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Good Nietzsche, Bad Nietzsche: The Role of Friedrich Nietzsche in Richard Rorty's Political Thought.

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GOOD NIETZSCHE, BAD NIETZSCHE: THE ROLE OF FRIEDRICH NIETZSCHE IN RICHARD RORTY'S POLITICAL THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

Good Nietzsche, Bad Nietzsche: The role of Friedrich Nietzsche in Richard Rorty's Political Thought

Richard Rorty found Friedrich Nietzsche's critique of epistemology (perspectivism) to be a helpful tool in getting us to stop thinking of knowledge as something we find, and instead as something that we create. He also found perspectivism to be a helpful tool in that of the private sphere, of private self-creation. The Nietzsche that provides perspectivism is "The Good Nietzsche". Rorty, however, conceived of Nietzsche's ideas as being absolutely useless when it comes to politics, along with his ideas regarding morality, the Will to Power, and the Übermensch. These are the ideas of "The Bad Nietzsche". Rorty's actual usage of Nietzsche's ideas, however, defies such easy, self-defined categorization, because these ideas extend outside of their spheres into the realm of politics in Rorty's own writings. Most traditional analyses of the relationship between Nietzsche and Rorty as it regards politics tend to focus on Nietzsche. By focusing on Rorty's appropriation of Nietzsche, through looking at his extensive writings and interviews, a more subtle, and complex relationship between Nietzsche's various ideas and Rorty's politics is seen to exist.

INTRODUCTION

Richard Rorty was a man with a mission; he wanted to make philosophy relevant

to democratic societies. Rorty hoped to do this through offering his vision of what a post-

modern liberal democratic society could be. Several thinkers help with this project, one

of them being one of his philosophical heroes: Friedrich Nietzsche. To Rorty, Nietzsche

is a European version of his pragmatist heroes in that he helps Western thinkers get away

from Plato's preoccupation with the distinction between appearance and reality and the

attempts to ground knowledge. Rorty does not use all parts of Nietzsche's ideas,

however. He is profoundly dubious of the use and validity of key ideas such as the will to

power, the eternal recurrence, and the Übermensch. Nietzsche's thought also contains a

profoundly strong strain of anti-democratic thought, which Rorty could not reconcile with

his liberalism— and discards it. Rorty expresses these sentiments in *Truth, politics and*

'post-modernism:

> "It is true that we neo-Nietzscheans stand out from our fellow-citizens by being
> the only ones who insist that liberalism is 'merely one form of life among others'.
> But my kind of neo-Nietzschean then goes on to express his or her devout
> conviction that it is the best form of political life yet invented."[1]

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[1] Rorty, Richard, *Truth, politics and 'post-modernism*, Spinoza lectures, 1. Is it desirable to love truth? 2. Is 'post-modernism' relevant to politics? (Assen, Van Gorcum,1997), pg. 49

Rorty succinctly sums up his usage of some parts of Nietzsche's ideas and not others in an interview near the end of his life, *Take Care of Freedom and Truth Will Take Care of Itself*:

> "I think that one can detach the good Nietzsche—the critic of Platonism—from the bad Nietzsche, the one who had no use for Christianity or democracy. The stuff about the Overman can safely be neglected, as can what Heidegger called "the metaphysics of the will to power." There is still a lot of valuable stuff left in his writings."[2]

One of Rorty's most well-known ideas, as revealed in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is the idea that once we had given up on trying to answer Plato's question, "Why be just?", or why should I with my self-interest care about other human beings, we will no longer see philosophy as being able to provide an answer to this question. Instead, we will have to divide our philosophers into two camps: the "public" one: those that help us create a political community and reduce cruelty towards one another (Mill, Dewey, Marx, Orwell, and Nabokov) and "private" thinkers: those that help us create ourselves (Nietzsche, Heidegger, Foucault, Proust, and Sartre). The Nietzsche that is critical of Platonism obviously has implications in public and private worlds, but, Rorty argues the fullest application of Nietzsche's ideas is through answering the question of how we create ourselves according to our own standards. As this quote shows, his understanding of Nietzsche is subtle, he believes that Nietzsche's ideas are not consistent wholes, but can be separated out and justified on their own grounds, especially as they apply mostly to the private sphere.

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[2] Rorty, Richard, *Take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself : interviews with Richard Rorty*; edited by Eduardo Mendieta, (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2006), pg. 93

Many scholars have expressed profound skeptical about such an appropriation. An especially poignant criticism comes from the field of political philosophy as seen through Frederick Appel, in *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, where he outlines his skepticism about an appropriation of Nietzsche for political purposes, and more importantly, questions the utility of doing so:

> One obvious objection to this "progressive" reading readily comes to mind. Let us put aside the considerable textual evidence against it for the moment and assume that Nietzsche is indeed a protean thinker whose work, with some creative bending can be appropriated in limitless ways. Why, then, would anyone interested in radical democratic theory want to expend the considerable amount of creative energy required to adapt Nietzschean thought for democratic purposes? Why bother making Nietzsche's work "groan" and "protest" when there are so many other thinkers past and present with less dubious credentials who could provide ready inspiration? If all of this bending and twisting turned the end product—call it "Nietzsche" into a mirror image of one's own convictions, it is hard to imagine the point of such an endeavor. A Nietzsche thus sanitized or domesticated can teach nothing that could not be learned directly from dozens of other contemporary writers.[3]

Appel's question is especially applicable to Richard Rorty. Pragmatist philosophers such as William James, Charles Peirce, John Dewy, as well as thinkers such as Donald Davidson, Thomas Kuhn, Wilfrid Sellars, and W.V. Quine, provide plenty of arguments for him to use in his thoughts about epistemology. He is thoroughly enamored with the ideas of John Stuart Mill and John Dewey as they apply to the political realm, as well.

Given this rather diverse set of argumentative tools, a key question emerges, why would Rorty bother using Nietzsche's ideas for his vision of a post-modern liberal society given the possible problems this might create given that he has so many alternatives?

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[3] Appel, Frederick, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, (Ithaca, New York, and London, England, Cornell University Press,1999), pg. 5

This thesis' answer to this question is that Nietzsche ideas are thoroughly intertwined with Rorty's political project in subtle and complicated ways that go beyond Rorty's own easy categorization into public and private. The strongest link between the two is Nietzsche's perspectivist theory of truth, the idea that our descriptions of reality are conditioned by our subjective experiences. This idea has spawned into another argument: that regarding private self-creation. These two applications of perspectivism are what compose "The Good Nietzsche" that he refers to earlier.

The first chapter, "The Good Nietzsche"- Perspectivism I: Epistemology," outlines Nietzsche's perspectivist theory of truth. It also analyzes how Rorty incorporates it into his own ideas about truth. Nietzsche's critique of epistemology obviously helps Rorty argue for the need to distinguish between public and private spheres, but we are not sure which sphere the critique of epistemology fits into, especially because Rorty applies it to his ideas about a post-modern liberal society. Here he argues that liberal societies need to give up the notion of trying to provide "foundations" for democracy through philosophy because, philosophers such as Nietzsche, have proven to us that no such foundations can be found. Rorty argues that instead of trying to provide justifications for ourselves liberal societies would be better served dreaming of what they could become.

The second chapter, "The Good Nietzsche"- Perspectivism II: Self-Creation, takes as its subject an application of Nietzschean perspectivism, and exemplifies Rorty's arguments about the private utility of Nietzsche's philosophy. Rorty argues that once Nietzsche shows us that truth is merely a matter of perspective, then we cannot think of such a thing as a paradigmatic human life. Instead, Nietzsche's works and life is an example of how one creates oneself. Rorty gets the majority of his analysis about

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Nietzschean self-creation from Alexander Nehamas' *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, especially Chapters five and six. Unlike other studies of this argument, this chapter analyzes Nehamas' arguments in depth whether Rorty uses all of them or not. Rorty then goes on to argue that he thinks that Nietzsche's ideas are better expressed through Freud, and this chapter offers an analysis of Rorty's use of Freud and Nietzsche. Rorty's arguments about public and private seem to break down again, as he argues a liberal society exists to allow for the flourishing of such individuals and that only an active, vigorous left in American politics will provide the conditions for such individuals to exist.

The third chapter, "The Bad Nietzsche"- Morality and Politics, analyzes Nietzsche's critique of morality and Rorty's assorted counterarguments against it. Rorty argues that Nietzsche's views on this subject have no application for him. Rorty, however, does consider the implications of what happens when one does do so, and this chapter analyzes those implications. He also argues that applying Nietzsche to politics results in a pessimism that has manifested itself through the American post-modern Cultural Left. Even though morality and politics, broadly speaking, are enormous topics that usually should not be grouped together so generically, they are treated together because Nietzsche's critique of democratic politics are an extension of his critique of morality, and Rorty treats them as such.

Many studies of the relationship between Nietzsche and Rorty tend to have some common limitations. The first is that many of them attempt to assess the validity of one the thinkers' ideas against that of the other. This thesis will not do that; in other words, this will not be a "Nietzschean" reading/critique of Rorty or a "Rortyean"

reading/critique of Nietzsche." While intellectually stimulating, this type of analysis

does not lend itself to exposing the depth and richness of either's thoughts very well,

especially Rorty's. Another common limitation is that many studies focusing on the

political aspects of the relationship between Nietzsche and Rorty tend to center on

Rorty's seminal work, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, as all of Rorty's principles

regarding liberalism are presented here. Ignoring Rorty's other works is problematic,

however. Some of his later interviews and articles expand upon many key arguments

that he is unable to make elsewhere. For example, the chapter, "Pragmatism as

Romantic Polytheism" in *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, gives one of the most

sustained treatments of the relationship between Nietzsche, pragmatism, and politics.

Most articles, also, tend to ignore Rorty's most direct statement on politics, *Achieving*

Our Country. This is Rorty's history of the American Left during the 20th Century, and a

call-to-arms for the contemporary American Left. Analyzing this work, especially, shows

ties to Nietzsche's ideas that Rorty does not recognize as existing elsewhere, and exposes

relationships and commonalities that seem to be lacking from looking at Rorty's works in

isolation.

CHAPTER I: "THE GOOD NIETZSCHE"- PERSPECTIVISM I: EPISTEMOLOGY

William James, John Dewey, and Donald Davidson are the dominant influences on Rorty's pragmatist theories as they apply to epistemology. He argues that they gave up the appearance-reality distinction initially proposed by Plato, and Kant's attempts to ground knowledge. Rorty argues that both gave up the search for truth, by interpreting it in psychological terms.[4] He also argues that they, "…self-consciously abandoned the search for an Archimedean point from which to survey culture. They abandoned the notion of philosophy as super-science. As Nietzsche said, they were the first generation not to believe that they had the truth."[5] From this quote, it is evident that Rorty acknowledged another "pragmatist" as a key influence— Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche is not traditionally classified as a pragmatist, as this is traditionally identified as an America movement, but the works René Berthelot and Arthur Danto, were key works that linked Nietzsche's perspectivist theory of truth with pragmatism.[6] What role does perspectivism serve in Rorty's epistemology? Nietzschean perspectivism is essential to understanding Rorty's conception of what a modern liberal society should be like. He

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[4] Rorty, Richard, *Consequences of Pragmatism (Essays: 1972-1980)*, (Minneapolis, MN, University of Minnesota Press, 1980) pg. 150

[5] Ibid

[6] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pg. 27

outlines these advantages mostly in Chapter 3 of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*.

Here, he argues that a culture of liberalism is best served by a Nietzschean understanding

of truth and rationality, and, argues why the traditional vocabulary of Enlightenment

rationalism serves as a hindrance to a liberal society. Rorty, however, does not want to

provide "grounds" for his view of a liberal society, but instead a new vision of it. For this

vision, we must turn to *Achieving Our Country*. Rorty gives an example of his vision in

an eloquent quote about Whitman:

> Whitman thought that we Americans have the fullest poetical nature because we
> are the first nation-state with nobody to please but itself—not even God. We are
> the greatest poem because we put ourselves in the place of God: our essence is
> our existence, and our existence is in the future.[7]

Kant

In order to appreciate Nietzsche's critique of epistemology and Rorty's

appropriation of his critique, it is important to understand the philosophical context they

are working in. It begins with Plato's distinction between appearance and reality, featured

prominently in *The Republic*'s allegory of the cave. For the West, Plato began asking the

question: What is knowledge? Philosophers have continuously tried to answer this

question, and a related one, how do we know, what we know? This is the question that

Immanuel Kant concerned himself with answering. Nietzsche concerned himself with

countering Kant's views on this question.

David Owen, in *Nietzsche, Politics, and Modernity*, provides a cogent summary

of Kant's ideas, and analyzes Kant's place in the modern study of epistemology— the

attempt to ground knowledge in an objective realm (not influenced by our perceptions),

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[7] Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1998, Fifth Printing, 2003), pg. 22

or prove that such an attempt is impossible.[8] Kant attempts to mediate the dispute between empiricists and rationalists. The empiricists claim that our knowledge of the world depends on our experience (senses) of phenomena that occurs. If this is the case, however, then we cannot have any knowledge of absolute truth. The rationalists, however, claim that there are truths independent of our experience that we can know. Kant concedes that strict rationalism is insufficient, but that strict empiricism also has faults. He argues that we experience time and space as a whole, not in discrete segments, as the empiricists claim, and that if they are correct, then they cannot easily account for the concepts of space and time, as they would only be "impressions" to us, and not ideas.

Kant attempts to provide a secure foundation for knowledge by arguing that the human mind is an active participant in reality in that it experiences phenomena and concepts (such as causality) simultaneously, thereby allowing us to comprehend the phenomena that occur to us. Kant posits this through the possibility of synthetic a priori judgments. Analytic judgments/a priori are propositions whose truth is independent of experience, while synthetic/a posteriori are propositions whose truth is dependent on experience. Synthetic a priori statements are those that reveal to us knowledge of universal truths that are not mere tautologies and that we do not have to experience directly. For example, take Newton's first law of motion—an object in motion will stay in motion unless acted upon by an outside force. It is not an a priori statement (as our concept of object has no necessary connection with the concepts of motion or force), nor an a posteriori statement (we do not need to experience an object in motion for this statement to be true). How, then, are synthetic a priori judgments possible?

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[8] My summary owes much to the work of Owen, David in *Nietzsche, politics, and modernity*: *A Critique of Liberal Reason*, London; Thousand Oaks, Calif., Sage Publications: 1995) pgs. 25-28

Kant argues that the intellect has a tripartite self: sense, understanding, and reason. Sense and understanding both have transcendental structures that they impose on reality. The transcendental structure underlying the senses allows us to understand space and time as a unity, while the transcendental structure underlying understanding allows us to interpret phenomena individually, and discover relations between them. Therefore, the transcendental self (universal) as subject, is able to interpret the world as object. The transcendental self and the empirical self (body) are both different and distinct. Kant distinguishes between the real, noumenal world as it is in itself (the transcendental self is "here"), and the apparent, phenomenal world that the empirical self lives in.

Nietzsche's Critique of Epistemology

Nietzsche's ideas on epistemology are a radical departure from the tradition that came before him. Nietzsche virulently attacks the concept of the bifurcated self by arguing that there is no such thing as a self, and no distinction between subject and object, which effectively undermines all attempts at grounding knowledge from Descartes until that time. His solution is philosophical perspectivism, which states that we increase our knowledge of the world through better descriptions of it, not through knowing the world as it is "in-itself."

Nietzsche gives an account of the human mind that distinguishes between the intellect and consciousness. The intellect is essential to the survival of the fragile animal known as human beings. Without it, this animal would perish quickly. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche presents us as animals that can "think, feel, will, recollect, and 'act' in every sense of the word."[9] The intellect's primary mode of operation is through

simulation. Nietzsche argues that our weak, pathetic ancestors were not strong enough to survive with their extremities, since they lacked things like fangs and horns, and therefore began using the intellect to imagine how to accomplish goals through deceptive means. Hobbes correctly calls such an existence, "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short," and human beings need a better existence.

For Nietzsche, consciousness is not part of the intellect— it comes from human interaction. In *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense*, Nietzsche gives a rather Hobbesian explanation for why otherwise solitary individuals come together in society. Mostly it is out of necessity, boredom, but mostly it is the need to live, in Nietzsche's common pejorative phrase, in a "herd"-like state in which human beings seek to mitigate the more extreme conditions in the state of nature, and its "war of all against all". In *The Gay Science*, however, Nietzsche argues that consciousness only emerges when we have a need to communicate with one another, and becomes more complex, when society (and language) becomes more complex. Human beings had needs (ex: food, warmth, protection), but they did not "know" that they had them, and could not express them until they had first developed consciousness.[10] Nietzsche characterizes the thoughts that are in our consciousness as shallow because they are in words, and insignificant relative to the sum total of our other internal perceptions. Therefore, complete self-perception is impossible, for when one tries to "know oneself" in words, all that one will be able to come up with are things that characterize one in relation to others, that makes one similar

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[9] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The Gay Science*, Section 354 in *A Nietzsche reader*, selected and translated [from the German] with an introduction by R. J. Hollingdale, (New York, Harmondsworth/Penguin, 1977), pg. 65

[10] Ibid.

to another. Although each individual, in existence and deed is unique and individual, consciousness makes one seem general, universal, shallow, and herd-like.

Therefore, all that we are conscious of "the Truth," is only a social creation that is supposed to help us survive. In order to secure this new "invention" humanity must attach some societal primacy to the concept of truth, and we do this by the distinction between the truth and the lie. According to Nietzsche, the truth is "a regularly valid and obligatory designation of things."[11] A liar changes these designations to make the unreal appear real, and to benefit himself. If this is to the detriment of society, then society will punish the liar by exclusion. Society does not care if the designations that the liar uses are actually true or not, only whether they have harmful *consequences*. From this, Nietzsche determines our motive to discover the truth: to discover things about the world that yield practical benefits to humanity, not to discover abstract truths merely because they are interesting.

Language is the tool with which we create valid and obligatory designations (truth) that allow human beings to survive in society. Unfortunately, there is no link between the phenomena we describe through language and the truth of these things as they are. The world that is "out there" is intangible and completely removed from our senses of them, and especially our descriptions of them. Richard Rorty succinctly argues why this is true: "Truth cannot be out there—cannot exist independently of the human mind—because sentences cannot so exist, or be out there. The world is out there, but

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[11] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense* in *The Portable Nietzsche*, edited and translated by Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Viking, 1968), pg. 44

descriptions of the world are not."[12] Words are only the images of nerve impulses

converted into sounds, and to infer a cause outside of this process would be an error. We

superimpose our subjective experiences onto objects, but the objects do not have these

qualities themselves. In addition, if we had academic, and pure, motivations for seeking

knowledge all that we would be left with would be tautologies, and hence, useless

knowledge. The creators of language therefore relate the phenomenal things of the world

to humanity, and Nietzsche describes this relationship as being metaphorical—we

describe the real world through the world of language. For Nietzsche this relationship

gives us the ultimate meaning and importance of truth:

> What, then, is truth? A mobile army of metaphors, metonyms, and
> anthropomorphisms—in short, a sum of human relations which have been
> enhanced, transposed, and embellished poetically and rhetorically, and which
> after long use seem firm, canonical, and obligatory to a people: truths are illusions
> about which one has forgotten that this is what they are; metaphors which are
> worn out and without sensuous power; coins which have lost their pictures and
> now matter only as metal, no longer as coins.[13]

Although we often invent new words and concepts (metaphors) to adapt to our changing

circumstances, our entire framework of knowledge rests upon "calcified" metaphors that

we take for granted, but that in the end are ultimately metaphors, and hence unstable.

Nietzsche argues that there is a psychosocial component to this idea too. The desire for

truth is nothing more than a complicated manifestation of the animalistic instinct of fear

that seeks the familiar and the known, as it is safer than is the unknown.[14] This instinct

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[12] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 24th printing, 2005), pg. 5

[13] The Nietzsche Channel: On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense,
http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/tls.htm , (accessed: April 25, 2008)

[14] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The Gay Science*, Section 355 in *A Nietzsche reader*, pg. 68

helps to maintain the potency of the "calcified" metaphors that we have forgotten are only metaphors Most of our attempts at objective knowledge start from the known and works towards the unknown, for example, Descartes' *Discourse on the Method* begins with the inner world (familiar) and moves outward (unknown). Nietzsche argues that this is one amongst many errors of reasoning that flow from the relation of language to knowledge.

The first error of reasoning is our continued belief in ideal forms thanks to Plato. This comes about when we first transfer our senses of phenomena into nerve impulses, then into words, and then into concepts. The latter is where the error comes about. With concepts we are able to find similarities between objects. According to Nietzsche, however, no object is similar to another one. Each and every object is unique and may have an essence that will nevertheless forever remain inaccessible to our minds. For example, a tree does not exist in nature. Every tree has unique qualities, many of which we ignore in order to form our concept of a tree, for example, color, texture, smell, leaf shape. All of our concepts derive from what Nietzsche calls these "arbitrary abstractions."[15] Logic and mathematics commit the same error— and must, in order to function as disciplines. Logic depends upon the assumption that there are identical objects throughout time, but such a thing does not actually exist. There is no such thing as a straight line, a circle, or a number in nature. Therefore, for Nietzsche, the all too important synthetic a priori principle is not possible, as all of our concepts are merely errors and there are no ideas that have an absolute existence somewhere.

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[15] The Nietzsche Channel: On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense, http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/tls.htm , (accessed: April 25, 2008)

Another error of reasoning that comes from language is the concept of cause and effect. This has its roots in linguistics. For us, all sentences must have a subject and a predicate, "do-er" and "deed," and because we think in sentences, we assume that nature must follow this same pattern. This way of thinking comes from our distinguishing between our own will and the movements of our bodies in the world, but the world does not operate in this way. Nietzsche remains open to the possibility that there may be such causes and effects, but if this is so, then we cannot know them because of our deficient concepts of time and space. We divide up time and space into discrete segments that we can understand, but the universe is a continuum of time, and has an innumerable number of relationships that we cannot mentally identify simultaneously. We never experience cause directly, nor do we know of them before we experience what we consider effect. Once something has occurred we reason backwards to determine the cause; this is not the case. Nor can we reason back to first causes for things that we experience as we cannot know of all possible causes (if they exist) simultaneously. As Nietzsche writes in *On the Genealogy of Morals:*

> "…the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightning…The popular mind in fact doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as its effect."[16]

As David Owen writes, "*the event* (lightning/flash) *is taken both as subject-cause* (lightning) *and object-effect* (flash)."[17] There is no "do-er" behind the deed, no Being, as

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[16] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* First Essay, Section 13 translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. *Ecce homo*, translated by Walter Kaufmann; edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Vintage Books, 1967, 1989) pg. 45

[17] Owen, David, pg. 28

our thinking assumes. Nietzsche's argument about our need for the known applies here, too. Our need to establish causes comes from our desire to make the seemingly chaotic world more familiar.

The destruction of the concept of cause and effect is fatal to Kant's theory of the self and synthetic a priori statements, as there is no longer a distinction between subject and object. This type of reasoning has its boldest statement in Descartes' proposition: "I think, therefore I am." Descartes argues that this is the most fundamental proposition. Nietzsche argues that this is only a belief, and a false one, as there is no substance/something thinks. We cannot know absolutely that this substance exists. The only way that this statement could be true is as an a priori statement, a tautology "I think therefore there's thinking." This is the apparent world that Kant identifies, but both he and Descartes sought a more fundamental grounding, a world in itself.

Even if there were subjects and objects, it is not possible to know of a realm distinct and removed from the world (the possibility of metaphysics).This error has two origins. The first comes from the way in which we conceive of language (and therefore the mind) as distinct and apart from the world that we experience. Nietzsche concedes that metaphysical language is an inevitable way of speaking about the world; however, he wants to make his reader aware of the metaphysical assumptions that underlie our languages.[18] The second comes from dreams. Likely, our ancestors thought that their dreams were part of a second real world; otherwise, there is no reason why our ancestors would have reasonably thought it was possible to divide this world into several realms.

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[18] Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts, and London, Harvard University Press, 1985), pg. 94

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From this division between the dream world, and the real world, is the division into the

soul, and body, and then (for Kant) between the transcendental mind, and the empirical

mind. Nietzsche argues that a metaphysical world is entirely possible, but that it is

logically impossible to prove it.[19] In *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche explains the reason

why:

> "But even supposing there were an in-itself, an unconditioned thing, it would for
> that very reason be unknowable! Something unconditioned cannot be known;
> otherwise it would not be unconditioned! Coming to know, however, is always
> "placing oneself in a conditional relation to something"—one who seeks to know
> the unconditioned desires that it should not concern him, and that this same
> something should be of no concern to anyone… something that is no concern to
> anyone *is* not at all, and thus cannot be known at all."[20]

Even if a thing-in-itself were possible, it would imply that it would have features that

either exist independently of other things, or have no features at all. Either possibility is

incomprehensible.[21] Nietzsche argues further that we have refuted the claims of the

epistemologists because even if we could discover absolute knowledge, it would be

useless to us, as there would be no consequence to know about things as they actually are.

We have also refuted these philosophers when we also discover that the motives of all

previous attempts by philosophers to ground knowledge has been based upon our fears

and passions, and not some abstract realm of truth "out there".

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[19] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *Human, All too Human*, Section 9 in *A Nietzsche reader*, selected and
translated [from the German] with an introduction by R. J. Hollingdale (New York,
Harmondsworth/Penguin, 1977) pg. 54-55

[20] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power: A new translation by
Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale.* Edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, with facsims. of
the original manuscript (New York, Vintage Books, 1967, 1968), Section 555, pg. 301

[21] There is a much more thorough elaboration of this point in Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as
Literature*, pg. 90

Nietzsche thoroughly criticizes Kant's ideas but he offers another model for epistemological knowledge, and that is through perspectivism. The clearest exposition of Nietzsche's perspectivism comes from *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

> "Henceforth my dear philosophers, let us be on guard against the dangerous old conceptual fiction that posited a "pure, will-less, painless, timeless knowing subject"; let us guard against the snares of such contradictory concepts as "pure reason," "absolute spirituality," "knowledge in itself": these always demand that we should think of an eye that is completely unthinkable, an eye turned in no particular direction, in which the active and interpreting forces, through which alone seeing becomes seeing *something*, are supposed to be lacking; these always demand of the eye an absurdity and a nonsense. There is *only* a perspective seeing, *only* "knowing"; and the *more* affects we allow to speak about one thing, the *more eyes* different eyes, we can use to observe one thing, the more complete will our "concept" of this thing, our "objectivity," be.[22]

As David Owen argues, this passage highlights the absurdity of the "God's eye view" of reality put forth by Nietzsche's predecessors with the ideas of the transcendental self, and the thing-in-itself.[23] All of our views come from "somewhere."[24] Knowing, like seeing, is an embedded and embodied character of human subjectivity.[25] The kind of knowledge we have about the world depends on our affective interests.[26] As Owen, puts it, "logos is entwined with eros."[27] Nietzsche's perspectivism gives all frameworks (science, religion) the right to make epistemological claims, but it does not grant them all authority—some

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[22] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* pg. 119.

[23] Owen, David, pg. 33

[24] Ibid

[25] Ibid

[26] Ibid

[27] Ibid

perspectives provide better descriptions than others do for certain things.[28] Each

perspective has certain criteria that it attaches to towards phenomena that it emphasizes

more than other phenomena.[29] For example, astronomy provides a better description of

planetary movement than Christianity because its criterion is correspondence to what

scientists observe, and not accordance with God's law. According to Nietzsche, no

perspective can *explain* the world; all that they can do is *describe* it.

<div align="center">Rorty's Pragmatism</div>

Rorty is a pragmatist. Pragmatism is a "meta-philosophy" or a philosophy about

philosophy, in that it is a theory about how we think. It challenges the notion of the

Kantian relationship between truth and reality, but not in a Kantian way because

pragmatists and traditional epistemologists are not speaking the same language. The

arguments that are legitimate in one sphere are not in the other. The pragmatists do not

claim to have more knowledge of the truth than the traditional epistemologists do, but

that it is useless to ask such questions. Rorty's task, along with other pragmatists (such

Charles Peirce, William James, John Dewey, W.V. Quine, Donald Davidson, and Hilary

Putnam) is to describe the benefits relative to the "appearance-reality" school of Plato-

Kant.

Rorty not only speaks a different language than traditional epistemologists, but he

subscribes to a completely different theory of linguistics. Traditional epistemologists

argue— Rorty redescribes. This method implicitly criticizes the view that there is one

truth from which we work from, and makes an argument look "good" or "bad" by point

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[28] Ibid, pg. 34

[29] Ibid

out the problem of meaning depending upon which use one has in mind.[30] As Rorty

writes,

> "Our opponents like to suggest that to abandon that vocabulary (Plato and
> Aristotle) is to abandon rationality— that to be rational consists precisely in
> respecting the distinctions between…reality and appearance. We pragmatists
> reply that if that were what rationality was, then no doubt we are, indeed,
> irrationalists. But of course we go on to add that being an irrationalist in *that*
> sense is not to be incapable of argument. We irrationalists do not foam at the
> mouth and behave like animals. We simply refuse to talk in a certain way, the
> Platonic way. The views we hope to persuade people to accept cannot be stated in
> Platonic terminology."[31]

Rorty seems to believe that meaningful changes in beliefs, individually and thereby

collectively held, comes about through seeing things from a new perspective than by

being forced to concede to the superiority of a better argument.[32] Redescription will be

effective depending upon the purposes we have in mind, and works from things that we

already believe instead of being forced to believe them later on.[33] The pragmatists

strategically acknowledge that very few of our ideas actually come from arguments;

usually we have a sentiment and then we seek a justification for it.

Just like his philosophical heroes (James, Peirce, and Dewey) Rorty, too,

integrates the ideas of Darwin into his philosophy—we are at the mercy of nature's laws,

not distinct from it. Language, just like rocks, is a tool that we use to cope with our

environment that seeks to maximize pleasure and minimize pain.[34] Just as it would be

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[30] Voparil, Christopher J., *Richard Rorty: Politics and Vision* (Lanham, MD, Rowman & Littlefield
Publishers, 2006) pg. 9

[31] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, (New York, Penguin Books, 1999), pg. xviii-xix

[32] Voparil, pg. 10

[33] Ibid, pgs. 10-11

[34] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pgs. xxii-xxiii

absurd to speak of rocks keeping us out of touch with reality, language cannot do this either.[35] It is hard to conceive of rocks and language being the same thing because rocks are tangible, and ideas are not. The assumption that our ideas are not part of this world is just the type of Kantian thinking that Rorty wants us to eradicate.[36]

The pragmatists seek to break down the traditional distinction that we think exist between knowing things and using them.[37] From Bacon's premise that knowledge is power, they then claim that that is all there is to knowledge, that to know a thing is to be able to do something to or with a thing, or to put it in relation to another thing.[38] Pragmatists criticize the distinction between knowing the inherent properties of a thing, and a thing as it stands in relation to other things. Take, for example, the number 50. It is the double of 25, and half of 100, the relations it has to all other numbers is indeed infinite. All that we know about the number fifty and all that we can know about anything is its relation to other things. There is no "essence" about fifty, no property of "fifty-ness" that we can identify without its relationship to other numbers, and even if we could, we would not care to identify it.

Rorty couples this with the idea from Charles Peirce the belief is a habit of action.[39] Towards others this means that when we say that someone believes something

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[35] Ibid

[36] Ibid

[37] Ibid. pgs. 50-51

[38] Ibid

[39] Ibid, pgs. xxiv

that means that they will behave as I do when we say the truth of a certain sentence.[40] We

attach belief to human beings because they use sentences, while trees do not, and their

habits are fairly predictable. Therefore, when we speak sentences to others, we are trying

to coordinate behaviors and actions with others, not to express something from our

transcendental self. The key consideration for our beliefs then is not whether they are true

or accurate, but whether they are the appropriate means for achieving our

ends.[41]Therefore, when we say that a belief is true it means that we have not yet come up

with a better tool to describe reality.[42] For example, Rorty would describe Einstein's

physics as a more helpful tool than Newton's in describing physical laws and Quantum

mechanics may turn out to be a better tool than Einstein's tools.

Therefore, there is no need to discover the truth as an end "in itself" and all such

attempts are useless to pragmatists. In *Philosophy and Social Hope,* Rorty writes:

> "the goal of inquiry is agreement amongst each other about what to do, and to
> bring about what to do, to bring about consensus on the ends to be achieved and
> the means to be used to achieve those ends. Inquiry that does not achieve
> coordination of behavior is not inquiry but simply wordplay. All areas of culture
> are part of the same endeavor to make life better."[43]

With thinkers such as James, Peirce, and Dewey, Rorty argues that the attempt to ground

knowledge gets us stuck in philosophical quagmires that we cannot extricate ourselves

from, and that it is more useful to view such questions from a more naturalistic, and

utility-maximizing viewpoint. Languages were not made to copy nature, but to help us

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[40] Ibid

[41] Ibid, pgs. xxiv

[42] Ibid., pg. xxv

[43] Ibid.

cope with it, and because of this we are unable to distinguish between whether what we

know stems from the phenomena we observe, and our own subjectivity.[44]

What, then, are the "benefits" of pragmatism? Rorty identifies three. First, there is

epistemology. Following in the tradition of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, and Dewey, we can

abandon the notion that epistemology, the attempt to ground knowledge, and metaphysics

are possible disciplines, and many of the problems that stem from them.[45] Take for

example, the mind-body problem. Daniel Shaw, in "Rorty and Nietzsche: Some Elective

Affinities", cites Rorty argument that we cannot make sense of the idea of two

ontological realms, the mental and the physical, once we have eliminated the Aristotelian

notion of "substance, and the incorrigibility of "raw feels."[46] Second, pragmatism helps

philosophy deal with the challenge of Darwin, as his theories made it much more

untenable to conceive of ourselves as Kant's transcendental beings, as language became

identified as the distinguishing part of our species, not our desire for the unconditional

truth.[47] Third, it criticizes our attempts to find certainty, and finality in knowledge, as an

attempt to escape from the world, and recommends replacing it with an ethic of creativity

that seeks new alternatives to the beliefs we currently hold.[48] Pragmatists hope that it will

liberate philosophy so that it can help create new ideas that provide for a better future for

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[44] Ibid., pg. 26

[45] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, (, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1979, 2nd print, with corrections, 1980) pg. 5

[46] Shaw, Daniel, "Rorty and Nietzsche: Some Elective Affinities", *International Studies in Philosophy,* 21 (1989), pgs. 3-15, pg. 5

[47] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pg. 68

[48] Ibid, pgs. 34-35

humankind. It is the hope that philosophy can exhilarate and inspire us with awe once again.[49]

Nietzsche & Rorty

Rorty praises Nietzsche for coming up with a new interpretation of how truth has functioned in society. In *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty writes:

> It was Nietzsche who first explicitly suggested that we drop the whole idea of "knowing the truth." His definition of truth as a "mobile army of metaphors" amounted to saying that the whole idea of "representing reality" by means of language, and thus the idea of finding a single context for all human lives, should be abandoned."[50]

Rorty uses this definition in conjunction with Davidson's theory of metaphor, where the distinction between the literal and metaphorical sense is "not a distinction between two sorts of meaning, nor as a distinction between two sorts of interpretation, but as a distinction between familiar and unfamiliar uses of noises and marks."[51] This definition also has a pragmatic ring to it. Truth is not only a "mobile army of metaphors" but these metaphors are also" coins which have lost their pictures and now matter only as metal, no longer as coins."[52] The coin and metal metaphors have use implications. We use coins, and even when they stop being coins (when they get old), we use them as metal to support us for other purposes while our new coins (new metaphors) help us adapt to new circumstances.

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[49] Ibid

[50] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 27

[51] Ibid, pg. 17

[52] The Nietzsche Channel: On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense, http://www.geocities.com/thenietzschechannel/tls.htm , (accessed: April 25, 2008)

Nietzsche and Rorty both concede that language was not meant to correspond to reality as "it is in itself," there is no reality "in-itself," and even if we could know of the world as it was in itself, we would not want to (why would we care to know about the fifty-ness of something). Rorty, using Nietzsche and Darwin, considers language to be just like everything else, a tool that is part of our environment that helps us adapt.

Two other areas of agreement between Nietzsche and Rorty are the subject/object distinction, and the value of redescription. Both concede that distinguishing between subject and object is an arbitrary project. Both argue that finding the causation of anything is particularly difficult, but for Rorty, biology is the reason why. Recall, that Rorty tells us that as a result of our makeup, we cannot distinguish between varying levels of the natural, since it is all natural. Rorty thoroughly agrees with Nietzsche's style of refuting traditional epistemology through critiquing it, not arguing against it. Nietzsche describes his own method in *Ecce Homo,* "One error after another is coolly placed on ice; the ideal is not refuted— it *freezes* to death."[53] It freezes from indifference. Nietzsche's style is essential to his philosophy as it offers a template of how Rorty can go about offering his pragmatic criticism of traditional epistemology.

The one possible area where there is some disagreement is the issue of the origin of consciousness. Both agree that consciousness, (for Rorty, language) is a means of social interaction and increases the ease with which we can live with one another. Such ideas, however, do not owe their origin to Nietzsche; many other philosophers have given the same analysis. Nietzsche (and Dewey too) basically follow Rousseau's reasoning from *The Second Discourse*. Rorty does not stand at the beginning of time and give an

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[53] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On the Genealogy of Morals,* pg. 284

account of the origin of consciousness perhaps because he would find such an endeavor to be a bit too speculative. He uses Darwin, instead of Rousseau (or Hobbes) to ground his arguments about consciousness and its relation to language as it is more scientific to do so.

Pragmatism & Liberalism

In "The Contingency of Community" Rorty writes that a liberal society is better served by a vocabulary of Nietzschean (as well as Davidsonian, Wittgensteinian, and Freudian) metaphors about language and consciousness instead of those of traditional Enlightenment discourse. Rorty provides this argument in order to counter charges of relativism and irrationalism. Rorty outlines his task as redescribing liberal institutions instead of defending them, and he does so in the following way:

> But to offer a redescription of our current institutions and practices is not to offer a defense of them against their enemies; it is more like refurnishing a house than like propping up or placing barricades around it.[54]

Rorty argues the need for foundations rests upon the notion that philosophy can help us distinguish between competing claims like some kind of neutral arbiter in moral and political disputes, which, Nietzsche's perspectivism has convinced Rorty, is sheer folly. Each philosophy is an expression of the biases of a philosopher, and not the Truth. Perspectivism shows us that philosophy is incapable of answering the question, "Why be liberal?" or "Why be a fascist?" Following the pragmatist line of argumentation, Rorty argues that our preference for democracy is merely a matter of taste. We can only attest to the benefits of democracy from our own experience; and this is the only non-circular justification we can give to democracy's challengers. One need not be discouraged

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[54] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 45

however; as this is sufficient. The desire to have a liberal society is no more or less arbitrary than other preferences we may have, such as friends, or a taste for certain foods. He argues that it is just as absurd to ask someone why they are someone's friend as it is to ask why one prefers democracy. Only someone stuck in Enlightenment discourse would call such thinking "irrational," and Rorty suggests that liberal societies would be better served if they moved away from such discourse.

While Enlightenment rationalism was essential to liberalism's formation, in our current age, Rorty believes that such discourse serves as an impediment to the preservation and progress of liberal societies.[55] Following Nietzsche's arguments about perspectivism we are convinced that since there are several legitimate perspectives through which we can assess political issues, liberal societies would be unnecessarily limiting innovative perspectives by appealing to Enlightenment rationalism. Perhaps a practical example will illuminate this concept. Let us take the issue of pornography. There are several competing perspectives about it, such as Christian, Feminist, Marxist, etc. perspectives. To limit the discussion, by imposing philosophical constructs on it (such as the categorical imperative) as the decisive factor, will not have made one perspective more "correct" than another one, it will merely have chosen one perspective amongst many others, and excluded other possible ones in a society that should pride itself on open discussion. Rorty's describes such a society as one in which "logic" had precedence, and "rhetoric" is shunned.[56]More importantly, though, the truly revolutionary ideas that have led to social progress often do not share the assumptions of the old

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[55] Ibid., pg. 44

[56] Ibid

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discourse, and do not refute them, but merely replace them, for example, Romanticism replaced the Enlightenment, it did not refute it. The future progress of a liberal society depends upon free competition in what Holmes described as "the marketplace of ideas."

At the end of chapter two of *Philosophy as Cultural Politics*, he argues that as opposed to Plato, Nietzsche wrote the better poem about humanity. Nietzsche shows us that the "true world" that Plato constructed was a fable that had outlived its usefulness. Nietzsche offers as the possibility that human beings are not limited, and forever linked with the past through the fulfillment of an ideal, but instead showed human beings that they have the freedom to create their own future.[57] It is this possibility that guides Rorty's politics as shown in *Achieving Our Country*.

Rorty's hope of what a thoroughly secular, liberal society would look like comes from the ideas of John Dewey and Walt Whitman, prominently in *Achieving Our Country*. These two thinkers saw America as special, but not in a divine sense. Throughout the majority of European and American histories, these cultures have held themselves to God's standards, assessing whether or not they were succeeding or failing to implement His will. Both thought that a thoroughly secular America (one that had internalized anti-Foundationalism) would lead to the flourishing of democracy because democratic consensus would replace God's will.[58] Such a standard would not only be sufficient, but absolute; democratic assessments of the nation's character and goals would

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[57] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4*, pgs. 118-119

[58] See Whitman quote in Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, pgs. 14-15

be the only legitimate ones in such a society.[59] America could be a nation wherein it

defined itself by its level of national self-creation—to the extent that it created its own

values, and goals.

Rorty gives an example of what type of political action would occur in such a

post-metaphysical liberal culture. In a later essay in *Achieving Our Country* ("Movements

and Campaigns") Rorty writes of how Irving Howe was satisfied with being involved in a

series of campaigns (finite projects whose success and limits could be ascertained, such

as unionization, women's suffrage, and gay marriage) instead of movements, such as

Marxism and Christianity. Rorty also means movements in the artistic and social senses

as well. Rorty recommends campaigns as opposed to movements because campaigns do

not disillusion the individual to so great an extent because imperfections and finitude are

expected. Rorty says that campaigns are similar to polytheism: there can be many

mutually exclusive campaigns that one can be a part of. Movements suffer from the same

problems that Rorty says Nietzsche's ideas about self-creation have—the attempt to

achieve what he previously said Nietzsche tried to achieve, "sublimity"—the fusion of

public and private. Such Platonic projects require a level of self-purification and

surrender that is impossible to achieve.[60] One can only surrender oneself to one

movement. Each campaign in a movement has no intrinsic meaning in of itself, it is

subsumed under the broader umbrella of a grand project, to which campaigns get linked

with campaigns in other areas (art, literature, etc.) to offer a reflection of "the age."

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[59] Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*), pg. 16

[60] Ibid., pg. 118

Politically, movements are inspirational—but unsuccessful because there is no way

movements can end except by the replacement of it by another movement.

Conclusion

Many theorists take issue with Rorty's pragmatist usage of Nietzsche's ideas.[61]

Even Nietzsche might take issue with such usage as shown in *The Will to Power:*

> What "useful" means is entirely dependent upon the *intention*, the wherefore? The intention, "the goal" is again entirely dependent on the degree of power. Therefore utilitarianism is not a foundation but a theory of consequences, and absolutely cannot be made obligatory for everyone.[62]

This quote from *The Will to Power* also underlies a central tension between Rorty and

Nietzsche more generally. Rorty takes Nietzsche's ideas and often strips them of their

anti-democratic content reinterpreting them along democratic lines with the help of John

Dewey. Rorty's retort would most likely be along the lines of his concession of the

perspectivism inherent even in utilitarianism and its benefits. A key question is how

thorough and extensive are the anti-democratic tensions in Nietzsche's thought, for Rorty

seems convinced that Nietzsche's perspectivism is sufficiently neutral, politically, to be

of service to his broader ideas.

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[61] See Lutz Ellrich's "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Appropriation of Nietzsche" in *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought*, edited by Pütz, Manfred (Columbia, SC, Camden House, 1995) pgs. 297-312

[62] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power. A new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale*, # 724, pg. 385

CHAPTER II: "THE GOOD NIETZSCHE"- PERSPECTIVISM II: SELF-CREATION

Nietzsche's epistemological perspectivism is quite useful for Rorty's pragmatist theory of truth. Nietzsche's perspectivism helped Rorty to argue that there is no single context in which to view all things, no single theory that could explain everything. In "The Contingency of Selfhood," Chapter Two of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty argues that once we give up the attempts to explain the universal and the eternal, we would shift to trying to explain the individual and contingent. He likens this to a shift from philosophy to poetry as the more useful of the arts. We would praise the one who creates instead of the one who finds. The creator, whom Rorty calls the poet, is more interested in creating himself instead of discovering the truth, and his creations would be the distinguishing marks of his life.

Rorty's linkage of Nietzsche's perspectivism and self-creation, however, is not his own idea. For this, he relies upon Alexander Nehamas': *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. Nehamas' central thesis is that Nietzsche viewed the world (self included, obviously) as a piece of literature and that a literary interpretation of the world permeates Nietzsche's philosophy. While the first half of the book deals with the world, the second half deals with the self. Rorty apparently found the latter section to be the most helpful, especially chapters five and six, in his interpretation of the primacy of the self. Rorty ignores the last

chapter of Nehamas' book, the one on morality, as is consistent with his views on Nietzsche's morality.

This allows Rorty to link perspectivism, self-creation, and a clear metaphor, literature, together, to interpret the full implications of Nietzsche's perspectivism. Rorty uses this to give his model of the pragmatist's paradigmatic human being, one who goes about creating oneself constantly instead of trying to discover oneself. For Rorty, though, Nietzsche's ideas are not sufficient to explain the dynamics of the self, that is the job of Freud, and Rorty elaborates on the usefulness and applicability of both.

While Rorty wrote extensively on the links between Nietzschean self-creation as they apply to individuals, these same ideas apply to politics as well. He writes:

> If there is a connection between artistic freedom and creativity and the spirit of democracy: it is that the former provide examples of the kind of courageous self-transformation of which we hope democratic societies will become increasingly capable—transformation which is conscious and willed, rather than semiconsciously endured. [63]

In *Achieving Our Country* he argues that only a democratic society will provide the conditions under which a self-created individual can flourish. It is the duty of the left, according to Rorty, to provide those conditions.

Polytheism & Poetry

If one fully accepts that "the truth" is likely nothing more than a series of perspectives or, more concretely, that it is not useful to ask questions about the true nature of things in the universe, it is logical to conclude that there is no extra-human perspective to give a definitive statement about the purpose of human beings' lives. This

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[63] Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge, MA, and London, England, Harvard University Press, 1998, Fifth Printing, 2003), pg. 122

has clear implications on the philosophical project from Plato to Kant. No longer can we

think that there is a unified project in which Plato, Kant, and others were engaged.

Instead, they have offered their own theory of what human beings' lives should be like.

One can therefore think of the relationship between various philosophers not as

dialectical, but discrete and separate, almost like separate novelists. The realization of the

meaninglessness of existence is the "disease" of nihilism that Nietzsche so succinctly

captures in his phrase that "God is dead"; no longer can human beings pretend that they

have a place in some grand teleological plan.[64] With the help of Darwin, we realize that

we are nothing more than clever animals with no great plan that "reason" can help us

ascertain.

  If human beings, broadly, do not have inherent characteristics, neither, too, do

human beings individually. Rorty agrees with Nietzsche that the full implications of

perspectivism mean that there is no extra-human authority to determine what the "model"

human being should be like, or strive to be like, and thus, no metaphysical source for

moral choices as well.[65] It is all the result of one's beliefs about oneself. We as

individuals replace God or moral standards as the arbiter of our development. Individual

human beings, however, will incorporate a variety of perspectives into their own: that of

their state, their religion, etc. and will contain conflicting perspectives that do not

necessarily fit into a coherent whole. The challenge, therefore, is for each human being to

negotiate the various perspectives that are incorporated in her psyche.

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[64] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, (New York, Cambridge University Press, 1989, 24th printing, 2005), pg. 21

[65] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 2007) pg. 29

Rorty uses two metaphors to describe this tension within the individual: polytheism, and poetry. The individual will have to become what Rorty calls a polytheist—someone whose allegiance is to multiple, mutually exclusive, and often irreconcilable ideals. In *Philosophy as Cultural Politics* Rorty borrows a metaphor from Nietzsche to describe what he means by polytheism in more depth. Rorty cites a section from *The Gay Science*:

> *The greatest advantage of polytheism.*—For an individual to posit his own ideal and to derive from it his own law, joys, and rights—that may well have been considered hitherto as the most outrageous human aberration and as idolatry itself...The wonderful art and gift of creating gods—polytheism was the medium through which this impulse could discharge, purify, perfect, and ennoble itself…Hostility against this impulse to have one's own was formerly the central law of all morality. There was only one norm, man; and every people thought that it is possessed this one ultimate norm… In polytheism the free-spiriting and many spiriting of man attained its first preliminary form—the strength to create for ourselves our own new eyes—and ever again new eyes that are even more our own: hence man alone among all the animals has no eternal horizons and perspectives.[66]

The metaphor of polytheism helps here. Just as there are several, conflicting gods with vastly different natures who are not subordinate to one central deity, Rorty believes that human lives develop in much the same fashion. To be a polytheist means that one believes that one must "privatize" perfection. To privatize is to mean that one knows that one's ideas are contingent and personal, and one does not attempt to argue that one's pantheon is the correct one.

Literature is similar to polytheism, according to Rorty. Just as there are several great works of literature; when one becomes a polytheist, one finds it absurd to try and find the

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[66] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs*, translated, with commentary by Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Vintage Books/Random House, 1974), pgs. 191-192

greatest work of literature, or a single way in which to view human lives.[67] Different

works of literature will show different sides of the human experience. One medium of

literature, poetry, has a greater significance for Rorty. At the beginning of Chapter two of

Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity Rorty presents a poem by Phillip Larkin as a means of

discussing the supremacy of poetry over philosophy since Nietzsche's time. Poetry, from

its Greek root meaning "to make" or "to create", being the art form that expresses

individual idiosyncrasies, while philosophy, love of wisdom, is an expression of universal

truth. Rorty believes that Nietzsche helps us to give up on the traditional quest for

wisdom, and settle for creation—self-creation. He also argues that post-Nietzschean

philosophers, such as Wittgenstein and Heidegger, have attempted to "poeticize"

philosophy—to contextualize philosophy, or, to recognize philosophy's contingency.[68]

Life As Literature: Nehamas' Interpretation of Nietzsche
Nietzsche's ideas about self-creation are most clearly elaborated in two key

chapters from *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*. The first of which is chapter five, which is an

explanation and reinterpretation of one of Nietzsche's most controversial ideas—the

eternal recurrence. The scholarly debates are unending and complex on what the eternal

recurrence is. Nehamas simplifies this through outlining three possible interpretations.

The first is that the eternal recurrence is literal; one's life will recur in exactly the same

way because this is how the universe is designed. This has been the traditional and most

common interpretation of the eternal recurrence; however, it has several complications.

The first is it seems to be an explanation of a universal truth that Nietzsche cannot

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[67] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4*, pg. 29

[68] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 25

possibly have access. It would make Nietzsche unexplainably inconsistent. How can he

deny the value (and possibility) of metaphysics and then offer a metaphysical theory?

Further, Nietzsche never commits to a sustained attempt to offer any proof of this

possibility. The second possible interpretation is that the universe may eternally recur,

however, this argument suffers from many of the same problems as the first possibility,

and Nehamas rejects this possible meaning as well. Nehamas offers a theory of the

eternal recurrence that is consistent with Nietzsche's prevailing philosophical musings,

and applies not to the world, but to the self, which is where Nehamas thinks such a theory

is appropriate.

Nehamas cites section 341 from *The Gay Science* to illustrate what he thinks

Nietzsche means by the eternal recurrence:

> The greatest weight.- What, if some day or night a demon were to steal after you into your loneliest loneliness and say to you: "This life as you now live it and have lived it, you will have to live once more and innumerable times more; and there will be nothing new in it, but every pain and every joy and every thought and every sigh and everything unutterably small or great on your life will have to return to you, all in the same succession and sequence--even this spider and this moonlight between the trees, and even this moment and I myself. The eternal hourglass of existence is turned upside down again and again, and you with it, speck of dust!"
>
> Would you not throw yourself down and gnash your teeth and curse the demon who spoke thus? Or have you once experienced a tremendous moment when you would have answered him: "You are a god and never have I heard anything more divine." If this thought gained possession of you, it would change you as you are or perhaps crush you. The question in each and every thing, "Do you desire this once more and innumerable time more?" would lie upon your actions as the greatest weight. Or how well disposed would you have to become toward yourself and to life *to crave nothing more fervently* than this ultimate eternal confirmation and seal?[69]

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[69] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs*, pg. 273

Nehamas also links this consideration with the argument that to want to change a life would be to want to change the world (because everything is interrelated). Thus Nehamas' definition of the eternal recurrence thus becomes: If anything in the world recurred, including an individual life or even a single moment within it, then everything in the world would recur in exactly identical fashion.[70]Walter Kaufmann (prominent translator of a great variety of Nietzsche's works and a philosophical mentor of Alexander Nehamas) writes that Nietzsche considered section 341 to be the first proclamation of the eternal recurrence, and also the central idea of Nietzsche's fictive character, Zarathustra.[71] Section 341 shows that the question of whether or not the eternal recurrence is actually true is irrelevant. The central question is what does one do with such knowledge, how does one feel about his life as he has lived it thus far. As Nehamas argues that Nietzsche sees it, there are only two possible reactions, complete joy, or utter despair. Indifference to this question is not possible (but it is for the cosmological interpretation of the eternal recurrence), for this question strikes at the root of one's being, and asks one to evaluate it, and because to want to change one's life would mean having to change the entire world. Nietzsche's hope is that one does not want to change any aspect of one's being. Nietzsche explains what the person (the Overman/Superman/Zarathustra that he identifies in other works, but not in this section) who responds with joy to the demon's proposition is like:

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[70] Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, (Cambridge, Massachussetts, and London, Harvard University Press, 1985) pg. 156

[71] See Kaufmann's comments in footnote 71, in Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs*, pg. 273

My formula for greatness in a human being is *amor fati*: that one wants nothing to be different, not forward, not backward, not in all eternity. Not merely bear what is necessary, still less conceal it—all idealism is mendaciousness in the face of what is necessary—but *love* it.[72]

The essential thing for the human being who has internalized the profound implications of the eternal recurrence is to want everything in her life to be the same—every last, miniscule, insignificant detail. One might ask why these little details matter so much. Why can I not change the insignificant things, like the clothes I wore the other day? If, when one is looking back over the course of a life, one finds something small, and insignificant that one wants to change, the thing is most likely not insignificant at all. More importantly though, for Nietzsche, the key idea is that each person is the sum total of his actions (this includes thoughts too, because Nietzsche argues that there is no distinction between subject and object) and that to change even (what one considers to be) insignificant details of one's life is to quite literally change one's life. However, there continues to be "additions" to the sum of one is being each moment of one's life. Therefore, one's desire for his life to recur must not only apply to the past, but to the present and the future as well. Nietzsche asks the individual to have the most complete acceptance of one's various positions throughout time.

The eternal recurrence reinforces Nehamas' view that Nietzsche views the world and the self as a piece of literature. Nehamas argues that when we read novels, all that we know of the characters are the things that the narrator tells us. Characters do not have inherent natures independent of their stories. Each detail provides a clue as to whom that

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[72], "Why I am so clever", Section 10, in *Ecce Homo* in Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On the genealogy of morals,* translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. *Ecce homo*, translated by Walter Kaufmann; edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Vintage Books/Random House, 1967,1989) pg. 258

character is to the reader; and to change the details is to change the character.[73] Nehamas

uses examples from *Anna Karenina* to illustrate his point, I will use *Hamlet*. Can we still

think of Prince Hamlet as the same person if he had not been Ophelia's boyfriend, or had

broken up with her over his grief over his father's death? What if he had been persuaded

earlier to be persuaded by others to be more conciliatory towards his uncle Claudius? Or,

most profoundly, what if he dismissed his vision of the ghost? Nehamas says that Marcel

Proust's *Remembrance of Things Past*, is the perfect example of his interpretation of the

eternal recurrence. He writes that the beautiful imperfections of Proust's life that he

recounts in overwhelming detail becomes and is seen (by the reader) as the perfect life

through its self-referential techniques.[74] The concept of the eternal recurrence is only part

of the puzzle, however.

How does one possibly interpret the subtitle of Nietzsche's *Ecce Homo*, namely,

how does "one becomes what one is"? Nehamas dedicates the title and contents of

Chapter 6 of *Life as Literature* to resolving this paradox. First, let us concern ourselves

with the latter part: the "is" part. In the first part of *Life as Literature*, Nehamas says that

Nietzsche's concept of the Will to Power can be described simply as the supposition that

each "thing" is nothing other than the sum of all of its effects and features in an

indistinguishable relationship between cause and effect.[75] Combine this with Nietzsche's

rejection of the Freudian (and Christian) idea that there is a "core self" that all human

beings have individually if only they will take the time to "discover" it, as this is merely

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[73] Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, pgs. 164-165

[74] Ibid., pg. 168

[75] This definition comes from Chapter 6 of this work, however, in: Ibid., pg. 179

another form of the appearance and reality distinction that he has criticized elsewhere. This means that our concept of selfhood and being is left in quite a vague state. Nietzsche, however, substitutes a conflict and actor model of the self for the unified one to which we are accustomed—namely, that "we" are a collection of conflicting thoughts, desires, and actions, not all of which can be reduced to some single subject.[76] It is just important to recall that Nietzsche does not believe in anything in the universe as being a static entity. Nehamas quotes Nietzsche from the Will to Power as arguing that Nietzsche wants: "to transform the belief "it *is* thus and thus" into the will "it *shall become* thus and thus."[77] Cumulatively, therefore, the "self" is a mixture of a physical self, a mental self, and an environmental self in an indistinguishable mixture that is dynamic, never static.

How, then, do we come to "know" the self and to become it? Nietzsche's solution is through "creating" the self (just as we, obviously, have before). Nehamas quotes a section from *The Gay Science* to illustrate Nietzsche's concept: We, however, *want to become those we are*—human beings who are new, unique, incomparable, who give themselves laws, who create themselves.[78] Nehamas argues that self-creation is the underlying theme of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and the goal of the Übermensch. The individual will engage in a perpetual quest for a form of unity in which she will attempt to coordinate and subordinate the conflicting thoughts, drives, and actions together. She will do this

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[76] Ibid., pg. 180

[77] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power. A new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale.* Edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, with facsims. of the original manuscript (New York, Vintage Books, 1967, 1968), #593, pg. 324 quoted in Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, pg. 174

[78] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *The Gay Science: with a prelude in rhymes and an appendix of songs*, #335, pg. 266 quoted in Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, pg. 174

through conscious attempts to interpret all this conflict in her own words, her own narrative of herself. It is a narrative that attempts to explain the linkages between the past and the present, but is, however, always threatened by the future, and can never settle with a complete interpretation. Nehamas uses a quote from the Will to Power to elaborate on this point: "…that all who are "in the process of becoming must be furious when they perceive some satisfaction in this area, an impertinent "retiring on one's laurels" or "self-congratulation."[79] In the end, one is who one becomes.

<div align="center">The Poet: "Thus I Willed It"</div>

The metaphor of life as literature returns once again, at the end of Chapter 6, and Rorty expands on this last point quite extensively in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*. How did Nietzsche become who he was? How did Nietzsche reconcile the contradictory aspects of his individuality and give himself unity and coherence? Nehamas argues that the perfect model for the traits of unity and coherence are characters out of novels. Therefore, how did Nietzsche create himself like that of a character out of a novel? Nehamas argues that he did this first, though incompletely, through his creation of Zarathustra. The character that most fully embodies the character Nietzsche was the Nietzsche of *Ecce Homo*. In it, Nietzsche meditates and reflects upon his works, fully showing how each work is a meditation and growth upon the previous ones, and how they all represent the character that he was to become by the time he wrote *Ecce Homo*: behold the man.

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[79] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power. A new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale,* #108, pg. 68 quoted in Nehamas, Alexander, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, pg. 189

Nietzsche, as character, as poet, mediated through Nehamas, becomes (as close as is possible for a pragmatist) the paradigmatic model of a human being for Richard Rorty. Rorty cites a well-known quote from William Coleridge that illustrates what Nietzsche sought to do: to create the taste by which he will be judged.[80] An individual must determine for herself what she believes is right or wrong, and what is good or bad for herself. Poets will seek to create themselves according to their own standards. Nehamas argues that Nietzsche sought to do this throughout his works, and that, in the end; Nietzsche's works are his attempts to create himself, to create his own standards by which he could be judged, and to be true to his vision of truth as perspectivism.

Rorty is quick to qualify his praise of Nietzsche by arguing that he (and Nehamas, too) does not care whether Nietzsche lived up to his own ideals of himself, whether he became Zarathustra.[81] In a footnote, he cites a passage from Nehamas wherein Nehamas argues that Nietzsche the author created a character who was a philosopher who did not fall back into metaphysical dogmatism, even though, as we shall see later, Rorty thinks that Nietzsche does relapse back into metaphysics.[82]

In this section of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty elaborates upon his conception of the paradigmatic poet as Nehamas outlines. Rorty gives these arguments a slightly altered emphasis, however. Rorty's poet acknowledges that she creates the most essential part of herself—her mind, her own vocabulary to explain the world, and the standards through which she shall be judged and evaluated at the end of her life, as a

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[80] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 27

[81] Ibid., pg. 79

[82] Ibid., pg. 79, see footnote 2, which cites Nehamas on pgs. 8, and 234

human being. Rorty's poet must not resort to other templates to explain how she came about and what her ends would be, otherwise the poet would fail to create an authentic individuality, she would at best, be a variation on an already written individuality. Success for the poet is novelty and idiosyncrasy. Rorty's conception of the poet will seek to describe the past in an original way and create a new individuality. This poet, therefore, will not be some cookie-cutter human being buffeted by the waves of chance, but can declare for herself, (a quote of Nietzsche's that Rorty repeats in several contexts), "thus I willed it."[83] The poet, too, unlike the philosopher, is able to appreciate the temporality of all language and philosophical assumptions or as Rorty calls it, the contingency of perspective, as she has already broken out of the dominant, normative perspective and created her own. Rorty emphasizes a point about self-creation from Nehamas' in a little more detail, however. Rorty thoroughly emphasizes that who "one ended up as" is not predetermined, or was "there" all the time, as the process of self-creation is never-ending (as Nehamas emphasizes elsewhere).[84] For Rorty, this poet is most able to accept contingency or the perspectivism that Nietzsche advocates elsewhere because the poet has broken out of one language and into her own.[85] Rorty acknowledges that the majority of humanity will be "weak" in that they will be philosophical. The majority of human beings will seek to escape the terror of time and try to stand out for all eternity, to stand as a Platonic example of excellence, or at least to seek to live a life that accords to a universal standard.

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[83] Ibid.,, pg. 29

[84] Ibid., pg. 99

[85] Ibid.,, pg. 28

The Democratizing of Nietzschean Psychology: Freud

Fundamentally, Rorty believes that the self-creation Nietzsche outlines is impossible for the vast majority of human beings. We can infer from Nehamas' presentation of these views why Rorty would believe this about Nietzsche. We will begin with Nietzsche, himself, who gloats about the inaccessibility of his ideas. A clear example comes from *Ecce Homo*:

> Those who can breathe the air of my writings know that it is an air of the heights, a *strong* air. One must be made for it. Otherwise there is no small danger that one may catch cold in it. The ice is near, the solitude tremendous…
> How much truth does a spirit *endure*, how much truth does it *dare*? [86]

Nietzsche often writes of how "the herd" cannot accept his ideas because of the harshness of them. Most people are most likely not sufficiently creative or antisocial to create the taste by which they will be judged. Rorty writes that Nietzsche relegates the vast majority of human beings to the status of "dying animals," and the egalitarian in Rorty finds this possibility unacceptable.[87]

Even though Rorty admires Nietzsche's ideas about self-creation, he praises Freud as being more useful for the development of a self. Nietzsche and Freud are both useful and compatible, according to Rorty, because both believe that our naturalized "blind impresses" are sufficient grounds upon which to build a life, as opposed to Aristotle, in which a "higher" goal is the ground upon which to base one's personal ideals. He says that Freud breaks with the philosophers by removing the faculty of reason as the core of what makes a human being. Nietzsche does this too, but he praises Freud, especially for ending the Kantian project of trying to locate a universal ethical impulse.

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[86] Nietzsche's preface, Section 3, in *Ecce Homo*, in Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On the genealogy of morals,* pg. 218

[87] For more on the "dying animals" see Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 35

Nietzsche, Rorty believes is still stuck in questions about human nature; he just happens to take the nastier view of it.[88] Rorty admires the detail and richness of Freud's observations and jargon, as they provide much better tools through which to describe the dynamics of the internal world: such as repression, neurosis, and narcissism rather through the philosophical, virtue-centered words such as selfish, courageous, etc. Rorty also believes that Freud helps his project of keeping the public and private realms separate by not arguing for some universal human unity. Each person's psychology is vastly different because we all have very different pasts and the way that we have responded to them. According to Freud, the key is to escape the grip of the past to return to psychological health.

Rorty sees this as the missing link that makes Nietzsche's ideas about self-creation possible for everyone else.[89] Instead of having to create the taste through which others will judge us, we create personalized narratives through making peace with our pasts and discovering the "blind impresses" that have influenced our psychosexual makeup. We do not have to be like the intellectuals—those whose private obsessions happen to be public issues, we can still create ourselves according to the standard of psychological health—some form of happiness as we define it.

The Limits of Private Perfection

In chapter five of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, he compares Proust's, Nietzsche's, and Heidegger's attempts at self-creation. The comparison between Proust

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[88] For more, see Rorty, Richard, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in *On Human Rights*, edited by Shute, Stephen, and Hurley, Susan (New York, BasicBooks/HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), pg. 114-115

[89] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 34

and Nietzsche is one that Rorty borrows from Nehamas. In *Nietzsche: Life as Literature* both men serve as examples of perfected private self-creation, however, for Rorty, their occupations made a decisive difference in their observations. Proust, the novelist, was fine with accepting the contingency of his self-redescriptions of all the various elements of his life and relished them. Nietzsche, as a theorist, was too ambitious; he sought more than simply to redescribe, he sought what Rorty called "sublimity"— to write the *definitive* redescription, not only of his own personal contingencies, but that of all of western philosophical history (of metaphysics), what Rorty calls the "Plato-Kant canon". Nietzsche sought to explain the *urge* to write metaphysical treatises, and in the process discover something essential that permeated that history (for example, the Will to Power, or the destiny of Europe). The paradox is how one can offer a redescription and concede the contingency of it without also being subject to another's redescription. Nietzsche, erroneously, tried to resolve this paradox by arguing that his redescriptions of metaphysics were definitive, hence, part of the reason of his illiberality, and that certain figures, like the Superman of *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* would be the crucial link between the private and the public, the small and the big, the human and the divine. Nietzsche's failure to escape his own desire for sublimity is why Heidegger calls him "the last metaphysician of the West" (a phrase that Rorty often uses to describe this particular problem with Nietzsche's ideas). Rorty also refers to Nietzsche as an "inverted Platonist" because he was so thoroughly enraptured in his project of personal self-creation, as Plato conceived that a philosopher would be in a state of contemplation, that he thought this project was primary and complete. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, is in many ways,

an attempt to challenge the view that either a completely public or completely private life can be autonomous or complete.

America as the greatest poem

Even though the self-created individual, the poet, is interested in private perfection, this poet cannot exist without the prerequisite social conditions to allow such an individual to exist, that condition is liberal democracy. Liberal democracy in this context is a form of social life, as well as a regime, interested in the protection and flourishing of the individual, not merely that of the great, or the virtuous. Its emphasis on protecting individuals' freedoms of expression allows for people's idiosyncrasies to flourish. This flourishing naturally reinforces the development of a pluralistic society. Rorty writes about the duty of a democratic society:

> …governments and social institutions exist only for the purpose of making a new type of individual possible, one who will take nothing as authoritative save free consensus between as diverse a variety of citizens as possible can be produced.[90]

The diversity Rorty has in mind is of the Nietzschean variety; he clarifies the type of diversity he advocates in *Against Bosses, Against Oligarchies*:

> That's because I'm thinking of individual differences rather than group difference. I do not care whether anybody thinks of themselves as Vietnamese-American, Italian-American, or Baptist. I would just like them to be free to make up their own lives, in a good Nietzschean manner.[91]

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[90] Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, pg. 30

[91] Rorty, Richard, Nystrom, Derek, & Puckett, Kent, *Against Bosses, Against Oligarchies: A Conversation With Richard Rorty* (Charlottesville, Virginia, Prickly Pear Pamphlets, 1998), pg. 22

Rorty's democratic utopia will enable the creation of several different, new types of human beings than what has previously come before.[92] It is essential, however, that current democratic societies create the conditions under which these individuals can come about, and that is the job of the left.

Rorty leaves the language of the academy behind for that of the factory in describing the conditions under which the self-created individual will flourish in *Achieving Our Country*. He believes that a potent left in American politics is the only kind that will provide the social and intellectual conditions under which those who seek a Nietzschean form of self-creation can flourish, and these can only come about with the right economic conditions. Part of his frustration with the modern, Cultural Left is that it has been more interested in cultural issues rather than economic ones. His "new left" will have to discuss economics (globalization, labor, and class issues) for two reasons: political efficacy, and to allow for the self-creation that he thinks a democratic society should foster. Rorty's hope is that America will turn into a classless society:

> Such a country cannot contain castes or classes, because the kind of self-respect, which is needed for free participation in democratic deliberation is incompatible with social divisions… All that can be said in its defense is that it would produce less unnecessary suffering than any other, and that it is the best means to a certain end: the creation of a greater diversity of individuals—larger, fuller, more imaginative and daring individuals. [93]

This argument is definitely cast from the mold of traditional liberal ideas, namely, that good citizenship in a democracy requires citizens that cannot be manipulated by material concerns. A democratic society cannot function well when it must consistently deal with the contradiction between the ideal of equal participation and the actual reality of castes

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[92] Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, pg. 30

[93] Ibid.

(racial, economic, or otherwise) wherein certain citizens are seen as illegitimate participants. A caste-based society would not provide for individual diversity because many individuals would not have access to the educational and economic resources that would foster individual diversity, such as a college education.

The left will provide the intellectual groundwork for national and individual self-creation because of what it believes. Conservative politics insists that the fundamental charters of the nation (the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence, amongst other key texts, such as the Gettysburg Address) express the character of our country, and that adherence to these key principles will provide for the continued flourishing of American society. America stands as a timeless principle that can only be perfected. Nietzsche's arguments, mediated through Nehamas, help us understand how Rorty conceives of the role of the left in America. The goal of the left is to help America "become what it is." The fundamental texts and dreams of what our nation could be are not something that exists apart from all of time. The left's challenge is to help integrate America's past with its present—to make its ideals and principles meet current challenges, and to surpass them. Just as the future is a threat to individual self-creation, the future threatens national self-creation, and hence, why an active left is needed, as Rorty argues:

> Stories about what a nation has been and should try to be are not attempts at accurate representation, but rather attempts to forge a moral identity. The arguments between Left and Right about which episodes in our history we should pride ourselves on…is better described as an argument about which hopes to allow ourselves and which to forgo.

> As long as our country has a politically active Right and a politically active Left, this argument will continue. It is at the heart of the nation's political life, but the

Left is responsible for keeping it going…The Left, by definition is the party of hope. It insists that our nation remains unachieved.[94]

As long as America is a story that is not finished, the American Left should be dreaming up new visions of how to allow for the conditions in which as diverse a set of individuals as possible can exist.

Interpretive Complications

Rorty's "Nehamas-ian" reading of Nietzsche is fraught with several complications. The first is Rorty's own appropriation of Nietzsche's concepts of strength and weakness. Throughout the vast majority of Rorty's writings in other places he rejects Nietzschean conceptions of strength and weakness as banal, and most likely dangerous. However, in Chapter 2 of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, Rorty uses these terms to describe his poet, and any careful reader of Nietzsche knows these are rather strong terms with a very contextual meaning, that one usually ascribes to the perfected self (like the Übermensch) that Rorty rejects. A few lines from this section will illuminate this point:

> …we can see the point of Bloom and Nietzsche's claim that the strong maker, the person who uses words as they have never before been used, is best able to appreciate her own contingency. [95]

He Continues:

> For Nietzsche, therefore, the line between the strong poet and the rest of the human race has the moral significance which Plato and Christianity attached to the distinction between the human and the animal.
>
> The line between weakness and strength is thus the line between using language which is familiar and universal and producing language which, though initially unfamiliar and idiosyncratic, somehow makes tangible the blind impress all one's behavings bear.[96]

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[94] Ibid., pgs. 13-14

[95] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 28

[96] Ibid.,, pgs. 28-29

Rorty acknowledges his debt to Nehamas in many aspects of his interpretation of Nietzsche,[97] broadly, and it is clear when it comes to his ideas about self-creation. What is problematic is that the foundations of Nehamas' interpretations relies upon many ideas that Rorty explicitly rejects—the eternal recurrence, the will to power, and the Übermensch and all of its variations throughout Nietzsche's thought. Rorty, in *Philosophy and Social Hope*, writes about the progress a pragmatist (very much like Richard Rorty) has in his mature reflections upon Nietzsche:

> A further state is reached when, upon rereading *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, one comes down with the giggles. At that point, with a bit of help from Freud, one begins to hear talk about the Will to Power as just a high-falutin euphemism for the male's hope of bullying the females into submission, or the child's hope of getting back at Mummy and Daddy.[98]

Much of the scholarship on the topic of Nietzsche, Rorty, and self-creation omits many details of the relationship between Nietzsche, Nehamas, and Rorty as it regards self-creation. For example, Keith Ansell-Pearson's *An Introduction to Nietzsche as Political Thinker*, does not even discuss Rorty's severance of the will to power from self-creation. Lutz Ellrich's chapter, "Richard Rorty's Pragmatic Appropriation on Nietzsche, in *Nietzsche in American Literature and Thought,* fully explores Rorty's ideas about self-creation, and Rorty's critique of Nietzsche as a metaphysician as elaborated in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, yet does not even mention Rorty's reliance upon Nehamas for his ideas about self-creation. While other articles, such as David W.

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[97] See footnote 4 in Ibid., pg. 27

[98] I found this in Sedgwick, Peter, "The Future of Philosophy: Nietzsche, Rorty, and 'Post-Nietzscheanism" *Nietzsche Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung* 29, 2000. pg. 242 Database on-line. Available from CSA, MLA International Bibliography. This is from Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, (New York, Penguin Books, 1999), pg. 133. For more information, see: Rorty, Richard, *Take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself : interviews with Richard Rorty*; edited by Eduardo Mendieta, (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2006), pg. 93

Conway's *Thus Spoke Rorty: The Perils of Narrative Self-Creation*, shows that many of Rorty's usages of Nietzsche's ideas are inaccurate (in this case, Rorty's oft-used "thus I willed it" is from Nietzsche's detested, *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*)[99], this article fails to mention Nehamas' contribution to Rorty's ideas at all. Conway later identifies this linkage in *Nietzsche and the Political*,[100] but, yet again, fails to analyze Rorty's debt to Nehamas in any depth. Similarly, David Owen's *Nietzsche, Politics, and Modernity: A Critique of Liberal Reason* makes a cursory mention of the will to power, and self-creation, yet nothing about Nehamas.

Not all scholarship has taken an uncritical view of the Rorty's "Nehamas-ian" interpretation of Nietzsche. A key example is Brian Leiter's *Nietzsche on Morality.* In it, he criticizes Rorty (and Nehamas') for underestimating the fatalism inherent in Nietzsche's ideas, which Leiter attributes to a mistranslation of the subtitle of *Ecce Homo*—not "who" one is, but "what" one is.[101] Further scholarship will need to analyze the relationship between Nietzsche, Nehamas, and Rorty in much more depth and will need to analyze whether Rorty's selective appropriation of Nehamas is problematic, or not.

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[99] Conway, David W. *"Thus Spoke Rorty*: The Perils of Narrative Self-Creation", Philosophy and Literature, 15:1, (Johns Hopkins University Press, April 1991), pg. 107

[100] Conway, David W., *Nietzsche and the Political* (London, Routledge, 1997), pg. 128

[101] For a more thorough look at this argument, please see footnote 15 in Leiter, Brian, *Routledge philosophy guidebook to Nietzsche on morality*, (London ; New York : Routledge, 2002), pgs. 83-84

CHAPTER III: "THE BAD NIETZSCHE"- MORALITY AND POLITICS

Rorty, for the most part, ignores Nietzsche's critique of morality. He argues that it is possible to amputate morality from the rest of Nietzsche's philosophy. Rorty's reasoning on this topic, however, is never sustained or complete. Broadly, his counterarguments can be summarized as follows: Nietzsche's critique has some traces of metaphysics, it mistakenly links Christian morality with Platonism, and that moral education is a good thing. These are Rorty's explicit counterarguments; however, looking at his other arguments in works such as *Achieving Our Country* reveals another strand of argumentation. In this work, he criticizes the "Cultural Left" (also referred to as the "Nietzschean" Left) for giving up on politics because of their acceptance of Nietzsche's skepticism as it relates to society. Rorty, however, is not fully consistent in his denial of Nietzsche's ideas, nor does his severance of Nietzsche's ideas go without criticism, as evidenced by the arguments of Frederick Appel in *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*.

Nietzsche's Critique of Morality and Democratic Politics

Perspectivism permeates all aspects of Nietzsche's thought and his critique of morality is no exception. His last work, *The Will to Power* provides a succinct explanation of arguments that he makes elsewhere. He argues that one must let go of the idea that there are inherently moral (or immoral) actions. Nietzsche writes in the *Will to Power*, "*My chief proposition: there are no moral phenomena, there is only a moral*

interpretation of these phenomena. This interpretation itself is of extra-moral origin.[102]

(italics original*). From this follows the argument that all moral phenomenon, then, are

interpreted by different perspectives. Nietzsche defines the realization of this as his

central task: "*My purpose:* to demonstrate the absolute homogeneity of all events and the

application of moral distinctions as conditioned by perspective."[103] The question then

becomes, whose perspectives affect moral phenomena? In writing of the contradictory

nature of the individual human being, Nietzsche argues that there are several interpreters:

"Insight: all evaluation is made from a definite perspective: that of the preservation of the

individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a faith, a culture."[104]This fractured, set

of perspectives and the assessment of those perspectives leads to his definition of

morality: "I understand by "morality" a system of evaluations that partially coincides

with the conditions of a creature's life."[105]

　　　How, then, does Nietzsche illustrate that morality is conditioned by perspective?

Nietzsche's method is through "genealogy". This method helps him the "lineage" of

moral development that has led to the cultural conditions of Europe. He describes the

genealogical method succinctly in *The Will to Power:* "Formerly one said of every

morality: "By their fruits ye shall know them." I say of every morality: "It is a fruit by

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[102] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power. A new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale.* Edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, with facsims. of the original manuscript (New York, Vintage Books, 1967, 1968) # 258, pg. 149

[103] Ibid., #272: pg. 155

[104] Ibid.,, #259: pg. 149

[105] Ibid.,   #256: Pg. 148

which I recognize the *soil* from which it sprang."[106] Since moral phenomena are simply

outgrowths of a culture, it is only reasonable that interpretations of them will bear their

culture's imprint. The development of morality, unlike Nietzsche's critique of Western

metaphysics, is applicable to many cultures, as he sees Christianity and Buddhism as

sharing many of the same cultural conditions and moral precepts.[107]

Nietzsche's application of the genealogical method can be found in *On the

Genealogy of Morals*, in which he traced the origin of moral development in Western

society. It began with the socially powerful of antiquity. The powerful caste (the nobles)

created a distinction between themselves and the poor, the weak, through the distinctions

good and bad. The noble caste defined themselves by virtues that coincided with their

conditions: goodness, luckiness, power, excellence, and strength. They also defined

themselves as truthful (real) in distinction to the bad—the lying, common, lower, bad,

unlucky, unfortunate masses—the slaves.[108]

The values of these slaves, though socially weak, eventually came to dominate

Western culture. The driving pathos of this group was resentment, an emotional

internalization of hatred for their masters and those above them. Due to the masters'

emotional and philosophical simplicity, the slaves, initially through Judaism, but then

through Christianity, developed a religion that condemned the masters for their strength

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[106] Ibid., #257, pg. 149

[107] Nietzsche gives sparse commentary on similar developments of morality in non-Western cultures in Ibid., #274 pg. 156

[108] For a more thorough elaboration of these points, see Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, *On the genealogy of morals,* translated by Walter Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale. *Ecce homo*, translated by Walter Kaufmann; edited, with commentary, by Walter Kaufmann, (New York, Vintage Books/Random House, 1967, 1989), pgs. 29 and 38

and power.[109] The virtues that the slave class imposed (through force) coincided with

their conditions, such as humility and charity.

Nietzsche, in other works, prominently, in *The Will to Power*, identifies several

problems with the dominance of slave morality. The first is his repugnance at the

philosophical equivalent of "in order to break an omelet, you have to break a few eggs."

Nietzsche hopes to expose the paradoxical nature of the development of Christian

morality, the development of something out of its opposite, as he specifies it in the *Will to*

Power:

> ...to demonstrate how everything praised as moral is identical in essence with
> everything immoral and was made possible, as in every development of morality,
> with immoral means and for immoral ends—; how, on the other hand, everything
> decried as immoral, is, economically considered, higher and more essential, and
> how a development toward a greater fullness of life necessarily also demands the
> advance of immorality. "Truth" the extent to which we permit ourselves to
> understand this fact.[110]

Nietzsche combines this rather banal observation with the inclusion of Darwinism into

his critique. Since we are nothing more than animals, we will always have violent

passions, but Christian morality forces us to suppress these passions for some uses while

it depends upon these terrible passions in order to gain dominance. This suppression is

harmful, and unnatural. Not only were human beings forced to value unnatural things

(like humility and selflessness), but they had to focus on denying the value of the material

world that had treated them so terribly in order to feel valuable. This latter element, the

life-denying element is also part of his other arguments against slave morality.

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[109] Nietzsche writes about the "cleverness" of the slaves in Ibid., pg. 38.

[110]Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power. A new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale*, #272: pg. 155

His other problem with slave morality is its alliance with metaphysics. Since the slaves were themselves quite powerless and could not impose their morality on their masters through force, the slaves created an afterlife, and the judgment of an omniscient, supreme God to judge those who did not adhere to their values. This is the only way that slave morality could suppress the natural instincts inherent in the human animal—by humbling and equalizing everyone before God.[111] With the alliance of metaphysics and slave morality the distinctions good and evil emerged as states of being and that explained reality and gave meaning to the material world. The result of slave morality's imposition of metaphysical monotheism is that it ruled out polytheism—other forms of morality and life as illegitimate.

Nietzsche wants to return to many forms of life and ethics through the establishment of an aristocratic ethic, an "ordering of rank":

> I have declared war on the anemic Christian ideal (together with what is closely related to it), not with the aim of destroying it but only of putting an end to its tyranny and clearing the way for new ideals, for *more robust* ideals—
> The continuance of the Christian ideal is one of the most desirable things there are—even for the sake of the ideals that want to stand beside it and perhaps above it—they must have opponents, strong opponents, if they are to become *strong*.—
> Thus we immoralist require the power of morality: our drive of self-preservation wants our *opponents* to retain their strength—it only wants to become *master over them*.[112]

His return to aristocracy is not meant in the sense that Aristotle meant it in *The Politics*.[113] Instead, Nietzsche wants a competition of values in society, but his ethics, of life-affirmation and the expression of all human instincts should govern society— not slave morality. Aristocratic morality if it competes with slave morality will naturally

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[111] Ibid., #275: pgs. 156-157

[112] Ibid., #361: pg. 197

[113] Ibid., #942: pgs. 495-496

force it to submit because it is more powerful due to its being more natural to human beings. Aristocratic ethics, by their very nature, cannot be egalitarian or have universal accessibility or acceptability. This ethics will allow many forms to exist, but those that favor strength will rule, not that of weakness, that of the slaves. Nietzsche believes that a new form of aristocratic ethics and politics will allow for the flourishing of the human spirit in ways that have not previously been seen.

Despite the rigorousness of his critique of morality, his critique of democratic politics is surprisingly simple. He simply sees it as an extension of slave morality, as epitomized through Christianity, with its emphasis on equal rights and the ennobling of the weak as dominant, which, to him, is an absurd notion. Nietzsche writes in *The Will to Power* "Democracy is Christianity made natural."[114] In addition, in *The Will to Power*, he traces this "naturalizing" of Christianity into democracy:

> In fact, it was Christianity that first invited the individual to play the judge of everything and everyone;… Another Christian concept, no less crazy, has passed even more deeply into the tissue of modernity: the concept of the "equality of all souls before God." This concept furnishes the prototype of all theories of equal rights: mankind was first taught to stammer the proposition of equality in a religious context, and only later was it made into morality: no wonder that man has ended by taking it seriously, taking it practically!—that is to say, politically, democratically, socialistically, in the spirit of the pessimism of indignation. [115]

Nietzsche also found liberal democracy to be an incomprehensible development in the modern era. Since Enlightenment societies have given up on the concept of metaphysical monotheism, it should be impossible for them to continue to justify equality.[116] The

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[114] Ibid., #215, pg. 126

[115] Ibid., #765: pg. 401

[116] Nietzsche elaborates this point in his usual wit in Ibid., #253: pg. 147

liberal philosophers have simply transferred slave morality from God to an equally elusive entity called "reason."

<div align="center">Rorty's Rejection, Part I: Various Sources</div>

One of Rorty's criticisms of Nietzsche is his somewhat mild relapse into metaphysics through Nietzsche's positing of a universal nature.[117] In an essay written later in his career, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality," Rorty argues that even though Nietzsche's observations on morality—namely, through his usage of Darwin, were helpful in getting us away from Plato, he thinks that Nietzsche is just as bad as Plato in writing about an inherent human nature. The expression of the nastiness of human nature, as Nietzsche occasionally argues is expressed through the will to power, reeks of metaphysics to Rorty. He argues elsewhere in this essay that progress in moral philosophy has resulted from moving beyond these debates between Nietzsche and Plato over an inherent human nature.[118] In another essay, he accepts the possibility of there being an inherent human nature. Even if Nietzsche is right about our inherent human nature, Rorty argues that a Nietzschean politics would be quite undesirable:

> "I think that attempts to get a political message out of Heidegger, Derrida, or Nietzsche are ill-fated. We've seen what these attempts look like, and they don't succeed very well." Hitler tried to get a message out of Nietzsche, and Nietzsche would have been appalled by it."[119]

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[117] For an example of Nietzsche's seeming metaphysical stance, see: Ibid., #397-398, pgs. 214-215

[118] For more, see Rorty, Richard, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in *On Human Rights*, edited by Shute, Stephen, and Hurley, Susan (New York, BasicBooks/HarperCollins Publishers, 1993), pgs. 114-115

[119] Rorty, Richard, *Take care of freedom and truth will take care of itself : interviews with Richard Rorty* / Richard Rorty ; edited by Eduardo Mendieta, (Stanford, CA, Stanford University Press, 2006) pg. 51

The fundamental problem Rorty has with Nietzsche's critique is why the reduction of cruelty and sadism is such a terrible thing. Nietzsche has not sufficiently argued for the defense of cruelty and aristocracy; Rorty finds more evidence in the opposite, and argues that Nietzsche's critique was too broad. One of Rorty's most sustained criticisms of Nietzsche's moral views comes in another work, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics.* He believes that Nietzsche (as well as various critics of pragmatism) makes a fundamental mistake when they think about Christianity—they link it with Platonism. Rorty defines Platonism in this context as being the idea that human beings have mutually exclusive desires for their own happiness. The first is for some primitive, lower form of happiness, and a more divine, higher sense of happiness.[120] Rorty argues that when Nietzsche assumed that once human beings are told that they are only animals, there is no way that they could not have any reason to consider helping others beneficial. Put another way, Nietzsche (and his philosophical disciples) thought that there was no answer to Plato's question, "Why be just?" To Nietzsche, self-interest and self-preservation are the only standards that the human animal could reasonably be assumed to have. Rorty argues that human beings do not need a reason to avoid being cruel to one another because there is no inherent link between the hope of reducing cruelty and the need to ground such hope in philosophical arguments. This is the problem with mixing Christian ethics with Platonism, for he argues that it is possible to separate Christian ethics from Christian theology—or the hope of universal love for one's neighbor and charity, and the identification of such a message with Truth. Rorty then argues that this

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[120] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers, Volume 4* (Cambridge, England, Cambridge University Press, 2007), pg. 32

occurred for historical reasons, such as Augustine's argument that Plato prefigured the truth.[121] He argues that early Christians (to their detriment) attached Christian ethics to Platonism, and mixed sentiments and metaphysics unnecessarily.

He argues in the "Human Rights" article that our kindness towards one another increases when we recognize the "Other" as a member of our family, and not having differences that matters besides the human potential to be humiliated and to experience pain.[122]

As the previous argument makes obvious, Rorty is fully convinced by Nietzsche that we are just clever animals, but unlike Nietzsche, Rorty believes that this "taming" is a good thing.[123] He outlines his preferred method of "taming" in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity:* through literature, which includes other forms of creative media such as television and movies. In his "liberal utopia," people would read two types of books. The first type of book would tell us about the effect of social practices on others: exposés such as *The Jungle, Uncle Tom's Cabin, and The Well of Loneliness.[124]* While the second type of book tells us about the pain that we cause one another by our own personal actions on one another. Rorty hopes that through these works we can identify on an emotional and intellectual level with characters and persons vastly different from ourselves, and in that way seek to include other such persons in our definition of "us" (our network of relationships that we consider to be intimately connected to: like our family and friends).

Rorty's Rejection, Part II: The Nietzschean Left

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[121] Ibid., pgs. 32-33

[122] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 91

[123] See Ibid., pg. 87, footnote 8, where he comments upon Nietzsche's idea that "Democracy is Christianity made natural". Rorty writes, "Take away the sneer, and he was quite right."

[124] Ibid., pg. 141

One group, however, has applied Nietzsche's ideas (in another form) in American politics, and this is what Rorty calls, the new, or Cultural, Left that he discusses extensively in *Achieving Our Country*. He, first, praises the New Left for having the fortitude to challenge the country to have the moral conscience to end the Vietnam War, and protest against the draconian anti-communist measures being implemented in the United States. The old, "Reformist" (the economic liberalism of the New Deal) Left had grown too tired, and wealthy, to continue the fight for social progress, as they were comfortable. This New Left reinvigorated this struggle through the creation of original forms of scholarship with the hope of reducing the amount of cruelty that we inflict on each other through sadism (the trait that this left found to be the most dangerous sentiment in American culture). He argues that to some extent, these Leftist agreed with Marx's ideas about economics, but began to integrate Freud more into their thinking to the extent that they began to see the need to change people's mindsets as well as fill their wallets.[125]With the focus on reducing cruelty, the New Left focused its attention and on groups that the Reformist Left had ignored, and often, oppressed. The New, academic, Left, thinks that the system, not just the laws need to be changed. The primary way of doing this is to teach Americans to recognize and empathize with the "Other."

The problem with the Cultural Left, for Rorty, is its deep pessimism of culture and especially liberal institutions. Specifically, they have stopped seeing economic inequality and insecurity as essential concerns that they should address. To them, it is more important to expose the sadistic tendencies in a culture instead of enriching them

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[125] Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century* (Cambridge, MA, and London, Harvard University Press, 1998, Fifth Printing, 2003) pg. 76

through liberal economic policies. To the Cultural Left, such considerations are both intellectually shallow, and perhaps a bit selfish. The old, Reformist Left, as exemplified through the New Deal was so interested in the economic security of the whole society that it ignored the non-material (and often material) needs of many others in the society, such as African-Americans. The problem with this New Left is that it has been more content to uncover and expose abuses and atrocities by whatever it is that they criticize (racism, sexism, etc.) than to work to end it. The vast majority of people are not interested, solely, in this endeavor, and the only way they are going to end the abuses they identify is if they engage in reformist politics once again.

Why, however, does not this left believe in liberal politics? Rorty argues that it has a lot to do with a lack of national pride. The New Left is convinced that America has the secular, post-modern equivalent of "sin" in its soul through things such as slavery, and that its moral identity cannot be redeemed. The America of the present, to this left, is nothing more than a continuation of sadistic practices. Allan Bloom referred to this left as the Nietzscheanized Left—the left that, Rorty says, tells us: "the nation is rotten to the core—that it is a racist, sexist, imperialist society, one which cannot be trusted an inch, one whose every utterance must be ruthlessly deconstructed."[126]

A key question is why the Cultural Left has Nietzschean origins, as it may not be immediately obvious why Nietzsche would be seen as relevant to the Cultural Left's assessment of America. It is especially not obvious why the other portions of his thought, such as the need to reestablish an ordering of rank, or aristocracy, do not seem political. Even Rorty concedes: "By contrast, Nietzsche often speaks as though he had a social

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[126] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, (New York, Penguin Books, 1999), pg. 129

mission, as if he had views relevant to public action—distinctly antiliberal views."[127]So

how is it that the "Nietzscheanized" Left would be against political involvement?

Nietzsche's large body of thought contains a strong anti-social strain. One

example should suffice, but there are several other examples and plenty of scholarship on

the extent of this anti-social strain in his ideas:

> The individual is something quite new which creates new things, something
> absolute; all his acts are entirely his own.
>
> Ultimately, the individual derives the value of his acts from himself; because he
> has to interpret in a quite individual way even the words he has interpreted. His
> interpretation of a formula at least is personal, even if he does not create a
> formula: as an interpreter he is still creative. [128]

As this section implies, he, and his disciples, believe that all socialization involves a form

of coercion— a corruption of the self because society manipulates the psyche of the

individual and seeks to homogenize her.[129] For philosophers such as Nietzsche, but more

specifically "Nietzschean philosophers" such as Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida, liberal

institutions are no consolation (as they lived in such societies). Liberal societies, like all

societies, according to these theorists, are guided by dominant ideologies (ex: capitalism,

patriarchy) that governments only reinforce through several mediums, and the law is one

of the most imposing and coercive means of imposing the cultural ideology upon

individuals.[130] The very best that a liberal society can do is to reform its laws, but often

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[127] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 99

[128] Nietzsche, Friedrich Wilhelm, Der Wille zur Macht, (English), *The Will to Power. A new translation by Walter Kaufmann and R. J. Hollingdale*, #767, pg. 403

[129] See the arguments about Foucauldian accounts of power in: Rorty, Richard, *Achieving Our Country: Leftist Thought in Twentieth-Century America*, pgs. 94-95

[130] Rorty comments about the link between antiliberalism and the ironist theorists in Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 89

the ideologies permeates all aspects of culture so thoroughly that the law is ineffective.

The only solution, so argue some of these theorists, is a radical transformation of society

along the lines of whatever some of these critiques might emphasize that allows for the

type of autonomy against socialization.[131] Very often, these theories advocate a form of

individual resistance and autonomy (along Nietzsche's self-created lines) that makes

itself liable to Rorty's charges of inverted Platonism that Rorty criticizes Nietzsche for

having.[132] Logically considered, often such theories are inherently antisocial and

antipolitical. Nietzsche's ideas about self-creation illustrate this point. Self-creation,

inherently, means trying to create ones own language in response to a culture's dominant

messages and cannot become a cultural message. Rorty argues that by nature such

philosophies are at the very least, reactive, but mostly anti-social and anti-political.[133]

Rorty elaborates on this point, in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* and how his form of

politics is still possible:

> The sort of autonomy which self-creating ironists like Nietzsche, Derrida, or
> Foucault seek is not the sort of thing that *could* ever be embodied in social
> institutions. Autonomy is not something which all human beings have within
> them and which society can release by ceasing to repress them. It is something
> which certain particular human beings hope to attain by self-creation, and which
> few actually do. The desire to be autonomous is not relevant to the liberal's desire
> to avoid cruelty and pain—... The compromise advocated in this book amounts to
> saying: *Privatize* the Nietzschean-Sartrean-Foucauldian attempt at authenticity
> and purity, in order to prevent yourself from slipping into a political attitude

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[131] Rorty borrows some of his analysis from Yack, Bernard in *The Longing for Total Revolution: Philosophic Sources of Social Discontent from Rousseau to Marx* (Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press, 1986) pg. 385 and elaborates more on this subject in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pg. 65, especially in footnote 26

[132] Rorty, Richard, *Philosophy and Social Hope*, pg. 119

[133] Rorty, Richard, *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity*, pgs. 87-88

which will lead you to think that there is some social goal more important than avoiding cruelty. [134]

Conclusion

There are some problems with Rorty's ignoring Nietzsche's critique of morality, however. The first is that he does not do so wholesale. Nietzsche's methodology (genealogy) has influenced Rorty somewhat, as he read and engaged with his ideas and that of Foucault's as they concern genealogy as well. Given Rorty's pragmatism, he seems to accept that morality does not have divine or rational origins, but human ones. One inconsequential example of his applying Nietzschean methodology is his description of Heidegger as an ascetic priest. [135]

A substantive example of this is in "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality". Here, Rorty criticizes Plato for putting moral philosophy on the wrong track in that it sought to answer the Thrasymachuses (psychopaths) of the world, and not the vast majority of human beings. The rest of us tend to treat some groups (those we define as part of our community) well, but consider others not just as different, but lower, pseudo-human, or the Other. Rorty amplifies this point in a footnote quoting Nietzsche's *Genealogy of Morals:*

> Nietzsche was right to remind us that "these same men who, amongst themselves, are so strictly constrained by custom, worship, ritual gratitude and by mutual surveillance and jealousy, who are so resourceful in consideration, tenderness, loyalty, pride and friendship, when once they step outside their circle become little better than uncaged beasts of prey." [136]

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[134] Ibid., pg. 65

[135] See his essay "Philosophers, Novelists, and Intercultural Comparisons: Heidegger, Kundera, and Dickens" in Balslev, Anindita Niyogi, *Cultural Otherness : Correspondence with Richard Rorty* (Atlanta, Scholars Press, 1999), pg. 106

[136] Rorty, Richard, "Human Rights, Rationality, and Sentimentality" in *On Human Rights*, pg. 246, note 8

An interesting endorsement of Nietzsche's key idea, resentment, comes in this essay as well. Rorty thinks that, politically, a human rights utopia, where human beings thinks that every other one is a member of their community, will only come about through the sentimental revolution of the rich, and powerful, not from the masses. He gives an intellectual nod to Nietzsche by arguing that we tend to reject this idea due to our resentment to the idea that our fate ultimately rests with the powerful. He also accepts Nietzsche's idea that the common core of Platonism, Kant's moral philosophy, and religious omnipotence is the desire of the weak to have a powerful ally on their side. His only major disagreement with Nietzsche on this topic occurs on how both assess the triumph of slave morality.

While several scholars take issue with Rorty's selective usage of Nietzsche's critiques of morality,[137] one of the more potent criticisms comes from Frederick Appel's *Nietzsche contra Democracy*. Arguing within the political philosophy tradition, he argues that Nietzsche's aristocratic ethos permeates all aspects of his thought, epistemology included, and therefore, Rorty's and other democratic theorists attempts to use the parts of Nietzsche that they like while ignoring others is not possible. Appel's critique is especially problematic for Rorty because it challenges the notion that Nietzsche's critique of epistemology is only an extension of his perspectivism. Appel senses a tension in Nietzsche's thought between private purity, and a decadent culture that will defile it, however, unlike Rorty and others, Appel believes that Nietzsche wanted to change

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[137] An article that examines this question from the broader context within "Post-Nietzschean" philosophy is Sedgwick, Peter, "The Future of Philosophy: Nietzsche, Rorty, and 'Post-Nietzscheanism" ,*Nietzsche Studien: Internationales Jahrbuch für die Nietzsche-Forschung* 29, 2000. pgs. 234-251. Database on-line. Available from CSA, MLA International Bibliography.

culture directly, and that his higher human beings would be the ones to impose aristocratic values on their cultures.

Appel criticizes Rorty and other democratic theorists' appropriations of Nietzsche for other reasons as well. One problem is that they do not agree about which parts of Nietzsche's ideas are acceptable and which are not. Appel concedes that others (like Rorty) will take a cue from Foucault and attempt to argue that authorial intent should not limit the possible meanings that a text can have. Appel's counter is to this reading is his aristocratic reading of Nietzsche. Appel, like many others, also does not think that such easy compartmentalization into public and private spheres is as easy to do as Rorty suggests.[138] Even Rorty would concede that this point is not easy to differentiate. Appel's criticism of Rorty continues in deeper ways, too, however. He writes that Rorty's appropriation is part of a broader trend within 20th century Anglo-American academia, beginning with Walter Kaufmann, which tried to defang the Nietzsche of the Nazis. Taking a cue from Foucault, Derrida, and other postmodernist and poststructuralists, Rorty (and Nehamas) see Nietzsche's perspectivism as one of the key tools that help us get away from grand narratives and other sins of Platonism.[139] Appel argues that these interpretations in epistemology and other areas have challenged by further scholarship.

Appel's believes that Nietzsche's anti-liberalism challenges many tenets of modernism (such as liberalism, democracy, feminism) and challenge philosophers to

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[138] Appel, Frederick, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, (Ithaca, New York, and London, Cornell University Press 1999) pg. 169 and Conway, David W., *Nietzsche and the Political*, (London, Routledge, 1997), pg. 129

[139] Appel, Frederick, *Nietzsche Contra Democracy*, pg. 10

answer key questions about equality, such as equality of what, and for whom, and why.[140] Philosophers like Rorty are guilty of taking the benefits of liberalism for granted. Rorty seems to suggest that in the West there are no real alternatives to liberal democracy, and that debates about foundations are antiquated. This assumption is not enough. Appel argues that he and others should engage in a thorough debate over whether the benefits of liberal democracy (the "leveling" of everyone) are worth the costs (loss of the possibility of human excellence, and cultural decadence) that Nietzsche identifies.[141]

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[140] Ibid., pg. 169

[141] Ibid., pgs. 169-170

CONCLUSION

Rorty's "liberal utopia" has many ideological foundations, which leads to its sophistication— and inaccessibility. The ideas of John Stuart Mill, John Dewey, and those of several novelists (such as George Orwell), form the significant core of his political ideas. Nietzsche's ideas, as we have seen, are also part of this core as well. In order to understand this, however, we must first answer the question: what are we to make of the seemingly incompatible pieces that Rorty has made of Nietzsche's ideas? The "Good Nietzsche" is good, indeed, but the "Bad Nietzsche" is not all that bad. The latter Nietzsche was useful to Alexander Nehamas' interpretation of Nietzsche as a whole, and Rorty used the completed interpretation in his own analysis. As Nehamas' own scholarship shows, it may be possible to unite all Nietzsche together under perspectivism and avoid the criticisms that Rorty identified. While Nietzsche's ideas are obviously helpful for Rorty in the private sphere, they have public consequences and aid Rorty's project of making philosophy useful, and creating a "liberal utopia."

Nietzsche's ideas on perspectivism and self-creation aids Rorty's project of making philosophy useful to democratic societies. Perspectivism liberates philosophy from the dominance of metaphysics, and with the help of pragmatists such as Dewey, we can now allow philosophy to return to its chartering principles: wisdom, or the good life. As Dewey writes in "Philosophy and Democracy:" "All knowledge in short makes a

difference. It opens new perspectives and releases energy to new tasks."[142] One of these new tasks that philosophy assists us in is the creation of new types of individuals as Nietzsche's ideas about self-creation clearly shows.

Nietzsche's ideas also help Rorty in fashioning a liberal utopia, even if he refuses to acknowledge this as being the case, but these applications raise many questions. Only through Nietzsche's strategy of redescription does Rorty have a model of the type of argumentation that a liberal society no longer concerned with providing defenses would use. How would such a society transition to this postmodern liberal utopia? How do you persuade individuals that their society no longer needs grounds? Are the visions of Dewey and Whitman sufficiently powerful redescriptions to solve democratic societies' need for arguments? The possibility of a foundation-less society also raises interesting questions about the conduct of post-modern democratic societies, for example, should they attempt to democratize other nations, and how should they do so? Would they simply describe the benefits of their society and not the noble principles that bind them? Would other nations find such "utilitarian" appeals convincing?

The metaphor of self-creation extends to the public sphere, too. In his vision, America, like individuals will engage in self-creation. Are there limits to what it may choose? For example, may America choose to become anti-democratic, illiberal, or continue to choose to use Enlightenment discourse? Can a self-created nation be as skeptical of socialization of the self-created individual? Rorty also reinterprets the charter of a democratic society from individual protections of private property to that of the

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[142] Dewey, John, "Philosophy and Democracy," in *The Political Writings of John Dewey,* edited by Morris, Debra, and Shapiro, Ian (Hackett Publishing Company, Inc., Indianapolis/Cambridge, 1993), pg. 39

fostering of individual self-creation because of Nietzsche's ideas. What trade-offs,

however, would such a society need to make in order to foster this kind of

transformation? How far should a society allow self-creation to extend? Should a

government sponsor such transformation, or should this be the ethics of a society? These

questions make it evident that the path to Rorty's liberal utopia remains unpaved and

rocky, but it remains a vision of inspiring creativity and originality.

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