decide to establish Fascism, and the others may be so cowardly or slack as to let them do so. If so Fascism will then become the truth of man, and so much worse for us. In reality, things will be as much as man has decided they are.[8]

This thought is hard to live with because it contrasts with the intuitive idea that *there must be* something beyond our own vocabulary that condemns the Nazis. There must be something in *the nature of things*, or in *Reason* that 'demonstrates' the objectivity of the Nazis' evil. Rorty's claim, one reiterated by his ironist, is that, alas, there is no such objectivity to be sought; the great philosophers of past ages (and perhaps to some extent our present age too) were wrong to think that there was. But even if Rorty is right that there is nothing outside or beyond our norms and practices to provide foundations for our assortment of moral claims, a position I argued for in chapter 1, it is still unclear that someone can accept the main tenets of ironism while maintaining ordinary moral commitment. That is, it is unclear that someone can fully 'face up to the contingency of their deepest beliefs and desires' while making strong evaluations that have any strength. This is in part Rorty's challenge; to persuade us that one can indeed make categorical strong evaluations, evaluations so unshakably convicted that they could be seen as worth dying for while dismissing as the ironist does, the suggestion that those evaluations can be rendered valid by anything universal or objective. He writes to this effect:

> One can be humane without being universalist, without believing either that it is "rational" to be concerned with the sufferings of others or that there is a "common humanity" which binds you to those others. One can want to relieve suffering without having an interesting answer when Socrates asks you *why* you desire this, and also without believing that this desire is the deepest and most important thing in your life.[9]

Rorty does, however, hint at the suggestion that the ironist's inability to take his or herself seriously, as evidenced by his use of Sartre's term 'meta-stable' in the passage I quoted at the beginning of this chapter, makes it very difficult for the ironist to have a clear sense of self or identity. That is, Rorty recognizes that the ironist's constant awareness of the "contingency and fragility of their final vocabularies" (the set of words that their strong evaluations are formed in) forces them to wobble on the question of who they are. They are "never quite able to take *themselves* seriously because [they are] always aware that the terms in which they describe themselves are subject to change."[10] The ironist is unstable about her strong evaluations. She is hesitant to make bold claims about modes of life that are higher, nobler, and more fulfilling. And more, after she has made strong evaluations, she immediately introduces "radical and continuing doubts" about them; she wonders if perhaps the evaluations she made were the *wrong ones*, whether she was taught to play the wrong language-games and thus speak the wrong language. Someone who wobbles the way Rorty's ironist does about their final vocabulary and thus their strong evaluations would lack a clear sense of identity, a sense of 'who they were', for as we saw in chapter 1, the ability to make qualitative discriminations about higher and lower, noble and base, is a necessary but insufficient condition that allows one, in the first place, to reflect on the question of their identity. Taylor reinforces the inescapability of strong evaluations when he writes:

> The horizons within which we live our lives and which make sense of them have to include these strong qualitative discriminations. Moreover, this is not meant just as a contingently true psychological fact about human beings, which could perhaps turn out one day not to hold for some exceptional individual or new type, some superman of disengaged objectification. Rather the claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.[11]

We might conclude that there is at least a *prima facie* inclination to suppose that the ironist cannot meet Taylor's requisite conditions for a notion of self, for she cannot make the strong discriminations that a healthy agent must make; discriminations the sort of which are integral for her to conceive of her clear identity.

2.2

Even if the ironist cannot make strong evaluations with the same zeal as non-ironists, we should not yet want to conclude that the ironist could not have a clear identity. After all, the ironist defines 'who she is', at least to some degree, through her allegiance to irony itself. That is, a commitment to Rortian ironism (and all of the ideas, judgments and gestures that accompany it) could be seen as that necessary set of qualitative discriminations against which the ironist's identity is couched. More specifically, the ironist as she is drafted by Rorty, is serious about irony; she does not, that is, treat irony ironically. Although she has no criteria for being serious about it and so cannot answer the question: *why not be ironic about irony?* in any non-circular justificatory way, 'being ironic' it seems is the one thing that the ironist does not have 'continuing and radical doubts' about.[12] If she did, she could no longer be an ironist, consistent with Rorty's depiction, for if she had radical and continuing doubts about irony itself, in what could her own 'ironism' then consist? Her commitment to ironism would in that case be seen as wobbly, something to take lightly, just like her commitment towards anything else. This is to say if Rorty's character is to *be an ironist*, if she is to be worthy of the title, she *must* be serious about it. If she were to take irony just as lightly as she took, say, Platonism, then what reason should we have for labeling

her an ironist and not a Platonist? Of course, it could be argued, conversely, that the ironist *must* take irony lightly, she must, that is, have severe and continuing doubts about it. She must, this objection goes, see irony like any other commitment, as contingent and subject to radical change or revision. If the ironist is to be an ironist in any consistent way, this objection insists, she must scrutinize her ironist allegiance with the same intensity as she does the rest of her claims and leanings. While there is an intuitive strength to this claim, I want to suggest that the ironist does not subject her 'being ironic' to continuing and radical doubts. Having "continuing and radical doubts" is after all, emblematic of being ironic in the first place, and so, taking irony lightly, as the above objection suggested, would mean that the ironist must have continuing and radical doubts about whether to have "continuing and radical doubts." She must introduce further doubts about whether or not to have doubts about having doubts and so on *ad infinitum*. Just like the skeptic must not be skeptical about skepticism itself, I want to suggest that the ironist cannot have continuing and radical doubts about whether or not to have continuing and radical doubts.[13] For if she did, she could never adequately commit to joshing metaphysicians out of their attempts at theorizing, she could not be playful towards claims of Platonic Truth or transcendental certitude because she would constantly mistrust the grounds for this playfulness. She could not confidently shrug off the accusation of relativism for she would, perhaps at her most doubtful moments, think that these accusers put forth a sound grievance. In short, she could not do what, as an ironist, she must do; that is, behave in the manner that her own irony requires of her.

The important point to consider here is that the ironist *does* have a set of strong evaluations, and an orientation towards the good. She chooses to orient herself towards

irony, towards the 'taking lightly' of Metaphysics and Epistemology. In short, *where* Rorty's ironist should like to stand in her moral space, this thought goes, is governed by what she thinks can approximate the ideal good of irony the most carefully. While I do think that it is analytically true that the ironist is serious about irony (just as a nihilist cannot reject nihilism itself on nihilistic grounds), I do not think that irony represents a good in itself or the subject of a strong evaluation. Rather, as I read and understand Rorty, the ironist uses irony instrumentally, as a means to a further set of ends. Consequently, I want to suggest that we must peel away a further layer in order to determine whether Rorty's ironist can have an orientation towards the good and the set of qualitative discriminations that define where one stands in relation to that good.

Near the end of chapter 1, I said that Rorty's portrait of his ironist is fuelled by his own liberal hopes and dreams, and that Rorty's vision of a liberal utopia[14] is the picture that 'breathes the life' into his ironist. If we accept this, we should see irony instrumentally, as a tool that might facilitate the social and political change that is characteristic of Rorty's liberal utopia. Irony is, in this case, like a ladder to be kicked away once it has been climbed. It is a means to the end of moving beyond the need for metaphysical explanations.[15] Rorty expresses this point when he writes:

> The goal of ironist theory is to understand the metaphysical urge, the urge to theorize, so well that one becomes entirely free of it. Ironist theory is thus a ladder which is to be thrown away as soon as one has figured out what it was that drove one's predecessors to theorize.[16]

Here the chief goal of the ironist begins to come into focus. Namely, she wishes to eradicate the philosophical urge towards metaphysics. Her goal is a reformist one; she wishes to transform the discipline of philosophy, to show us philosophers the nature of the "picture that held us captive"[17] so that we may set that troublesome picture aside.

Thus her irony is employed in the hope that we may overcome our need to *search* for the objectivity of the Nazis wrongness, that we may overcome the need to justify on rational grounds *why* a life in middle-class Sweden just is, *ceterus paribus*, better than a poverty stricken life in Burkina Faso. It is the ironist's hope that we may set aside metaphysics and theory; that we may, in turn, "settle for useful tools, and take them where and when we find them."[18] In short, the ironist employs irony in the hope that philosophers might become pragmatists, those who no longer seek out deep truths about human nature and things in themselves.[19] The ironist's wish is that philosophy may become more practical, more committed to grappling with the problems of its day and less concerned with demonstrating necessary truths and theories about those truths.[20] If the ironist uses irony as a means to achieving a reformation in philosophy, then we may say that the good towards which the ironist is primarily drawn is pragmatism. The ironist makes the claim that useful, relevant philosophy is higher, better in a non-instrumental way than theoretical, metaphysical philosophy. Pragmatic philosophy, Rorty's ironist feels, is qualitatively higher than non-pragmatic philosophy.

2.3

I stressed in chapter 1 that Taylor's account of strong-evaluation cannot consist in instrumental claims alone. Being an efficient calculator of ends is not to be a strong-evaluator. I tried to show how Taylor's point was sound in claiming that all instrumental models require for their legitimating some set of ends. That is, being instrumental cannot be deemed good on purely instrumental grounds. That pragmatism or utilitarianism are good, I argued, cannot be so deduced from within pragmatism or

utilitarianism themselves. After all, pragmatism (taken in a general and unspecific sense) can be the Nazis' philosophy just as well as it can be the philosophy of liberals like Rorty or communitarians like Taylor. Instrumental models like utilitarianism or pragmatism require "inputs," they require directions towards which to be instrumentally efficient. After all, in purely brutish, instrumental terms, one would be correct in saying that the Nazis were extremely "pragmatic" in introducing their gas chambers. It is not the level of the Nazi's efficiency that we recoil at, it is rather the ends towards which they strove that we find abhorrent. We do not think the Nazis despicable because they were inefficient, we think of them as such because the ends towards which they aimed their instrumental efficiency strikes us as utterly appalling. I tried to argue, following Taylor, that we cannot but make strong evaluations. We must, if we are to be agents in any meaningful sense, distinguish between those ends that are noble, worthwhile and fulfilling and those others that are despicable and shallow, a task that is fatedly linked with the making of meaningful strong evaluations. To re-phrase Taylor's point in terms of Wittgenstein's tools analogy: *we must first have tasks if our having tools is to make any sense.* A tool can only be a tool, after all, against the background of its task.

I want to suggest that Rorty's ironist, with her chief good of pragmatism, falls victim to a similar problem. She cannot be, as perhaps the discussion in the last section would imply, instrumental *all the way down.* She cannot treat instrumentalism (more specifically pragmatism) as the good towards which she orients herself in moral space. She must have a further set of goods, goods the sort of which she thinks pragmatism is the best vehicle towards. She must, if she is to have a clear sense of 'who she is,' have some set of discriminations about *the higher*, the moral, more worthwhile, more

significant, that she feels, perhaps, might be more efficiently brought about by pragmatism. She cannot, I have been arguing, treat pragmatism itself as the good towards which she would like to be situated. That idea, I have suggested following Taylor, is incoherent.[21]

In section 2, I brought out some consequences of Wittgenstein's language as tools analogy. I said there that Rorty's ironist, since she sees the complete set of words she uses as tools, is always open to the idea that better tools might come along. She is constantly aware that her current tools may be vanquished by more efficient replacements. Here Taylor's point about the necessity of at least some non-instrumental claims becomes clear. To what can the ironist turn when wondering whether a proposed tool is more effective than her current tool? What criteria can she call on to decide between tools? The problem is simply that the ironist sees the use of *all* her words as tools; and so the goals or tasks that her tools are expected to fulfill are themselves tools (of which improved replacements may become available). The point here is that an agent must have ends; she must have some kind of demarcation between tools and tasks, between means and ends. Without ends or projects of any sort the very idea of having tools becomes unintelligible, for what good should tools be if we have no tasks in which to employ them? Wittgenstein's analogy is a helpful one, but it just is not conceivable to think that *all words* are, at the same time, tools. In order to make sense of Wittgenstein's analogy we must presuppose that there are non-tools, we must build-into "tool talk" the idea that there are tasks or ends that some tools can achieve more competently than others. We must insist that there are non-tools, if our talking about tools is to be at all intelligible. If we failed to make such a demarcation, as Rorty's

ironist appears to have so failed, we would be forced into endorsing an exact congruency between tools and language. This is of course, a false picture of language, for unlike language, we can typically set aside tools when we are finished with them.[22] Thus when Rorty writes:" We ironists hope, by this continual re-description [that is, the continual search for better tools], to make the best selves for ourselves that we can,"[23] it is unclear that the ironist can have any sense about what a "best self" could look like. For if the ironist's "best self" is a notion, like *all other notions*, that might be plausibly replaced by an upgraded notion, (and thus is one that invites radical and continuing doubt), it is unclear that the ironist can have this hope at all. She cannot say that she hopes to make the best self for herself because she views all her words (including the articulation of the idea that she should make the best self for herself) as tools. She might think, while in the midst of her radical and continuing doubt, that the very idea of self-creation is an idea that should be replaced with another very different *desideratum* (perhaps self-*finding* or discovery). More, she might come to think, in another bout of radical doubt, that the best way to make this best self is not, Rorty's insistence to the contrary notwithstanding, with poeticized re-description but rather with some very different instrument. It is unclear to sum up, that someone who had radical and continuing doubt about all of the words they used, could, in fact, have ends of any sort. It is more plausible that such a character would drown in her own skepticism, much in the same way that Descartes famously drowns.

To be sure, Rorty's ideal character is a *liberal* ironist, someone who in addition to endorsing irony as a vehicle towards pragmatism, also believes with Judith Shklar that "cruelty is the worst thing we do."[24] But since being ironic in no way insures, or even

encourages that someone be liberal nor does being liberal in any way encourage irony, this point is beside the point.[25] There is of course no compulsion in the matter. An ironist *could* feel that "cruelty is the worst thing we do" and equally, a liberal *could* feel that the urge to theorize is one that should be "joshed." However, since we are here only concerned with the ironist, there is no good reason to suppose that this character *would* be a liberal any more than a non-liberal. She would indeed, if a liberal, be a rather *weak* one for she must, if Rorty is serious about her traits, have 'radical and continuing doubts' about the tenets and *desiderata* of liberal thought or ideology. She must, that is, think of the desirability of an open, decent, liberal society as itself only the delicate result of time and contingent chance and thus one that is open to radical and continuing doubt.[26]

Rorty's ironist, in the end, may or may not have goods towards which she strives. Her chief *philosophical* goal (trying to turn metaphysicians into pragmatists) is not, I have been arguing, a good in itself. This goal cannot be the conviction of a strong evaluation, for pragmatism cannot be considered by itself as higher, or better than non-pragmatism without some set of judgments about the qualitatively higher, about *why* some philosophical positions are non-instrumentally better than others. I would conclude then, that Rorty's ironist (if we take this character at face value) is likely to be lacking a clear sense of who she is. Even more, this lack of a clear identity is itself the hallmark of the ironist. To the extent that a clear identity requires strong evaluations, as Taylor insists, the ironist's radical doubts are radical self-doubts. She cannot, that is, reflect on the question of her *self*, for she cannot make firm, lasting, strong evaluations and more, the strong evaluations that she does make, if indeed she is able to make them, can never be immune to "continuing and radical doubts". She cannot ever *stand*

somewhere, as a healthy concept of selfhood requires, for she is forever calling into question this *where* in severe and radical ways. She cannot isolate goods towards which she would like to strive because *all* demarcations of value, she feels are contingent, and subject to complete change or revision.[27] Rorty's ironist, I wish to conclude, is lost at sea. Her radical doubts about *all* of her words makes it dubious that she could have the strong moral convictions that non-ironists have.[28] She identifies with irony (tautologically perhaps), with the goal of making philosophy more pragmatic, but beyond this she cannot turn to herself as the object of reflection. For not only does she lack criteria for thinking about whether her life's quest is being sought, she lacks the ability to see her life in the form of a quest at all because she cannot ever stand firm for long enough (that is, cease to have radical doubts) to see this. Even more, since she lacks a criterion for wrongness, she cannot see goods as directions that can be more or less carefully approximated. She might feel, if she happens to be a liberal, that 'cruelty is the worst thing we can do,' but she cannot say categorically of any particular act that it is cruel for the distinction between the cruel and the non-cruel, she feels, is one that could easily change and one, accordingly, that she will have radical and crippling doubts about. She has no criteria to apply when thinking about cruel acts, for she is convinced that *any* criteria she could ascertain is nothing more than the fragile result of time and contingent chance.[29] She is constantly being pulled in every direction, towards *all* goods at *all* times. She can never, if we take Rorty's account of this character literally, choose any of these goods for long enough, or robustly enough, to warrant a reflection on the type of person she is. To sum up: Rorty's ironist cannot pronounce "Here I Stand!" with

enough moral stout to ever provoke an introspective meditation into the question: *Who am I?*[30]

2.4

One of the chief reasons I think that Rorty's irony is *prima facie* incompatible with what strikes us as a live, momentous realizable ideal is that it is too neglectful of the actual phenomenology of our moral experience. That is, we just could not conceive of our(selves) as calling our complete set of beliefs and the justifications for them (our final vocabularies) into question as Rorty's ironist does. We could not, that is, imagine our 'selves' as ironists, due perhaps to the tension discussed above, between what we take a healthy (normal) and clear concept of self to consist in and ironism's apparent disregard for those considerations.[31] The ironism that Rorty offers may strike some of us as a clever experiment in thought but lacking in attentiveness to actual human experience. It is in this vein that I want to now suggest that Rortian irony is akin to a species of skepticism and thus strikes us as, perhaps, intellectually absorbing but ordinarily outrageous, that ironism, like skepticism, is only a live option for the philosopher; indeed only a certain kind of philosopher.[32]

I can begin to show the overt congruency between skepticism and ironism by quoting an important passage from Rorty. He says that his ironist:

> Spends her time worrying about the possibility that she has been initiated into the wrong tribe, taught to play the wrong language game. She worries that the process of socialization which turned her into a human being by giving her a language may have given her the wrong language, and so turned her into the wrong kind of human being. But she cannot give a criterion of wrongness.[33]

Just *what* is the ironist worrying about in this case?[34] What would it even mean to discover that one was *indeed* initiated into the wrong tribe? What would such a finding be like? Here we can see that the ironist's doubt falls victim to the same Wittgensteinian charge of nonsense as do the theses of the global skeptic. Both try to raise questions where no answers are conceivable. Both fail to recognize that a meaningful doubt is one that can be quieted; that the "game of doubting presupposes certainty."[35] And more, both *metaphysicalize* the concept of "doubt" by removing it from the "language-game which is its original home."[36]

Of course there is an important distinction to be drawn between global skepticism and Rortian ironism. The distinction is centered on what propels each character into their representative doubt. The skeptic is usually a figure engrossed in traditional epistemology and so, in one sense, is fulfilling her duty as a careful and meticulous 'guardian of knowledge' in doubting. She cannot, if she is serious about the claims and *desiderata* of traditional epistemology, simply set these doubts aside; that would be intolerably negligent. Just like a surgeon must, if she is to be an adept and lawful surgeon, perform her work with care and exactitude, so too must the epistemologist doubt with commitment and carefulness. The epistemologist's doubt is then a sort of professional doubt, a perceived requirement of doing one's job well. Rorty's ironist, by contrast, has no professional protocol. She is convinced, quite to the contrary, that the job that traditional epistemology has taken seriously is one that we could (and should) make obsolete. Epistemology and its entrenched Cartesian quest for certainty, the ironist feels, is simply a broad collection of "habits of action" [37](perhaps like those of a

blacksmith) that we no longer require, a profession that we have moved beyond the need for, and one we might do better to replace.

For those who think, *pace* Rorty, that the topics of epistemology represent natural kinds, or that the questions and puzzles with which it deals are not optional, passing, questions and puzzles, the ironist's suggestion will seem wildly misguided. Those on the other hand, who agree with the following passage from Rorty will have little trouble with the general thrust, if not the specific details, of his ironist's reformist hopes:

> Interesting philosophy is rarely an examination of the pros and cons of a thesis. Usually it is, implicitly or explicitly, a contest between an entrenched vocabulary which has become a nuisance and a half-formed new vocabulary which vaguely promises new things.[38]

The discipline of philosophy, Rorty's ironist wants to suggest, should no longer define itself against the quest to *get things right* from what Hilary Putnam has called a "God's Eye View." Such a view, anti-representationalists feel, is an imaginary, chimerical one. Instead, anti-representationalists like Rorty feel: "*Anything* could be made to look good or bad, important or unimportant, useful or useless, by being re-described."[39] Very much in this spirit, Rorty admits:

> Conforming to my own precepts, I am not going to offer arguments against the vocabulary I want to replace. Instead, I am going to try to make the vocabulary I favor look attractive by showing how it may be used to describe a variety of topics.[40]

Rorty's ironist, it seems fair to say, situates herself squarely against the traditional epistemologist; she is, perhaps, a perfect inversion of the skeptic. Whereas the epistemologist thinks that some problems (in this case questions about the nature and limits of human knowledge) are patently perennial, the ironist feels that *any problem* can

lose its life and momentum by being cast in a different vocabulary, by being re-described. Whereas the epistemologist thinks that her discipline represents a real, obligatory *Fach*; a discipline to which we are compelled by nature, the ironist feels that nature does not have the ability to compel; the seeming compulsion is born from what has been *our* view of nature and our interactive relationship with it, a view *like all views*, that is subject to change and reform. Most fundamental perhaps; while the epistemologist typically thinks that there are "facts of the matter" that can be summoned to reach a verdict, in principle, between rival claims, the ironist rejects this view, arguing instead that it is *we*, not the facts, who adjudicate between claims. Thus the ironist wants to convince the epistemologist that the very idea of intrinsic nature (and hence the idea of "facts of the matter" taken in a strong philosophical sense) is one that we can and should do without. In light of these important dissimilarities between the epistemologist and ironist, it seems confusing that the ironist should have the "continuing and radical doubts" that she has. After all, profession does not compel her, as it does the skeptic, to doubt. Nor is she smitten with the quest for unshakable, Cartesian certainty; a quest the ironist thinks is merely a superfluous remnant from the worn out, old vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism. So why does she doubt with the zest and extremism of an epistemological skeptic?[41]

I think one plausible answer to this seemingly perplexing question is that she simply need not. That is, I suggest, Rorty did not have to create his ironist with the trait of "continuing and radical doubt." He should have preferably said things like: "The ironist is always open-minded" or "She is forever aware that better, more useful tools may come along" or "She has a profound tolerance for other forms of life and their

practices because she knows that her own form of life has no metaphysical preeminence over others" and so on. Michael Williams makes a related point when he writes:

> The fact is, being *aware* of alternative vocabularies does not, as a matter of course, equate to being *impressed* by alternative vocabularies, in the sense of finding them plausible replacements for one's own vocabulary. If irony depended entirely on the availability of equally impressive alternative vocabularies, irony itself would be far more occasional and contingent than Rorty allows. The ironist's doubts would not, in the normal run of things, be either radical or continuing. For example, Rorty himself is aware of anti-liberal political views but is certainly not impressed by them. [42]

There is no automatic inference, this suggestion goes, from the awareness of other vocabularies to 'continuing and radical doubts' about one's own vocabulary. To be sure, radical and continuing doubt has, in past époques, played a very important role in social change (vocabulary replacement). The grand project of Enlightenment rationalism and the 'scientification' of philosophy *did* offer a plausible vocabulary replacement for what was then the dominant vocabulary of Christian Europe.[43] Whereas deep, global doubt may have struck those Europeans who spoke the Christian vocabulary as a live option, it does not so strike us any longer. We have become too familiarized with Peirce Wittgenstein and Austin to take these ungrounded Cartesian-styled doubts seriously. We know that doubts of this radical sort only have 'teeth' in an intellectual, purely theoretical setting; we cannot attach any 'ordinary' importance to the conclusions of such disengaged theoretical thought experiments.[44] In short, we *can* follow Rorty in feeling that there is nothing in the nature of things, or in the infallible enterprise of Reason that provide foundations for our claims, and yet still refrain from radical and continuing doubts about them. It just is the case that the life in middle-class Sweden is better, *ceterus paribus*, than the underprivileged life in Burkina Faso. If we should have radical and continuing doubts about this, as Rorty's ironist should like to have, what

other basic truths must we call into drastic uncertainty? Most importantly, how can we be moral; how can we live and act once we have done so?[45] What sort of damaged notion of self will this force upon us? As Wittgenstein rhetorically made the point about the groundlessness of radical doubt: "If my name is *not* Ludwig Wittgenstein, how can I rely on what is meant by "true" and "false"?[46]

All of this provides the primer for a point I will make in more detail in the next and final chapter. Namely, that Rorty's ironist is still engaged with traditional epistemology despite her goal to set that troublesome *Fach* aside and that because of this engagement, Rorty's ironist is not adequately suited to her task. That is, to the extent that the ironist doubts without grounds and has doubts that cannot in principle be assuaged, she is involved in a thought experiment that has its original home in the Cartesian tradition, a tradition the ironist believes to have been notoriously unfruitful.[47] Setting aside the primary picture of that tradition, I will argue later on, should mean that one no longer engages with its emblematic challenges. Instead, one should simply set aside that picture "and neither explain nor deduce anything further."[48] For as Barry Stroud has rightly pointed out: "We cannot accept the terms of Descartes' challenge and then hope to meet it."[49]

NOTES TO CHAPTER 2

[1] Hilary Putnam, *Realism With a Human Face* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 20.

[2] Richard Rorty, "Religious Faith, Intellectual Responsibility and Romance" in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Clays Ltd., 1999), 153.

[3] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73.

[4] Ibid. 73.

[5] Ibid. 75.

[6] Ibid. Introduction, XV (Emphasis added).

[7] Ibid. 80.

[8] Richard Rorty, *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982), xlii (introduction). Sartre's quotation is taken from "Existentialism Is a Humanism" in *Existentialism From Dostoevsky to Sartre,* Walter Kaufmann, ed. (New York: New American Library, 1975), 358.

[9] Richard Rorty, "Moral Identity and Private Autonomy: The Case of Foucault" in *Philosophical Papers vol.2: Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 198.

[10] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 74. (Emphasis added.)

[11] Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 27.

[12] It is extremely difficult to understand how or why the ironist (someone characterized has having *radical and continuing doubt* about their final vocabulary) should or would choose to be ironic in Rorty's sense. That being ironic is good or worthwhile is a judgment that should invite the very same radical and continuing doubt that the rest of the ironist's judgments invite. That is, irony (to the extent that it is characterized by this doubt) is self-refuting. There is no better reason for the ironist to be ironic than there is for her not to be.

[13] It is fair to say that we *know* the various things that skeptics wish to call into question better and more certainly than we *know* the skeptical hypothesis itself. Thus, if the skeptic is to be skeptical, she cannot think of her own skepticism in the same light as she thinks of the various things that her skepticism tries to call into doubt. If she did that, how could she still be a skeptic? She would, in that case, be just as unsure about the skeptical hypothesis (more uncertain one would think) as she might be about our knowledge of the external world. Of course, we might concede that skepticism is not itself an epistemic position, it is instead the reminder that other epistemic positions might be untenable or unknowable. So skepticism, in this sense, highlights the *possibility* that knowledge is impossible, rather than asserting "knowledge is impossible."

[14] It would be inaccurate to say that Rorty's liberal utopia provides *the only* catalyst for his ironic ideal character. In large part, fundamentally perhaps, the ironist is born out of

a mistrust and disillusionment with the traditional philosophical enterprise. Indeed, the ironist is one that tries to "josh" these traditional types out of their metaphysical habits and urges. Rorty does think, however, that a liberal utopia would be more easily realizable if we ceased trying to theorize about the perfect society and just *started working towards it.* He has even accused theory (taken in a broad and far-reaching sense) for what he takes to be a new complacency within left wing intellectual circles. This claim has a certain Marxist flare to it; it seems to suggest something along the lines of: "Philosophers have always interpreted the world, the point is to do something to change it." *(Paraphrase of Marx).* Of course, Many of Rorty's critics from the left (including various Marxists and Marxians) would likely reject this characterization of Rorty's politics. Rorty has often been labeled a complacent, Bourgeois 'wet' liberal. Rorty's politics comes out most clearly in Richard Rorty, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

[15] See Daniel Conway "Irony, State and Utopia: Rorty's 'We' and the Problem of Transitional Praxis" in *Richard Rorty Critical Dialogues* Mathew Festenstein, ed. (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2001), 71.

[16] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 97. There is a distinction to be made between ironism as I have been calling it, and ironist theory as it appears in this passage. Ironist theoreticians (whom Rorty considers Nietzsche and Heidegger paradigm cases) are those who seek to transcribe their private idiosyncratic irony into some sort of universal, political or public truth. The liberal ironist is not a theorist, for she realizes that her private projects of self-creation need not commensurate with the public liberal project of reducing cruelty and humiliation. Rorty views Derrida as the ironic philosopher who has most carefully acknowledged this split. For Rorty, Derrida simply drops theory and instead focuses on the more private project of "fantasizing about his philosophical predecessors" (Ibid. 125).

[17] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), # 115.

[18] Richard Rorty, "On Heidegger's Nazism" in *Philosophy and Social Hope* (London: Clays Ltd., 1999), 197.

[19] The way in which Rorty drafts his ironist would indicate that ironist philosophers such as Heidegger and Derrida are driven, firstly, by the Nietzschean project of self-making. That is, these ironists employ their idiosyncratic irony in an attempt to personalize *their own* contingency; to make the set of contingent events that unfold in one's life fully and conclusively *one's own.* Rorty feels that authors like Proust, the late Heidegger and Derrida stand as exemplary figures of this quest. I have been arguing, rather unrelatedly, about the incompatibility of the ironist's theoretical, public hopes (making philosophy less metaphysical) and focusing less on these private projects. Despite this, there is still fair reason to say that the 'private' ironist (where private refers to personal goals of these

post-Nietzscheans) is still unable to "get off the ground". Why, for example, should Rorty's ironist think that self-making is at all a good thing to strive towards? (Thinking this, after all, requires a strong evaluation). More, if she does think such a thing, how can she act with force and conviction upon it while subjecting it to radical and continuing doubts, while she thinks that a better goal might come along?

[20] This characterization of the ironist's goals (and therefore Rorty's goals) demonstrates why Rorty should like to be considered a disciple of Dewey more than any other of the classical American pragmatists. The Deweyan emphasis on the practical aspirations of philosophy is much closer to Rorty's own emphasis than either the logic- centered '*pragmatacism*' of C.S Peirce or to the sometimes-mystical pragmatism of William James.

[21] Rorty emphasizes that part of the ironist's goal is self-creation in the vein of Nietzsche. Thus, he reads 'private' ironist thinkers like the later Heidegger and Derrida as trying to, through the use of irony, create their very own selves. The urge towards this ideal is captured well when Rorty writes: " If there is no center to the self, then there are only different ways of weaving new candidates for belief and desire into antecedently existing webs of belief and desire" *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 84. However, it should be noted that the project of self-creation (like all projects) requires some set of judgments about what is worth initiating projects towards. It is odd then, or so strikes me, that Rorty's ironist has the goal of forging a unique and idiosyncratic identity while radically doubting in her definitive way. Thus Rorty retains the Nietzschean idea that truth is made, not found (thus who we are is a question whose answer is to be made, not found) while failing to explain how someone who had radical and continuing doubt about all the words she used could ever believe the latter Nietzschean thesis. Someone characterized by 'radical and continuing doubt' after all, would come to question, perhaps at her most doubtful times, whether truth is in fact, following Nietzsche, made. So, the set of beliefs that is supposed to drive someone into ironism in the first place (given Rorty's depiction) are no less immune to radical doubt than any other set of beliefs. Thus it is unclear how someone could, while choosing to doubt radically, arrive at the conclusion that one should doubt radically.

[22] Wittgenstein's *language as tools* metaphor is used to illustrate that meaning is "use," that our use of language, rather than aiming at accurate representation, is employed to "do work," or help us accomplish something. While Wittgenstein might be right that *language-use* is always instrumental, it would be wrong, I submit, to view language itself as instrumental. That our language defines the "limits of our world" is, after all, a phenomenological thesis that does no work in the relevant, instrumental sense. So, while Rorty's ironist may *use* her final vocabulary always in conjunction with a task, that she has a final vocabulary at all, a vocabulary that demarcates the limits of her world, has nothing to do with tasks. That she has a final vocabulary, allows her to conceive of tools and tasks as coherent concepts at all. This distinction makes room for Gadamer's point: "history does not belong to us; we belong to it." Hans-Georg Gadamer *Truth and*

Method, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G.Marshall (New York: Continuum Publishing Co., 1994), 276. Imagine substituting "history" in Gadamer's passage with "language" and the contrast with Wittgenstein's *words as tools* metaphor becomes evident.

[23] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 80.

[24] Rorty characterizes a liberal as someone who endorses Shklar's edict. See Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 73-95.

[25] Indeed if one looks at some of the more prominent ironists in philosophical history (Nietzsche and Heidegger perhaps being paradigm cases) we see in both cases that neither man was a liberal. Both in fact were anti-democratic and anti-egalitarian. Analogously, if we take some of the most prominent liberal figures (Mill, Jefferson, and Rawls) none of them were ironic in the sense that Rorty characterizes it. Thus one would be on fairly solid ground to question the likelihood of the emergence of figures who embody the self-creating irony of (Nietzsche, Heidegger and Derrida) while embodying the political (or public) seriousness of figures like Rawls, Habermas, and any number of other thinkers.

[26] I think that Rorty's ironist, surprisingly perhaps, is more likely to be a communitarian in the style of Taylor than a liberal consistent with Rorty's politics (if of course, she should be *anything*). The ironist would likely be unable to endorse the idea of a supreme good (say fairness or neutrality) that is usually associated with liberal models. She is more likely to be a communitarian where no singular goods are allowed, as a matter of course, to trump all others. Taylor's communitarianism is one that stresses that there are always a plurality of goods, always vying for our attention. This seems to chime more closely with the ironist's radical and continuing doubts. In this sense, perhaps too, ironism can be seen as a sort of anti-liberalism for (at least in most liberal models like Rawls's and Dworkin's) some kind of supreme principal needs to be acknowledged, some single principle of morality from which everything can be deduced. Ironism, as Rorty illustrates it, would likely mock the idea of a supreme principle.

[27] The ironist goes much further than the typical fallibilist or revisionist. There is *nothing* that can quiet the doubts she has about all of her words. Whereas fallibilists and revisionists remain open to the possibility that they could be mistaken in their beliefs, and remain open too to the idea that there beliefs may change, the ironist feels that there is nothing that could ever be done to show that she might not be mistaken about *all* her beliefs. Thus, the ironist is not simply 'open minded' about other beliefs; she is forever skeptical about *all* beliefs.

[28] This does not mean, as I discussed in chapter 1, that non-ironists will have an easy time evaluating where they should stand. What I am here suggesting is that the ironist

cannot fulfill the *minimum* conditions for a clear identity. Rorty's ironist, I have been arguing, cannot fulfill the necessary but insufficient conditions in Taylor's account. A non-ironist, I should stress, could fulfill Taylor's necessary conditions but could lack further sufficient conditions. In short, not being an ironist is not nearly enough to insure that someone could or would conceive of their clear 'self'.

[29] My contention here is that we may, as most naturalists do, think of our beliefs and values as fully contingent. We can be fully historicist and believe, as a result, that things could have turned out differently but we need not assume, in light of that contingency, that we should have 'radical and continuing doubts' about our beliefs and values. Facing up to contingency should not mean, *pace* the ironist, that radical skepticism ensues.

[30] David Hall makes the same point as I when he declares: "Doubts about one's final vocabulary are serious *self*-doubts" See David L. Hall *Richard Rorty: Prophet and Poet of the New Pragmatism* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1994), 130.

[31] The apparent disregard for the phenomenological conditions necessary for a concept of self that I here charge Rorty's ironist with, can be better understood by recalling that Rorty's discussion of the 'self' and his ironist, are, somewhat like skepticism, the results of detached thought experiments. Rorty's meditation about ironism is born firstly from a rather esoteric philosophical picture of truth, and the relationship between language and the world. Thus, again like skepticism, ironism is a position that arises when epistemology (or as Rorty has said "merely" philosophical matters) are permitted to command actual experience. In the end it is unclear whether ironism is more *real* a thesis than skepticism. Just as Wittgenstein's therapy helped his readers realize the detached "non-ordinary" nature of the skeptic's doubt, so too could it be established, perhaps, that Rorty's ironist is a figure that is equally detached and non-ordinary.

[32] There are passages in both Descartes and Hume, for example, that speak to the idea that skepticism is *only* a *philosophical* problem. In both authors, there are passages that concede that the various skeptical hypotheses are not compelling while someone is not doing philosophy. Both Descartes and Hume stress, implicitly at least, that no one could *actually live* as a skeptic. I make this point in more detail, with reference to Michael Williams, in note 47 below.

[33] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 75.

[34] This point is made by John Horton in his paper: "Irony and Commitment: An Irreconcilable Dualism of Modernity" in *Richard Rorty: Critical Dialogues,* Mathew Festenstein, Simon Thompson, ed. (Cambridge: Blackwell Publishers, 2001), 15-28.

[35] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G.E.M Anscombe and G.H von Wright ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1972). #341.

[36] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), #116.

[37] Recall C.S Peirce's claim that "beliefs are just habits of action". In his essay "How to Make Our Ideas Clear" *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*, Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1965). 252-60.

[38] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9.

[39] Ibid., 7. (Emphasis Added.)

[40] Ibid., 9.

[41] Kierkegaard noticed the strong parallel between irony and skepticism when he wrote: "Just as philosophy begins with doubt, so a truly human life begins with irony." *The Concept of Irony* taken from *The Kierkegaard Reader* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2001), 28. So, for Kierkegaard, 'being ironic' represents the start of some sort of authentic being, just as doubting represents the start of authentic philosophizing. Irony can be seen as the personal, private equivalent to Epistemology's foundationalist doubt. Here too, the similarity between Kierkegaardian irony and Rortian irony becomes apparent, for both insist on an incommensurability, implied or explicit, between the 'private' life of irony, and the public life of responsibility or seriousness. Both too, suggest that irony is a trait that is likely to encourage philosophical creativity, a prospect that Rorty and Kierkegaard think crucial. While Rorty's ideal character is the liberal ironist, someone who fulfills the duties of both the public and private, Kierkegaard's is Socrates, whose rhetoric was aimed primarily at "joshing" Athenians out of their taken for granted beliefs, but who nevertheless took morality, virtue and politics very seriously. So Socrates was ironic as an interlocutor and teacher but serious as a citizen and moral agent just as Rorty's liberal ironist is playful and open with projects of self-creation but serious towards the liberal *desideratum* of reducing cruelty and humiliation.

[42] Michael Williams, *Unnatural Doubts: Epistemological Realism and the Basis of Scepticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 365n51.

[43] Rorty would concede that the emergence of 'scientism' or 'Enlightenment Rationalism' as a vocabulary replacement for the dominance of feudal Christianity is one that occurred with the aid of "radical and continuing doubts" about the claims and positions of the old, Christian vocabulary. We need not think, however, that all revolutions in thought require a radical doubting of one vocabulary in order to propose another. Even more, Rorty writes: "the notion of a 'philosophical foundation' goes when the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism goes." (*CIS*, 44) But "doubting" in this radical form, is the handmaiden of philosophical foundations. Without the quest for philosophical foundations, why should one doubt so vigorously? It seems that Rorty wants to replace the vocabulary of Enlightenment rationalism with a more anti-

metaphysical, pragmatic vocabulary but in so doing, he holds on to one of the main components of that vocabulary. Namely, the skeptical thesis that upholds deep doubt where deep doubt has no grounds.

[44] Recall Wittgenstein's *On Certainty* where he sarcastically expresses this idea: "I am sitting with a philosopher in the garden; he says again and again "I know that that's a tree", pointing to a tree that is near us. Someone else arrives and hears this, and I tell him: "This fellow isn't insane, we are only doing philosophy" #467.

[45] The distinction between certain purely intellectual positions on the one hand, and the ability to *live* as that position demands, on the other, is an important one. Dostoevsky, in his famous *Crime and Punishment* sought to show what he called "Parlor Atheists" what a real, lived, "vital" atheism would be like. For a fascinating account of these Dostoevskian ideas, see Paul Ramsey, *Nine Modern Moralists* (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1962), 11-35.

[46] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G.E.M Anscombe and G.H von Wright, ed. (New York: Basil Blackwell, 1972), #515.

[47] In Michael Williams's excellent recent paper: "Rorty on Knowledge and Truth" in *Richard Rorty: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus*, Charles Guignon and David R. Hiley, ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 61-80. Williams brings out the immense similarities between Rorty's ironic skepticism and David Hume's thinking on skepticism. Williams writes: "Hume's account of skepticism leads him to identify three human types: the vulgar, the false philosophers, and the true philosophers. The vulgar, lacking philosophical curiosity, remain permanently in the natural attitude, untroubled by skeptical doubts. False philosophers try to meet the skeptic on his own ground and are thereby led to embrace elaborate and ultimately absurd metaphysical and epistemological systems. The true philosophers are (Humean) skeptics. They recognize the futility of trying to respond to the skeptic in a theoretical way...But this recognition leaves them with...a split personality: believers in the street, skeptics in the study. Since the outlooks of philosophy and common life cannot be reconciled, the fate of the true philosophers is to oscillate between them." Williams continues, while comparing Rorty's own tripartite separation: " Rorty...divides the world into three parties. Nonintellectuals, who go about their business untroubled by questions about the status of their basic beliefs and values, correspond to Hume's vulgar. Metaphysicians, intent on rescuing the common sense of their day from skeptical undermining, continue the work of Hume's false philosophers. The ironists have accepted that no such rescue job is possible. They are Hume's true philosophers, the skeptics."

[48] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), # 126.

[49] Barry Stroud *The Significance of Philosophical Scepticism* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984), 20.

Chapter 3:
Recasting the Incompatibility

> He found the Archimedean point, but he used it against himself; it seems he was permitted to find it only under this condition.
>
> - Franz Kafka

> What is philosophy today- philosophical activity, I mean- if it is not... the endeavor to know how and to what extent it might be possible to think differently, instead of legitimating what is already known?
>
> - Michel Foucault

3

My aim in this chapter shall be to assemble some friendly, purposeful reminders. As I have so far only hinted, my suggestion is that Rorty's ironist, although emerging from what I perceive to be a worthwhile goal (that of making philosophy less theoretical and more concretely committed to what Dewey called "the problems of men") is a proposal that is not adequately suited to its task. That is, to the extent that the ironist wishes to set aside Epistemology and its dusty fly-bottle, she is a figure that remains decidedly inside that tradition due to, perhaps among other things, her characteristic radical doubt and thus her perfect inversion of traditional philosophical skepticism. [1] Although I do not propose an alternative to Rorty's ironist, some substituted figure that may be able to succeed where the ironist has failed, I shall argue that the spirit of Rorty's ironist in particular, or philosophical reformist proposals in general, is an important spirit for the public relevance of philosophy. Thus the spirit of making recommendations

(prescriptive or normative philosophy, broadly speaking) is one, I shall argue, that is vital for a conception of philosophy that, consistent with Dewey, grapples with the problems of men. Moreover, and again consistent with Dewey, I will contend that the spirit of making recommendations in philosophy must coexist with and be mindful of, the actual details of our current practices. I shall suggest then, that we should proceed as though 'ought' implies 'can' and that ends imply an understanding of means. I will try to show all of this, but perhaps in a roundabout way.

More specifically, my attempt will be to show how the ostensible tension between Rorty's ironist and Taylor's phenomenology of 'self' is one that can be better understood, perhaps, by reflecting on two common and competing ways to read and appropriate the later Wittgenstein; my suggestion is that Rorty and Taylor respectively are too much guided by what they take Wittgenstein's primary importance to consist in, and that each derives his own philosophical focus from, among other places, the particular way they read Wittgenstein. The two readings of the later Wittgenstein that I shall sketch, seem to me microcosmic of what is at stake methodologically and meta-philosophically between Rorty and Taylor, and, accordingly, can shed light on possible ways to repair the methodological gulf between the two. Further, I will argue that neither reading is, by itself, correct, and for reasons explicit in the later Wittgenstein himself, a more open and inclusive interpretation, one that blends important features of both readings, is a more fertile approach; an approach that may be able to amend what has so far seemed like a very palpable incompatibility between Taylor's phenomenology and Rorty's irony. More, this open and inclusive interpretation of the later Wittgenstein, is one, I shall suggest, that adds force to the Deweyan recommendations just mentioned

above: it helps point to a particular expedient approach in philosophy, and it highlights the edict that 'ought' should imply 'can', that proposals or revisionist recommendations ought to be mindful of the particular means that might bring them about.

It is a plain fact that Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* has been one of the most important and widely influential philosophical texts of the twentieth century. Its influence, however, has taken different forms. There are those readers of the later Wittgenstein who see him as having offered a new *method*, one in which description trumps theory. This new method is one that, these commentators feel, allows us to *properly* conceive of philosophical problems and, armed with a more careful understanding of our ordinary language, permits us to diagnose philosophical nonsense and comprehend the nature of the urge that perpetually leads us towards it. Those who read the later Wittgenstein in this way usually identify with the following sorts of passages:

> Philosophy may in no way interfere with the actual use of language; it can in the end only describe it[2]
>
> A philosophical problem has the form: "I don't know my way about."[3]
>
> A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.[4]
>
> People say again and again that philosophy doesn't really progress, that we are still occupied with the same philosophical problems as were the Greeks. But the people who say this don't understand why it has to be so. It is because our language has remained the same and keeps seducing us into asking the same questions. As long as there continues to be a verb 'to be' that looks as if it functions in the same way as 'to eat' and 'to drink', as long as we still have the adjectives 'identical', 'true', 'false', 'possible', as long as we continue to talk of a river of time, of an expanse of space, etc. etc., people will keep stumbling over the same difficulties and find themselves staring at something which no explanation seems capable of clearing up.[5]

These remarks, and indeed there are many other similar ones, seem to suggest the prospect of curing our temptation towards philosophical nonsense through a more fastidious understanding of our language and its rules. That is, once we grasp the nature of our ordinary language and its misuses perpetrated by metaphysics, we will have been shown the way out of the dusty fly bottle and see the world aright. Once we have understood *what* held us captive and how we are constantly seduced back into captivity, we can discover that philosophical problems are *really* just the results of a bewitchment of our intelligence through our language. Once we make these discoveries and grasp more "thickly" our words and their uses, we will, or so these commentators suggest, have peace. We will have made that special discovery that allows us to stop doing philosophy when we want to. In this sense, we will have been cured of the temptation towards metaphysics. Philosophers who read Wittgenstein in this first way see the primary message of *Philosophical Investigations* as the edict that philosophy may only describe. That is, they read Wittgenstein as having introduced something like a "linguistic phenomenology,"[6] a method that attempts to show how *we actually* use language and to note the linguistic misuses that philosophy initiates. In other words, this first group of philosophers believes that, in Wittgenstein's own words, "philosophy simply puts everything before us, and neither explains nor deduces anything."[7]

There is, however, another quite different way to approach the later Wittgenstein. This second reading sees Wittgenstein as somewhat more pragmatic in nature. This second group will focus on the message that "meaning is use," that in order to be meaningful language must be "doing work". Philosophical theses, this line of thought goes, must have a function, a purpose, a task to which they can be put. This second

group will usually identify with Wittgenstein's words as tools analogy as well as with the images of a wheel turning by itself, acting not as a part of the mechanism and with the "idle ceremony" of privately naming objects.[8] They will guide our attention towards Wittgenstein's continued polemics against essentialism, foundationalism and his reminders that language has and will continue to change, always in step with our various communicative needs. These commentators will stress that 'ordinary language' is not an Archimedean point from which to dissolve of philosophical puzzles, for they believe that the insistence, implied or otherwise, that there is such a point is a wildly misguided, incoherent one. Those who read Wittgenstein in this second way will probably agree with Rorty when he confesses:

> I do not believe that there is, in addition to the so-called fixations and obsessions of us philosophical revisionists, a peaceful, non-obsessed, vision of how things deeply, truly, unproblematically are. If there were-if there were something like what Cavell calls "the Ordinary"- I doubt that I should have any interest in dwelling within it.....If you want genuinely and permanently unproblematic peace, you should stay out of philosophy.[9]

Someone who is sympathetic with this passage will not think that there is a *correct* neutral standpoint (or philosophical *method*) from which to conceive of philosophical problems. They will likely rejoin in thinking, with Rorty, that:

> In the *Investigations*, we move from the sort of purity which characterizes a *Fach* to the sort one feels when no longer oppressed by a need to answer unanswerable questions.[10]

This second group of Wittgenstein commentators thinks that "ordinary language," taken as the first group of commentators should like to take it, is the latest substitute for God, or Reason as the supreme arbitrator of philosophical truth. It is to bestow upon our

ordinary words, these pragmatist Wittgensteinians think, the honor that Plato gave to the Forms and Kant to Reason; that of a neutral, ahistorical Archimedean point.

Put in the crudest terms, we can see the chief disagreement between these two competing interpretative schools as turning on the distinction between *description* and *prescription*, between laying bare *what is already in plain view* and making proposals to move and strive in novel and inventive directions.

3.1

There has been an abundance of original and absorbing scholarship about Wittgenstein and these interpretive questions. Accordingly, I will not try to offer some of the best arguments from both camps and assess them. That is indeed beyond the scope of the present thesis. It would be fruitful, however, to try and situate both Taylor and Rorty within this hermeneutic division. Doing so can help clarify and enlarge what is precisely at stake between the two and the seeming incompatibility between Taylor's phenomenology and Rorty's ideal post-Philosophical intellectual.

It does seem fair to say, as somewhat of an aside, that questions concerning philosophical method, and consequently the questions that arise about how to read the later Wittgenstein, will only be seen as crucial and imperative by those who think that there can be what was described in the previous section as an Archimedean standpoint. That is, only those who retain the idea that there is one, correct, ahistroical, neutral method with which to *do* philosophy will place any immediate and pressing significance on the questions with which meta-philosophy typically deals. Those others, by contrast, who think that philosophy is, or will be, whatever we make of it, will see the broad set of meta-philosophical questions as somewhat less pressing and immediate; they will see

these questions as they would any other set of questions that require some account or proposal of *what we should do.* [11] So in one sense, the debate about the *authentic* reading of the later Wittgenstein is one that will be taken a great deal more seriously by those who read him in the first of the two ways described in the last section. Those who read him in the second described way will, if they are consistent, think that Wittgenstein's chief importance lay not in his discoveries about how to do philosophy right, but rather in the imaginative and awakening effects that his writings had for those who were to come after him. When understood in this way, Wittgenstein's philosophical significance shall be seen as no greater than, say, Spinoza's important corrective to the then dominant Cartesian *Weltanschauung*, or Fichte's and Schopenhauer's reflections about how to correct what was for them overt shortcomings inherent in Kant's thought. In all such cases, these figures did not discover anything philosophically deep or ahistorical, they only responded to their predecessors in remarkable and innovative ways. This second group of Wittgensteinians will usually think, perhaps in a way inspired by Hegel's historicism, that *any* philosopher's importance lies in their ability to offer new and thrilling re-descriptions, to tender new, hitherto unseen tools, tools that allow us to imagine new and hitherto unimagined things. They will see Wittgenstein more as a revolutionary than as someone who uncovered, finally, the correct way to philosophize.

Before I try to translate the significance of this Wittgensteinian debate towards the question of the possibility of Rortian ironism, I want to propose, albeit in a superficial way, a third way to read the later Wittgenstein; a way that blends elements from both of the readings I described above. My proposed approach is a wholly inclusive one, one that does not discard certain suggestions because of their perceived

inability to mesh with particular trademark Wittgensteinian slogans. To be sure, advocates of both the aforementioned readings of Wittgenstein, can, and indeed *have*, isolated certain individual remarks that seem, on their own, to advise one particular kind of message; both schools typically appeal to certain passages that seem to indicate the correctness of their own reading. The third reading that I want to propose is one that should like to view Wittgenstein's later remarks collectively; it should like to examine what all of the later passages, taken together are suggestive of, rather than trying to deduce a particular primary message on the basis of certain apposite remarks. Indeed, one of the most potent and undisguised themes in the *Philosophical Investigations* is a continued and effective debunking of essentialism. It would be wrong, my third reading accordingly suggests, to attribute, in any way, an essentialist label to the later Wittgenstein. Even his paradigmatic "meaning is use" proclamation is one that is carefully bracketed with "For a *large* class of cases- *though not all*"[12] Wittgenstein does not suggest, I want to urge, that meaning is, in actual fact, akin to use; he is not advancing *meaning is use* as a philosophical truth, for that would call into tension other sections where he advances parable like polemics against essentialism of various sorts.[13] Instead, he is suggesting to his readers that we try looking at things another way; that we give up on traditional models of meaning that aimed to *represent* or *denote* reality faithfully with language and instead think of the uses to which we put our words . So just like Wittgenstein's work urges the abandonment of essentialism (taken in a broad and far-reaching sense) so too should we, his commentators, refrain from attaching an essence to his philosophical writings. After all, it would be odd to suppose that Wittgenstein's anti-essentialism could or should be given an essence.

On my third proposed reading, we should transmit the important message of anti-essentialism not only to the traditional quests of metaphysical *mapping*, but also to the broader hermeneutic question of how to read any particular philosopher. We should see Wittgenstein as having offered us brilliant new perspectives, as having re-described old things in thrilling and innovative ways. At the same time, however, we should not think that this innovation and re-description *gets at* what is essential to Wittgenstein's philosophy. We should see the ambiguity in his varied remarks as itself indicative of the message that there are no essences to be sought. We should interpret the fact that Wittgenstein is sometimes inconsistent as an intentional arrangement aimed at luring us away from the temptation to *pin down* what a text, or thinker is *really trying to do*. On my proposed reading, we should see the exegetical choice to write individual remarks instead of philosophical prose as itself part of the message that philosophy is not a unified whole; that philosophers should opt for tool-boxes instead of grand systems, helpful reminders instead of treatises. We should see this stylistic feature of the later Wittgenstein as part of the message; that philosophy ought to be many different things, as opposed to one, rigid *Fach* with its internal and self-reflexive standards and rules. In this sense, we should see the variety of shapes that Wittgenstein's later remarks take, as itself, repeating the often-misconstrued Marshall McLuan decree, *the message*. Taking all of this seriously will mean that we stop asking questions about the *right philosophical method*. It means too that we should no longer find much use for the series of questions concerned with philosophy's unrefined, *pure* tasks and *desiderata*. We should see Wittgenstein as having said and *shewn*[14] the very same thing; that, "There is not *a* philosophical method, though there are indeed methods, like different therapies."[15]

Someone who accepts my sketched reading will not think of Wittgenstein as having offered, at long last, the *correct* philosophical method. Nor will someone think that Wittgenstein is offering a pragmatist philosophy; on this third reading there is, after all, no *essence* to Wittgenstein's philosophy, and so while there may be a variety of pragmatic-styled recommendations in the *Investigations*, we should not think that Wittgenstein was privileging the vocabulary of pragmatism over its rivals. Someone who sympathizes with this third way to read the later Wittgenstein should think that we ought to employ different strategies for different tasks, that we should be open to a variety of approaches, styles and ideas; discriminating among these many approaches on the basis of the task that lies before us. This reading should like to see Wittgenstein as having offered compelling reasons for setting aside the traditional *Fachs* of metaphysics and epistemology but not as having erected anything new to occupy their places (linguistic or grammatical analysis, for example.) We should refrain, I read Wittgenstein as urging, from erecting anything specific to occupy the places left by metaphysics and epistemology, for this act of erecting, as a matter of course, will tempt us back into thinking that there are organic, perennial *Fachs* to which we are by nature drawn. It would be as though we moved from one fly-bottle to another different, albeit equally restricting, one. This act of erecting something new to inhabit the places formerly held by God or Reason, metaphysics and epistemology, will oblige us to be less open minded about which tools to employ than perhaps we ought to be, for it will tempt us to think that some tools (perhaps those that have most recently been erected) speak to something beyond their ability to simply get things done. Wittgenstein is urging then, that we no longer think that philosophy represents a natural kind, that we resist the further

insistence that its questions and puzzles are *real*, unavoidable questions and puzzles, ones that we must necessarily engage with, ones that reveal themselves naturally as soon as human beings pause to reflect. On this third reading, questions that arise about philosophical method or strategy should be seen in the same light that J.S Mill might have approached questions about different, even antagonistic ideas: *Let them all be heard, and perhaps, if we are lucky, we shall agree to employ the best of them.* Just as Wittgenstein turned to figures as varied as Frege, Brahms, Kierkegaard, Augustine, Freud and Tolstoy for his inspiration, so too should we neither rule out nor exalt one type of approach over others. We should remain satisfied to accept enlightenment and inspiration where and when we find it. We should not, however, think that *this inclusive reading*, like any other reading, gets to the heart of Wittgenstein's philosophy. There is, after all, no such heart, only a broad series of "reminders assembled for a particular purpose." I read Wittgenstein as persuading us to continue in assembling reminders (always for a *particular* purpose) but dissuading us to rank, grade or categorize the value or worth of any individual reminder on the basis of some pre-existent, neutral standard. To sum up: I have been recommending, by way of a third proposed way to read the later Wittgenstein, that we no longer place an urgency on the question *Which way to read the later Wittgenstein is the right one?* It is a question that Wittgenstein himself would have thought point missing, for it pre-supposes, implicitly at least, some species of essentialism. We should conclude that *both* and *neither* of the first two readings illustrated above are correct. They are both correct to the extent that, as philosophers, we should together seek to account for *what is already in plain view*, and make new proposals that promise great things, sometimes on the basis of what is in plain view and

sometimes not. We should, as philosophers, act as our particular task warrants; sometimes this will call for descriptive accounts, accounts that enrich and "thicken" our already existing tools, at others it will call for the imaginative introduction of as yet undreamed tools. There is no philosophical formula or transcendental deduction that can tell us, *a priori*, when and why either strategy is appropriate. Analogously, we should also say that neither of the previously sketched readings is the right one, for no single directional attitude, in some non-human way, trumps another. To label either of these readings, by themselves, as the *right* one, will be to assume that one particular philosophical approach can hook up with something True and otherworldly; that one proposed philosophical technique can establish an Archimedean, neutral, detached standpoint. Neither of the aforementioned readings are, by themselves, correct to the extent that *no* single method in particular or philosophy in general can hope to get to Nagel's "View from Nowhere" or Putnam's "God's Eye View." It is for these reasons that I said explicitly in chapter 1, that I will not attempt to argue for either Taylor's or Rorty's particular approach towards philosophy at the expense of the other. Rorty's and Taylor's respective approaches, if I am right about this third proposed reading of Wittgenstein, need not get in each others way; neither can get closer to *the right way* to do philosophy nor can either, as a matter of course, show its opponents to be wrong, or misguided in light of *that right way*. If I am right about this third reading of Wittgenstein, then the question of whose strategy (Rorty's or Taylor's) is on its own better, becomes akin to a question about the superiority of hammers over chainsaws; one that seems entirely incomprehensible; one that requires some contextual, qualifying information for its intelligibility. [16]

3.2

As perhaps by now seems obvious, both Taylor and Rorty form an attachment to one of the first two readings of the later Wittgenstein discussed above, or at minimum, can be seen as emulating the primary message of those readings. While Taylor is typically closer to the first reading I mentioned, thinking that description in general and phenomenology more particularly is the most fruitful approach in philosophy, Rorty by contrast thinks that the importance of any philosopher (and thus the attempt in his own work) lies in their ability to expand the imagination of their audience, to create new tools that aim at new and wonderful tasks. So while Taylor's focus, by and large, is centered on thickening our already existing tools and notions, making common concepts like the "self", and "the good" more rich and textured. Rorty, conversely, tends to offer re-descriptions to his readers, re-descriptions that may encourage us to strive in new and interesting directions.[17]

It stands to reason that Rorty's ironist, a proposal that is consistent with the second way to read Wittgenstein that I sketched, seems at odds with Taylor's phenomenology of self which identifies more closely with the first Wittgensteinian interpretation. In light of this, I would like to re-approach the question of Rortian ironism and its seeming incompatibility with our ordinary experience with the third reading of Wittgenstein I offered as a backdrop. The most salient feature of that reading I offered, or so it seems to me, is a staunch and unwavering anti-essentialism that lends itself both to interpretive questions (i.e. what a particular philosopher or text *is doing*) and to questions that arise about how we should proceed in doing philosophy. On this staunch anti-essentialism, all philosophical strategies should be viewed as tools, some

more appropriate to a given task, but no single philosophical approach ought to be endowed with an intrinsic superiority over others. So while it may be so that descriptive accounts can sometimes perform tasks that prescriptive accounts cannot, the converse is also, at times, true. If I am right about the third reading of Wittgenstein I offered, then it seems to follow that the assessment of the suitability of a given tool to its philosophical tasks, ought to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Only when we have sight of our tasks, does it make sense to inquire about the efficiency of our tools. Without sight of our various tasks, "tool comparison" seems completely out of place for there can be no criteria for tool selection in the absence of a task or project.

I want to suggest, in accordance with the third way to read Wittgenstein I proposed in the last section, that Rorty's ironist is a proposal that is not adequately suited to its task; that she represents a tool that might be better replaced or modified. The *philosophical* task that Rorty's ironist is primarily concerned with (that of making the discipline of philosophy less prone to metaphysics and theory)[18] is one that warrants, I think, a more careful and assiduous consideration of our actual experience. Even more, the overt congruency between ironism and global skepticism, mentioned in chapter 2, furthers the idea that the ironist is still caught up in the very esoteric, insulated discourse of philosophy professors; a discourse that the philosophically innocent layperson will have little or no interest in. To be fair of course, the philosophically innocent layperson is not the intended audience for the ironist's polemics. Rather her primary public goal (that of making professionalized philosophy less prone to metaphysics and theory) is one targeted at those who characteristically invoke metaphysics and theory: namely, philosophers. Her attempt is to "josh" the traditional metaphysician out of her urge

towards otherworldly validity and theoretical truth. Her vision is to make philosophy more like the way Dewey had envisioned; a hands-on, practical discipline committed to the problems of its day.

In the attempt to encourage the adoption of a theory-free philosophical climate, Rorty introduces an enormously abstract and theoretical figure. He endows her with the very theoretical trait of "continuing and radical doubts" about *all* of her words. He characterizes her as "meta-stable" and with Sartre, sees her as never being able to commit with zeal and enthusiasm to one thesis or another. Rorty's ironist feels, in a somewhat Sartrean vein, that in a world where we *know* nothing, all positions are equal. Similarly, that *anything* can be made to look good or bad by being re-described. To the extent that Rorty's ironist wishes that philosophy may becomes more like the model that Dewey sought, she remains decidedly inside the tradition she wishes to set aside. That is, although the ironist's hope is that philosophy may finally eschew those traditional problems that characterize it as a *Fach*, she remains trapped in philosophy's archaic thought experiments through her repetitive treatment of skepticism and existentialism.[19] Thus when Rorty writes:

> [any] theory which views knowledge as accuracy of representation, and which holds that certainty can only be rationally had about representations, will make scpeticism inevitable,[20]

it becomes clear to see that Rorty's ironist offers a perfect inversion of this traditional account of Epistemology and its perennial invitation to skepticism, for he has discarded the notion of accurate representation but retains, as a result, the inevitability of skepticism. Instead of abstaining from the debates about different, competing 'theories of knowledge', Rorty replaces one sort of radical uncertainty with another albeit very

different kind. That whereas once we thought that our task as philosophers was to discover the limits of "what we can know", we now think, if we are Rortian ironists that our task is to show the radical uncertainty associated with such tasks. That whereas philosophers once looked for foundations to ground claims of various sorts, Rorty's ironist now urges us, in the absence of such foundations, to have radical and continuing doubts about *all* of our claims. Thus, Rorty's ironist is skeptical about the epistemological picture that gives rise to skepticism, but in the process and as a result, retains the central features of the very tradition she wishes to discard. We may say that Rorty's ironist is a post-Epistemological figure, but only in the sense that she represents the kind of intellectual who has conceded that the skeptic has, in the end, won. That is, she seems to feel that the only way to go beyond Epistemology and its skeptical offspring is to grant them victory, to surrender to and live with the radical and continuing doubt the skeptic insists is necessary and intellectually honest. Thus, as Michael Williams bluntly puts it: " irony is skepticism by another name."[21]

Setting aside Epistemology should mean, I would like to suggest, that we doubt only when we have a reason to, that we should see *Who we are* as a question that cannot be given a neat and tidy philosophical answer, but not one that should invite radical, inextinguishable doubts. In short, the best way to set aside the traditional problems and *desiderata* of Philosophy (capital "P") is to actually set them aside; it is neither to mock these problems nor to try and solve them. It is to turn one's back on the fly-bottle, leaving whoever is there buzzing around to their own hopeless, metaphysical devices, for those who remain trapped in a dusty-fly bottle cannot be *mocked* out of it. They want *real* clarity, logical validity or presupposition-less truths; they require reasons the sort of

which no one can offer. Turning one's back on the fly-bottle, very much as Dewey did, will mean that we simply forget about the traditional problems outlined in *Philosophy 101* textbooks (many of them at any rate) and focus instead on the never-ending task of making things and life better. Rorty himself echoes this idea. While discussing Dewey's "experimentalism" he writes:

> It [experimentalism] claims that categorical distinctions of the sort philosophers typically invoke are useful only so long as they facilitate conversation about what we should do next. Such distinctions, Dewey says, should be blurred or erased as soon as they begin to hinder such conversation- to block the road of inquiry.

Immediately after, Rorty summarizes this point by saying:

> He [Dewey] urges us to be on our guard against using intellectual tools which were useful in a certain sociocultural environment after that environment has changed, to be aware that we may have to invent new tools to cope with new situations.[22]

It is my claim that Rorty's ironist clings to a philosophical tool (skeptical doubt) that has outlived its utility. I have argued, following Michael Williams, that Rortian irony is skepticism in disguise, that the ironist's characteristic 'radical and continuing doubt' is a notion that is at odds with the project of overcoming Epistemology. For once Epistemology has been overcome, the very notion of 'radical and continuing doubt' should no longer arise. It is an idea that is entrenched in the discourse of traditional Cartesian Epistemology and thus, when that *Fach* is discarded, so too should this sterile idea. In the next section, I will turn my attention to another, although rather similar, series of friendly purposeful reminders for Rorty. Again, I will argue, although with respect to slightly different questions and in a slightly different way, that Rorty's ironist betrays certain important ideals of Dewey's philosophy.

3.3

Even if we happily grant the view that philosophy should only concern itself with concrete problems, a position that is emblematic of Dewey's pragmatism, there remains the further sense in which some philosophical proposals are too neglectful of our actual experience; they fail to be adequately mindful of our actual concerns for they are too engaged with 'possible worlds', idealizations, and imaginary abstractions. That is, some philosophical proposals, if they are not careful, run the risk of missing their aims; they run the risk of striking people as dead and lacking in momentum. To say all of this in another way, philosophical proposals that are not attentive enough to our actual experience will invite failure, for those of us who weigh and consider various proposals are most likely to envisage the plausibility of such proposals against a background of what strikes us as reasonable, plausible and conceivable.

Rorty is quite right in saying that the *only* way to assess the possibility of a particular proposal, strictly speaking, is to experiment with it in practice. Consistently, there is nothing in Reason or theory that can show *a priori*, that any particular proposal *cannot* be realized in actuality. Thus, Rorty would likely say about his ironist and the tension she invites with what seems to be our actual moral experience, that the only way to determine the possibility of intellectuals *actually* becoming ironists as Rorty drafts them, will be to do our utmost to live and strive as ironists; only in practice can this question, and others like it, be settled with any finality. Rorty's point here, while it may be technically so, seems to neglect one of the primary teachings of his greatest hero John Dewey. Dewey's means/ends continuum stresses that the ends that people will consider tenable and towards which they may strive, are always negotiable on the basis of the

availability of means towards those ends. To envisage an end, Dewey's position seems to imply, is to already have some concept of how and in what that particular end can be realized; it is to have some concrete idea about what a means to that end would be like. Even more, our various ends can and inevitably will change as our means to those ends change. Dewey's position is expressed nicely in the following:

> When we take means for ends we indeed fall into moral materialism. But when we take ends without regard to means we degenerate into sentimentalism. In the name of the ideal we fall back upon mere luck and chance and magic or exhortation and preaching; or else upon a fanaticism that will force the realization of preconceived ends at any cost.[23]

The point that comes out clearly here is that deciding which ends one ought to strive towards is an assignment that is indissolubly connected with the means that might realize those ends. We should not, Dewey suggests, treat means and ends as separate, bracketed, uninvolved notions; they are forever intertwined, forever playing themselves off against each other. Accepting this Deweyan thesis should mean that revisionist proposals like Rorty's ironist entail within them some account of how they can be brought about, some causal forecast about how the particular recommendations in question can be realized.[24] Proposals that ignore their potential means are, Dewey thinks, lacking in "sincere and fruitful respect for ends and purposes."[25]

The main thrust of Dewey's point here is that goals should be realizable, that ought should imply can. Indeed, to have a goal that is in principle un-realizable is an idea that has its home, perhaps among other sources, in the religious language of divine perfection and consequently is hostile to Dewey's concrete pragmatism.[26] Of course, if we follow Rorty in thinking that the only way to demarcate the scope of the *can* is in practice, then it would seem that the scope of the *ought*, in turn, becomes as wide as

practice and social experimentation will permit. Thus, Rorty's view is one that stresses that no recommendation or proposal be deemed impossible at the outset. There is no proposal that can be shown *a priori* to be untenable, nor should we, as a matter of course, consult the theoretical enterprise of *Reason*, when thinking about which proposals to adopt and which others to ignore.[27] We should dispense with the typical insistence of philosophers that our proposals should aim at *fitting with* the ahistorical dictates of Reason, or be faithful to "human nature". We should cease to view the various changes in human affairs, Rorty persuades us, as in some sense a closing in on something final, true, or in accordance with the way things really are. For we should, Rorty urges, think that:

> Nobody can set any *a priori* limits to what change in philosophical opinion can do, any more than to what change in scientific or political opinion can do. To think that one can know such limits is just as bad as thinking that, now that we have learned that the ontotheological tradition has exhausted its possibilities, we must hasten to reshape everything, make all things new. Change in philosophical outlook is neither intrinsically central not intrinsically marginal- its results are just as unpredictable as change in any other area of culture.[28]

Someone who accepts the main message contained in this passage, will likely agree with the point of the third reading of Wittgenstein I proposed in the previous section. They will likely be sympathetic to the idea common to Wittgenstein and Rorty that philosophy cannot meaningfully aim at accurate representation. Further, once *getting things right* from Putnam's "God's eye view" is set aside, all we can do is attempt to get done the things we want to get done. Whether these things or their attempts are viewed by history as good, point missing, moral, justified and so on, is not something that anyone can authoritatively predict.

We can agree with Rorty that: " anything could be made to look good or bad, important or unimportant, useless or useful, by being re-described," [29] and come to think also that:

> ...individuals who happen to have been born at certain times, who have been driven by certain obsessive states, who happen to have had neurons firing in response to certain random stimulations, happen to invent forms of words that are made public at the right time and place and catch on. [30]

But we still have not yet asked *what* in a description makes it appear useful, or good or important; *what about* any particular description allows it to strike us as live and momentous? *What* is a particular re-description doing when we find ourselves smitten with it? An intuitively strong answer is that any given proposal, any given re-description, is only as great as what it promises; that the ability to get things done in remarkable and original ways is typically the hallmark of a new description that captures the imagination of its audience. Not surprisingly then, the *what* of a re-description that I just asked about above, is in large part determined by the receptivity of the audience, just as that same *what* of any given tool is determined by its suitability to its task. A re-description's success will depend upon those people who either accept it or discard it. It is the form of life to whom the re-description is offered that will ultimately decide whether the re-description is one worth preserving or not. This should mean, on its own, that proposals ought to consult and be mindful of the actual experience of their intended audience, that responsible proposal givers should be attentive to what strikes their projected audience as live and momentous. More importantly, we want the directions in which we move and strive, the pursuits we undertake and those that we ignore to be consistent with what strikes us as justified. We simply do not believe that anything goes,

that all reformist proposals are considered equal. We want the decisions we make, the legislation we pass, and the directions we encourage to be justified on moral grounds. Our wish is that, upon due reflection, the decisions we make and proposals we accept today, will be agreeable to what John Rawls called *Wide Reflective Equilibrium* tomorrow. I can see no way to take the goal of wide reflective equilibrium seriously while neglecting the nuanced, and ever changing details of our actual experience. Thus, that a proposal should be attentive to its intended audience's actual experience, is not, I am suggesting, merely a light recommendation for a successful proposal, a helpful "hint" for those who make proposals, it is rather an obligatory imperative, a requirement of thinking and acting with a sense of responsibility and morality. As Rorty himself writes about the idea of progress: "When we picture a better version of ourselves, we build into this picture the evolution of this better version *out of our present selves* through a process in which actualizations of these values played an appropriate part."[31] If we take Rorty at his word here, it seems that he is in full concurrence with the need for attentiveness to actual human experience I have been calling for. That is, he seems to comply with the idea that change and reform ought to begin with a thick understanding of our current situation. Then, and only then, can one be in a position to criticize or offer plausible replacements for elements of that situation. Without such an understanding, our proposals run the risk of being wildly misguided or at worst, terribly inconsistent with what we think can end up paralleling wide reflective equilibrium. Predictably enough, John Dewey expresses this same idea when he writes:

> Unless progress is a present reconstructing, it is nothing; if it cannot be told by qualities belonging to the movement of transition it can never be judged...Progress means increase of present meaning, which involves multiplication of sensed distinctions as well as harmony, unification...Till men

> give up the search for a general formula of progress they will not know where to look to find it.[32]

In other words, without a detailed understanding of the goods that we value and in what valuing them consists, our philosophical proposals run the risk of immorality or triviality.[33]

I have been trying to argue, albeit in a round a bout way, that the specific details of Rorty's ironist betray the call for attention to our actual experience that I have been discussing and that Rorty, most of the time, seems to accept. I have been suggesting, following John Dewey, that the encouragement of various ends must come pre-packaged with some understanding of their means; that we cannot but ask "How?" when faced with a proposal to move and strive in a new direction and that Rorty's ironist betrays this "How?". That is, it is unclear how one might actually become an ironist as Rorty depicts it. It is unclear too that this ideal *intellectual* is one that can, in practice, be realized. Of course, as Rorty has duly pointed out, maybe it is possible. It just does not strike me, for one, as a live and momentous prospect.

It ought to be noted that I am rather sympathetic to the ambitions of Rorty's ironist. I believe, as does Rorty, that we would do better to discard the traditional philosophical quests for presupposition- less certainty, and otherworldly Truth. The prospect of replacing these traditional aims, however, with a character who has radical and continuing doubts about their final vocabulary and who spends her time worrying that she was initiated into the wrong tribe and taught to play the wrong language-game is not, I think, what Wittgenstein had in mind when he said: "It's no good saying 'Perhaps we are wrong' when, if *no* evidence is trustworthy, trust is excluded in the case of the

present evidence."[34] I have been trying to stress that just as the Cartesian and Humean skeptic is not a figure that can exist outside of philosophy textbooks, so too does Rorty's ironist fall victim to the same "philosophers only" esoterism. Like skepticism although in a thoroughly different way, Rorty's ironism may strike us as the product of a noble goal, that of helping metaphysicians out of their useless habits, but inasmuch as this character is untenable (or so strikes us) so too are the various proposals that she provides. For not only can we post-Wittgensteinians no longer accept a figure characterized by radical and continuing doubt, we also tend to think of such a character as someone herself in need of therapy. We tend to see such a figure more as a victim than a prophet.

Someone who accepts the third way to read Wittgenstein I offered will likely think that Rorty's goals are quite noble. They will think that Rorty's anti-representationalism, and anti-foundationalism represent excellent accounts of what philosophy might look like once it has been freed from the burdens of absolute truth and presupposition-less certainty. But in erecting a new figure, a post- Philosophical intellectual, Rorty moves away from the Wittgensteinian view he seems, at other times, vigorously committed to, for abstract proposals that seem utterly untenable are analogous to a wheel acting not as a part of the mechanism, as a proposal that is not doing any work. More, we can see that the amendments offered for the ironist here, are in many ways Rortian suggestions, that is, pragmatic reminders. Thus, one way of characterizing the shortcomings of the liberal ironist is to say, somewhat ironically, that this character is insufficiently Rortian.

3.4

I began this chapter with a discussion of the later Wittgenstein. I mentioned too that both Taylor and Rorty seem too attached to one particular way to read the later Wittgenstein, and that as a result, the prescription of the liberal ironist that Rorty offers, fails to mesh with Taylor's descriptive phenomenology. I attempted to mend this gulf by introducing a third way to read Wittgenstein, a third way, I believe, that both Taylor and Rorty can draw from. Moreover, I attempted to transmute that third reading of Wittgenstein into some friendly amendments for Rorty's ironist.

The primary insistence of that third reading is that any philosophically descriptive account should have a point (a use more specifically), and a prescriptive account, in turn, should be attentive to its means of realizability.[35] That whether one's philosophical goals are to describe more "thickly" *what we do anyway* or, rather, to offer innovative and unique proposals, one should remain open to the idea that theirs is not the final word, that a the never-ending conversation associated with making things better is not something to be transcended or ignored. Thus whether a philosopher seeks to describe or prescribe (or any combination of both), we should remember, with Wittgenstein's assorted tool-box in mind, that either might be needed at different times; that neither technique on its own is the wholly apposite one; this is, as I see the matter, what being meta-philosophically anti-essentialist in the spirit of Wittgenstein would require of us. Descriptions without a point, after all, are trivial (like wheels spinning without affecting the mechanism or like 'idle ceremonies') and prescriptions without an understanding of our ordinary goods can very often be dogmatic if not dangerous. I think when Rorty is at his best, he wholly understands and applies this idea. On those

occasions when he is not writing at his best, he can have a tendency to slip back into the inviting temptation to offer theoretical figures and abstractions that fail to mesh with our ordinary sensibilities and intuitions; a tendency that makes the tools Rorty recommends on those occasions, inadequate to the tasks they wish to perform.[36] On those occasions, I have suggested, Rorty betrays the primary message of the third reading of Wittgenstein I proposed: that we as philosophers, act and write as our particular task warrants; always with the plausible realization of our particular goals in mind. When Rorty is not at his best, and makes proposals that are too neglectful of what strikes us as live and momentous, we feel, perhaps, that the tools he encourages on those occasions end up failing pragmatic tests; that those proposed tools do not do the work that both we and Rorty desire of them. When he is at his best, Rorty offers us brilliant and rousing prose that serve to add force to some of Wittgenstein's most celebrated "purposeful reminders." When he is at his worst, however, he makes proposals that betray these most fundamental ideas. Like his figure of the liberal ironist, the proposals that emerge from Rorty at his worst defraud the definitively Rortian notion that: "if something makes no difference to practice, it should make no difference to philosophy."[37]

NOTES TO CHPATER 3

[1] Throughout this thesis, some readers may feel, I have consistently run together the terms: Epistemology and Metaphysics. Some might feel that I have used these terms almost interchangeably and failed to adequately distinguish between them. I do this because it is my belief that the two disciplines are inextricably linked. Various answers to the fundamental metaphysical question: "What is there?" are often ranked by their agreeability with the fundamental Epistemological question: "How can we get in touch with what there is?" Perhaps most evidently in logical positivism does epistemology command metaphysics. For the positivists, it was indeed our ability or inability to "get in touch" that dictated which sentences had meaning and which others not. It would be wrong, I believe, after acknowledging the massive influence the Vienna circle's thinking

had on today's Anglo-American philosophy, to treat questions about "what there is?" and "How can we get in touch with what there is?" as distinct, cleanly bracketable questions. These two broad sets of questions are indissolubly linked, forever interacting with one another. For "justification" is an epistemological notion (at least traditionally) and questioning whether one is justified in making claims about "What there is" (all that pragmatists *can* do) shows the extent to which metaphysics and epistemology work in tandem. Since, in my estimation, we cannot test claims about "What there is" against what Bernard Williams called "The World As It Is Anyway", we can only ask whether someone was justified in making those claims. To say that we can ask more than this, is to imply that we can test sentences or descriptions *against* the world; to insist that say Newton's description of the heavens somehow mirrors the world more carefully than Aristotle's. To say this, however, we must have some idea about what a description mirroring the world would be like and more, we must have some idea about how to establish which descriptions perform this magical mirroring act better than others. All we can say about Newton's description over Aristotle's, anti-representationalists feel, is that it allows us to predict and control the world better than Aristotle's; it explains worldy phenomena *better* than Aristotle's. Although I will not go into detail about this point here, I believe that to maintain a sharp distinction between epistemology and metaphysics (putting to the side the practical, professional or institutional questions that deans and fundraisers are concerned with) is to be, implicitly at least, a representationalist of some stripe.

[2] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), #124.

[3] Ibid., #123.

[4] Ibid., #115.

[5] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Culture and Value*, trans. Peter Winch (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 15.

[6] J.L Austin has referred to his ordinary language project as a linguistic phenomenology. There are of course key differences between Austin and the later Wittgenstein, most strikingly perhaps, is that Austin is much more overtly interested in questions of grammar than is the often-ambiguous Wittgenstein. Even so, this first group of readers usually sees the two thinkers as advancing the same sort of message; the message that philosophical problems are essentially linguistic problems.

[7] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), #126.

[8] This pragmatic reading of Wittgenstein would probably construe the private language argument in instrumental terms. They would see this argument not as advancing a deep

truth about language and meaning but rather as highlighting the pragmatic point that language must be doing work; work that cannot be done privately.

[9] Robert Brandom, ed. *Rorty and His Critics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 349.

[10] Richard Rorty, "Keeping Philosophy Pure" in *Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982.), 36.

[11] Of course, some questions concerning *what we should do* are more pressing and grave than others. But pragmatists like Rorty will not think that meta-philosophical questions, or questions about philosophical method are, as a matter of course, more philosophically obligatory than other normative questions.

[12] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), #43.

[13] Heidegger's accusation that Nietzsche advanced an "inverted Platonism" is similar to the point I am here considering. That whereas Plato thought that human beings had some mysterious component that cleanly demarcated and elevated them from the rest of the animal kingdom, Nietzsche advanced the opposite thesis; namely, that there is no such mysterious component and that *this* is the True account of humans. Wittgenstein, I believe, does not fall victim to the same charge. It would be wrong, I think, to construe Wittgenstein's staunch anti-essentialism as suggesting the right way to look at things, for that would undermine or weaken the very message of anti-essentialism itself.

[14] Throughout Wittgenstein's later work, the word *shewn* is used for the German *erwiesen* (meaning proved or proven). I have no plausible explanation for why the word "shown" was written with an "e" rather than with the properly spelled "o".

[15] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G.E.M Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1997), # 133.

[16] Perhaps not all readers will be convinced that I have in fact isolated a "third way" to read and interpret the later Wittgenstein. I would be equally content to refer to my "third way" instead of a unique reading, simply a spirit or attitude with which one can read Wittgenstein. The inclusive spirit that I recommend here only serves as a reminder that Taylor's conditions for the self and Rorty's post-Philosophical intellectual need not be construed as antagonistic. We need not choose between them. We can view the type of descriptive project that Taylor engages in as one sort of tool and Rorty's philosophical recommendations as an altogether different sort. Thus, even if some readers are unconvinced about my having offered a distinctive Wittgensteinian reading, it will suffice to say that the inclusive spirit or attitude that I here encourage, should lead one to see Taylor's and Rorty's philosophical projects, respectively, as diverse types of tools that are not in need of commensuration. That is, we need not think that these two very

different philosophical endeavors need to be brought together under one united set of justificatory criteria.

[17] This divide between the prescriptive nature of Rorty's program and Charles Taylor's descriptive phenomenology comes our rather clearly when Taylor, in a recent essay, writes that: " It seems to me that Rorty's whole approach fails to take account of what has come in modern philosophy to be called "background", the skein of semi-or utterly inarticulate understandings that make sense of our explicit thinking and reactions...It involves what has at times been called "phenomenological description" or in Wittgenstein's language, "assembling reminders"- drawing on our inarticulate and semirepressed knowledge of what it is to be in the world as a knowing agent in order to puncture the illusions of a distortive framework." "Rorty and Philosophy" in *Richard Rorty: Contemporary Philosophy in Focus*, Charles Guignon and David R.Hiley ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 159. Here, Taylor appears to be highlighting the normative point that shall appear later in this chapter that philosophical revisionist proposals must take careful account of the phenomenological realities of the human situation. That is, proposals must begin from an assiduous understanding of what informs human experience.

[18] I have mentioned already that the task with which Rorty endows his ironist, primarily at least, is that of self-creation in the spirit of Nietzsche. The task I have been speaking about (namely, that of breeding a more pragmatic philosophical climate) is one that should like to see the ironist as a result of Rorty's broader philosophical ambitions. Rorty then, I have been urging, introduces this character as part of his post-Philosophical vision; he feels that such a character would help make philosophy less theoretical and more hands-on. A task, I suggest, that the ironist is not well suited for.

[19] Bjorn Ramberg has written that Rorty's *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity* "has come to constitute something of an existentialist manifesto for pragmatists" See Robert Brandom, ed. *Rorty and His Critics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 352.

[20] Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 113.

[21] Robert Brandom, ed. *Rorty and his Critics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 210.

[22] Richard Rorty, "Cosmopolitanism Without Emancipation: A Response to Jean-Francois- Lyotard. In *Objectivity, Relativism and Truth: Philosophical Papers Vol. 1* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 211.

[23] John Dewey, *Reconstruction In Philosophy* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1959), 73.

[24] Accepting Dewey's means/ends continuum does not commit someone, in turn to reject Taylor's claims about 'strong evaluations'. One can agree with Dewey that various ends are dependant in large part upon their various means, but one need not as a result,

abandon the idea that we just do rank certain modes of life as higher, more noble, more fulfilling than others. That is, while Dewey's thesis may apply to a large number of cases, (especially those that are more morally benign) there is no automatic inference from accepting Dewey's mean/ends continuum to rejecting Taylor's 'strong evaluation'.

[25] John Dewey, *Reconstruction in Philosophy* (Boston: The Beacon Press, 1959), 72.

[26] Recall that Dewey, particularly early in his academic life, read a great deal of Hegel and was profoundly influenced by him. Hegel's '*impotence of the ought*' seems to mesh quite closely with the attentiveness to means that I have been attributing to Dewey and for which I too argue.

[27] Here I think Rorty's "*all the way down*" liberalism becomes evident. He seems to rally against any suggestion of philosophical censorship, arguing instead that what ends up working is a question whose answer is perennially up for grabs. So his liberalism penetrates far beyond his politics. There are signs of it in his attempts at literary criticism, his meta-philosophy, and perhaps every other area of his work. It is almost as if "liberal philosophy" is first philosophy for Rorty.

[28] Richard Rorty, *Philosophical Papers Vol. 2: Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 6.

[29] Richard Rorty, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 7.

[30] Richard Rorty *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), 113.

[31] Richard Rorty "Hilary Putnam and the Relativist Menace" in *Truth and Progress.* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 54.(Emphasis Added.)

[32] John Dewey, *Human Nature and Conduct,* Vol. 14 of *The Middle Works of John Dewey* (Carbondale Illinois: Southern Illinois University Press, 1988), 195-6.

[33] I am not suggesting that Rorty's ironist is an immoral proposal. Rather, my dissatisfaction with this particular proposal is that it fails, or seems to fail, pragmatic tests. That is, it is unclear that the ironist can satisfy the basic pragmatic edict that "every difference must make a difference to practice" despite her wish that philosophers proceed with that edict in mind. Moreover, the ironist seems at odds with Dewey's means/ends continuum as it is unclear how such a figure could be realized. Finally, and this is a more 'merely' philosophical remark, the ironist is not a character adequately suited to the role of post-Philosophical intellectual. For as was shown in chapter 2, she remains decidedly inside the tradition of traditional Epistemology. Thus my complaints with this figure take two forms: (1.) We could propose a better post-Philosophical ideal intellectual, one that is more unambiguously *beyond* Epistemology, and (2.) quite

independently of (1.) we have no good reason to assume that intellectuals could become ironists as Rorty drafts them; it is entirely unclear what means towards ironism would or could look like.

[34] Ludwig Wittgenstein, *On Certainty*, G.E.M Anscombe and G.H von Wright, ed. (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1972), #302.

[35] In many cases good philosophy offers us both description and prescription at once. For example, Marx described the nature of capital and labor in painstaking detail so that he could be in a position to offer a plausible replacement for the current system (his metaphysical account of history notwithstanding). Analogously, Foucault describes genealogically, the multitude of "power structures" at work in our current institutions such that he can offer recommendations to make those institutions less cruel and more humane. Thus good proposals often emerge (perhaps need to emerge) from careful description of the present situation. Further, it is not entirely clear that there is a sharp philosophical division between "description" and "prescription". I use these terms in conjunction with Rorty's and Taylor's work, not to insist that each philosopher is committed, strictly, to one of these approaches, but merely to highlight the more general idea that in each, one of the two (*is* and *ought*, respectively) is emphasized over the other. I do not claim, however, that Rorty's thinking overlooks description altogether, nor that prescription or normativity is altogether absent in Taylor's thinking.

[36] In several ways, we could see Rorty's liberal ironist as a figure that embodies Rorty's own rather idiosyncratic philosophical interests. It is perhaps a figure that brings together Rorty's diverse predilections: his longing for a culture that is more poeticized and, following Nietzsche, sees the poet as the ideal moral exemplar rather than the scientist. It also accommodates Rorty's more public and political goals, goals the sort of which he shares with Habermas and other liberals.

[37] Richard Rorty, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry? Davidson vs, Wright" *Philosophical Quarterly*, vol.45, no. 180, July 1955. This passage is quoted from Akeel Bilgrami, "Is Truth a Goal of Inquiry?: Rorty and Davidson on Truth." Robert Brandom, ed. *Rorty and his Critics* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 2000), 243.

Conclusion

This thesis has taken a variety of twists and turns. It began with a somewhat modest task concerning the realizability and desirability of Rorty's liberal ironist. I tried to test this abstract character against what Taylor provides as the crucial conditions that permit one to turn to *themselves* as an object of critical reflection. So my test was whether or not Rorty's ironist could plausibly be expected to have a sense of self, a sense of 'who she was'. Of course, as it became clear that Rorty's ironist lacked (or appeared to lack) a capacity to fulfill these necessary but insufficient conditions, a set of broader meta-philosophical questions entered the discussion. A series of questions affecting on vast and expansive topics such as hermeneutics, the future of philosophy, the nature of good philosophical recommendations among others found their way into a discussion that had commenced with a much narrower target.

I think part of the reason for the deliberate inflation evident in this thesis is the breadth and sophistication of Rorty's work. It simply is not responsible, I have come to think, to view one singular element of Rorty's work (in this case the character of his liberal ironist) without delving into different and even *prima facie* irrelevant areas of his philosophical corpus. Although Rorty's is by no means a philosophical 'system', it is clear that many of his conclusions and recommendations have their origin in a number of views about language, meaning, truth and the history of philosophy. To criticize a fairly local part of his philosophy without taking into consideration these larger philosophical views that give life to the various local theses would be, in my own estimation, fairly careless. Thus I was concerned to show how the character of the liberal ironist is one that

naturally derives from Rorty's various polemics against representationalism, foundationalism and traditional Philosophy (capital P); to show, as it were, the philosophical views that are at the origin of Rorty's thinking about his liberal ironist. In one sense, this thesis reflects the inverse of Rorty's own thinking. Vaguely, whereas Rorty begins from large views about language, truth, and meaning and ends up with his ideal figure, this thesis began with his ideal figure and worked its way backward to the larger philosophical picture that gave rise to it. Whereas Rorty's polemics against representationalism, his Davidsonian rejection of the scheme/content distinction, and his anti-foundationalism provide the fuel for his meditation on his ideal figure, this thesis began from the prospect of his ideal figure and worked, in reverse, towards the larger views about meaning, language and truth. Thus, to the extent that Rorty's ironist can be seen as an extension or the result of these philosophical positions, I tried to trace back the details of the ironist to test them against a picture of philosophy that I indeed share with Rorty; to test, that is, whether there is a coherence (or necessity) between the former, large theses and the smaller ideal result. So in one sense, my test was one of coherence between Rorty's views on language, truth and meaning and the ensuing meta-philosophical proposals and ideals that emerge from them.

My criticism of this figure and the resultant recommendations I made, took two basic forms. First, I suggested that, to the extent the ironist could not plausibly be expected to have a clear sense of self, this figure is not one that would be worth striving towards. That is, by virtue of the fact that this character is likely to suffer from what we may call an identity crisis, it is not a promising goal towards which to endeavor. So despite my sympathy for Rorty's broader philosophical thinking that culminates in the

liberal ironist, the specific traits and details that this figure embodies are not, in the end, desirable. Wishing and striving for ironism, as Rorty drafts it, would be tantamount, I argued, to wishing and striving for the emergence of unhealthy agents; that would be like wanting to construct human beings who were lacking in a vital, health preserving, capacity. This first line of criticism boils down to the recommendation that we might do better to modify or augment the specific traits that Rorty endows his ironist with. We may wish to construct such a figure with the trait of "open mindedness" rather than "radical and continuing doubt", we may wish that this figure defined herself less through her opposition to traditional metaphysicians and epistemologists and identified herself instead with the Deweyan quest to continue on the road of open inquiry. We may wish that the ironist cared less about the traditional quests of metaphysical mapping and pre-supposition-less certainty, quests she appears at times to obsess over, and cared more about the concrete "problems of men". The first sort of criticism I offered, then, was one that proposed the replacement or amendment of this figure. I suggested, by way of some Wittgensteinian and Deweyan reminders, that some of the ironist's traits could be modified to mesh more closely with what both Rorty and I think is a promising direction to which philosophy should aim.

The second sort of criticism I offered of the ironist was less pragmatic and more theoretical than the first sort. I tried to assess whether or not the ironist *could* emerge with the characteristics that Rorty endows her with. This form of criticism asked whether, given our entrenchment in our ethnocentric frameworks, we could adopt the radical naturalism and almost religious adherence to contingency that Rorty calls for. This line of criticism took into account Wittgenstein's *language as tools* analogy (one

that Rorty has himself appropriated) and asked whether we could see all of our words and the justifications we carry around for their uses (that is, our final vocabularies) instrumentally. Could we ever come to think that our complete lexicon was merely a collection of tools while acknowledging that our capacity to envisage tools at all is a product of this lexicon? Could we ever come to think of our language as simply a toolbox while believing, as Rorty does, that this toolbox itself is a condition for thought? That is, could we plausibly imagine the things that the ironist swears by while acknowledging the immense set of background or phenomenological conditions at work in our being able to think these things at all? These are open questions, the answers to which certainly fall beyond the scope of this thesis. However, it did become clear that Rorty does not spell out how one might come to think these things, and indeed, whether we would have good reason to suppose that such things could be thought. Rorty's virtual silence on this question instigated some Deweyan reminders about keeping means in mind when envisaging and ranking ends. The Deweyan reminders I alluded to, amounted to the message that we cannot but ask *how* the details of Rorty's ironist could, in actuality, be brought about, and that most of us grade a good or worthwhile proposal against the background of its plausibility. I did not suggest, however, that Rorty's liberal ironist was a figure that *could not*, even in principle, be realized. I suggested, rather, that Rorty himself is quite vague about what such a realization would look like, and that this vagueness detracts from the strength of the particular proposal. I attempted to reiterate, following Dewey and Wittgenstein, that a strong proposal is attentive to its means of realizability and that a lack of this attentiveness is akin to a proposal that is not "doing work" in the relevant Wittgensteinian sense.

I would like to add one other qualification. Even if my suggestion that Rorty's ironist could not plausibly be expected to have a clear or healthy concept of self is correct, we should not conclude, by virtue of that fact alone, that Rorty's figure is entirely futile. Indeed, considering his liberal ironist as this thesis has attempted to do, may help to reinforce the idea that what counts as plausible, what has the ability to strike us as live and momentous can and surely will change. Perhaps, even if the central suggestion of this thesis was correct, we should see the primary message of Rorty's ironist as the edict that what was utterly implausible at one time in history can come to represent the common sense of a future time. Thinking about the ironist in this way will compel us to reflect on figures such as Darwin or Freud and how ridiculous their ideas must have seemed at first. Thus, even if the ironist fails in the rather narrow test I here constructed for her, we should still treat this figure as one with the capacity to remind us that new ways of speaking and thinking are not only possible, but probably inevitable, that our current vocabularies are themselves subject to replacement and revision. Thus, the suggestions of this thesis notwithstanding, we can treat the ironist as a fine and articulate spokesperson for the deep historicism that occupies a central place in Rorty's philosophical corpus.

By way of a final thought, I would like to qualify, again, that I am indeed quite sympathetic to Rorty's philosophical ambitions, despite my suggestion that his ironist is not a figure that we could or should strive towards. I do believe, with Rorty, that we would do better to discard Metaphysics' troubling distinctions, distinctions many of which do no work in the pertinent pragmatic sense. Following Rorty in this way will create, I believe, the intellectual climate that may bring about the increased popularity of

pragmatism. It will foster the environment where philosophers turn their attention to those questions that arise about justice, equality, solidarity and morality instead of pursuing the hopeless paths of Objective Reality and Metaphysical *mapping*. Following Rorty in this way is likely, *pace* Kant, to take philosophy off the "secure path of science," and instead restore it to its former, original role; that of the humanities, whose first and only concern is the "problems of *humans*".

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