

University of Nevada, Reno

**Interpreting Rorty as a proponent of self-creation,
not an opponent of scientific discourse**

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in
Philosophy

by

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THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

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prepared under our supervision by

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**Interpreting Rorty As A Proponent Of Self-Creation, Not An Opponent Of
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Abstract

Richard Rorty has been criticized for his dismissal of the importance of scientific discourse,¹ for his advocacy of a reduced role for philosophy, and for being a relativist. His particular strain of pragmatism focuses on the gulf between reality and language, arguing that it is unbridgeable. . . From the failure of correspondence theories of truth, Rorty concludes that, in this technical sense, no discourse more closely corresponds to reality than any other discourse and that truth is just a courtesy designation we use for statements that are highly justified.² Critics consider this conclusion especially problematic because it apparently marginalizes the strength and importance of scientific discourse. In this thesis I will argue that Rorty should not be understood in this way but, rather, as imploring us to reconsider the degree to which we value scientific discourse over other discourses.

Rorty's conclusions about the unbridgeable nature of the gulf between reality and language are more radical than those of the early pragmatists, Charles S. Peirce and William James, but his work also falls nicely in line with James's work, who already directly criticized the correspondence theory. Much of the difference between Rorty's conclusions and those of the earlier pragmatists comes from his place within the world of analytic, and particularly linguistic, philosophy. The vocabulary of linguistic philosophy and the work of his contemporaries in the field (i.e., W.V.O. Quine, Wilfrid Sellars, and Donald Davidson) help Rorty to more satisfactorily deal with truth. However, it is not

¹ Rorty's critics on this point include Bernard Williams (1995, pp. 26-37), Daniel Dennett (1997), and C. G. Prado (1987).

² Rorty considers 'warranted assertability' a suitable replacement for the common notion of truth. He addresses philosophical issues of big-T truth separately. So far as Rorty is concerned, our everyday use of 'true' or 'truth' to denote accuracy is acceptable.

his stance on truth that he is most criticized for. Philosophers, even other pragmatists, have criticized Rorty most for the conclusions he draws from his analysis of truth.

I argue that Rorty's public/private distinction is a device he uses to further the move towards subjectivism in pragmatism. William James started this shift in pragmatism. James emphasized the importance of subjective investment in one's beliefs, while Charles S. Peirce focused almost exclusively on the products of inquiry. At the same time *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* (1999), where Rorty heavily relies on the distinction, is an example of the kind of argument he thinks should replace traditional philosophical discourse. He argues that we should re-evaluate the priority of and value we place on science and scientific descriptions; and in *Contingency* he describes the kinds of things we can get from literature, ostensibly things we cannot get from science, and invites us to re-prioritize our values. Ultimately, he hopes that we will place greater value on self-creation. I will argue that we can consider Rorty's vision in *Contingency* an effort to anchor one extreme in pragmatism, and, by doing so, to shift discourse in a different direction.

Finally, I will use current research in cognitive psychology and behavioral economics to illustrate how the problem of representation that Rorty sketches shows up in a scientific problem. By separating Rorty's critique of representation, foundationalism and absolutism from his invitation to value literature more, it should become clear that he is not as radically anti-scientific as he has been interpreted to be.

Dedication

To Nora, Bodhi, and Squid

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Introduction

Pragmatism is, at its most basic, an endorsement of ‘what works.’ For any given purpose, say mobilizing a political party’s base to vote on Election Day, a pragmatist would endorse the tactics that work to realize the goal. This common-sense position seems beyond reproach: who would disagree that one should use the tactic that ‘works’ to achieve his or her goal? By endorsing ‘what works’ pragmatists are making more than a claim about what one should do, they are also making a claim about meaning. The claim about meaning is that the totality of a thing’s meaning is derived from the practical consequences of that thing. So the meaning of a belief is wholly contained in the possible practical consequences of holding that belief.³

In cognitive practices there is an issue within pragmatism about what kinds of belief are justified. Is one justified in accepting a belief, which cannot be empirically tested? The simple pragmatism described above, also, does not provide guidance about what goals to set, which presents a problem. One may have the goal of being happy, and blatantly false beliefs might ‘work’ to achieve this. Typically, we would consider someone irrational, or at least ignorant and epistemologically irresponsible, for accepting false beliefs, but pragmatism, as described above, seems to allow for this kind of irrationality or irresponsibility.

There is also the issue of truth. If we use ‘what works’ as a criterion of truth, as some pragmatists have done, we come up against different problems. If we gain access to truth by assessing utility, then we might be justified in labeling an explanation true

³ Charles S. Peirce started the tradition by making this claim about meaning. The claim that meaning only comes from the practical consequences of something is a rejection of metaphysics.

even if the explanation contained two mistakes, each canceling the other out, resulting in a useful explanation. We might be hesitant to call the explanation ‘true’ although it did prove to be ‘useful’ for the purpose it was intended for.

This problem regarding truth in pragmatism persisted among pragmatists because of the early pragmatists’ focus on experience. Richard Rorty, instead of using experience, uses the ‘linguistic turn’ in philosophy to better handle the problem of truth pragmatically. He points out that we can drop the issue of truth regarding non-linguistic things by accepting that truth is something asserted about sentences only. Rorty explains, “it is easy to run together the fact that the world contains the causes of our being justified in holding a belief with the claim that some non-linguistic state of the world is itself an example of truth, or that some such state ‘makes a belief true’ by ‘corresponding’ to it” (Rorty, 1999, p. 5). When we ascribe truth to sentences or descriptions only, then we find that there can be no correspondence between single sentences and how the world ‘is’. This is because there is no way for us to compare the two things. We cannot gain access to the world unmediated by language to check to see if the world really is as described. Rorty argues that descriptions are, like beliefs, useful for different purposes but that no description is any closer to ‘how the world really is’ than any other description.⁴ This is not to say that descriptions are no longer truth candidates; rather, Rorty’s point is about truth itself. Truth is an interlinguistic designation. Interlinguistically, the meaning and justification of a sentence are enough. Attaching the designation ‘true’ to the sentence does not add anything.

⁴ Within a particular discourse there are normative standards, but Rorty’s point is that there is no absolute way to adjudicate disputes among different discourses. There is no common unit of measure by which to judge the various discourses in order to determine which most accurately reflects reality.

By focusing on language Rorty is able to make stronger points about how we use language for specific ends. He urges us to think of different disciplines, for example physics, philosophy, poetry, and political science, as using different vocabularies to describe the world. Each discipline has its own discourse, a discourse that is useful for a particular purpose, and each discipline's purpose is different. If we accept that different discourses are useful for different purposes and that no discourse gets us closer to 'how things are,' that each is just useful for some purpose, then we are left with the feeling that there is something missing when we describe science and literature as merely different in purpose but not in how the content of each 'fits' with the world. This may be because we live in a culture where science is quite dominant. It is not altogether clear that the dominance of science, or our socialization to believe in the eminence of science, accounts for our inclination that scientific discourse 'fits' the world better than other kinds of discourse. Religion is also quite dominant, but we tend not to have similar inclinations about its correspondence with reality, for the most part.⁵

It seems that the inclination to see scientific descriptions as different from other kinds of descriptions when it comes to 'fit' with the world might have something to do with scientific practice. To start, scientific practice, the methods, values, and movements in science aim at descriptions of the natural world and descriptions of how human practice 'bumps' up against the natural world using quite extensive experimentation and procedures aimed at investigating from an objective position. Scientists are not only

⁵ There are a fair number of biblical literalists in the current political spotlight arguing that the truth of the bible is the only truth and that it corresponds completely with reality. However, these groups are small in number, and they tend to be marginal.

trying to make descriptions of the world; they are, also, interested in knowing why their descriptions work.

In the Cornell Computational Synthesis Laboratory engineers, computer scientists, and computational biologists have created a robot called Eureka. This robot is programmed in such a way that, by analyzing observational data, it will come up with mathematical formulas to represent the particular phenomenon it is set to analyze. By observing the movement of a double pendulum, and without any information about physics, it produced the formula $f = ma$ (Sample, 2009). This astounded scientists, but it was a result that they understood.

After feeding the machine complex data about biological systems, Eureka again produced useful equations. The equations both explained the data and made accurate predictions. In a radio interview Hod Lipson, the head of the Cornell lab where the ‘eureka machine’ was built, describes his predicament,

These equations match the data, and in fact they explain new data. ... We don't know what they mean. ... Now we are in this bizarre situation we can't even publish it right now, because we can't just publish an equation without explaining it. ... I think it is a preview of what is to come in science; we will be faced with this challenge of having to find ways to get a computer to explain what it found. (Horne, Abumrad & Miller, 2010)

Here Dr. Lipson suggests that science is not only interested in descriptions but is also interested in understanding why its descriptions work. By considering science one kind of description, Rorty does not seem to do justice to the work of actual scientists who aim to produce results that are more than just descriptions.

Because of the tension between our inclinations to see science as having descriptive priority over other discourses and Rorty's contention that no description is

‘closer to reality’ than any other, Rorty is often accused of being anti-science, anti-philosophy, and relativistic. These are not charges that all pragmatists face; there seems to be something about how Rorty states his pragmatic conclusions that people find objectionable. He answers all of these charges, but his answers seem to dodge the issues or to not quite satisfy his critics. Rorty is a master of offering grand philosophical narratives that span from ancient to postmodern philosophy. In these narratives Rorty offers interesting, and sometimes controversial, interpretations of various philosophers.

In this style, I will offer an interpretation of Rorty’s work that places him within the history of pragmatism as a ‘Jamesian’ rather than a ‘Peircian’ pragmatist. By placing Rorty within the history of American Pragmatism, I will be offering an alternative description of Rorty. This description will show Rorty to be less radical than he has often been depicted. It will show that he is not anti-science, not anti-philosophy, but possibly still a relativist, although no more relativistic than the early pragmatist William James.

The interpretation I will offer places Rorty as a figure who is expanding upon the work of James, who started the move away from the near-exclusive concern with scientific explanations in pragmatism to a subjectivist philosophy. By looking at the scientism of C. S. Peirce and the subjectivism of William James we get a picture of two issues: What is a community justified in believing? And, what is an individual justified in believing? By framing the problem this way, Rorty’s public/private distinction helps to illuminate these as two separate issues. Rorty can then be more easily understood as a champion of the private, rather than as an opponent of the public.

In the first chapter, I will attempt to characterize pragmatism in such a way that illustrates two shifts within it. The first shift is the shift from a pragmatism that starts

with empiricism to a pragmatism that starts with linguistic philosophy. C. S. Peirce, the first pragmatist, and William James, the philosopher/psychologist who made pragmatism popular, made their pragmatist arguments using the science of the day and what James (1995) calls the 'empiricist stance of looking towards consequences' (p. 20).⁶ Because of this origin Peirce and James focused on issues of inquiry, belief, and doubt. Both maintained high regard for scientific inquiry. Richard Rorty, the second sort of pragmatist, used the linguistic philosophy of his day to focus on issues of truth and representation. The philosophical tools that each philosopher had at his disposal to make his arguments tempered the strength of the resultant views. Rorty's access to the tools of linguistic philosophy gave him the ability to make stronger indictments of traditional philosophy, but I will argue that the ideas he puts forward are largely present in the work of William James.

The second shift in pragmatism I will try to illuminate is from a pragmatism that is focused on inquiry about the world around us to a pragmatism that begins to take self-inquiry seriously. Peirce is the first sort of pragmatist; his focus on inquiry about the world around us is strongly supportive of science and the so-called 'scientific method.' James is the second sort of pragmatist. He argues that beliefs that are only meaningful to an individual and beliefs that are not subject to empirical scrutiny may still be justified. Where Peirce focuses on the beliefs of communities and moral obligations to communities, James expands Peirce's criteria and arguments to the beliefs of individuals.

⁶ The early pragmatists are empiricists in the sense of focusing on experience, but their approach was quite different. Classical empiricists, for one, considered beliefs and ideas to be distinct mental entities, where as the pragmatists considered beliefs to be dispositions to act and thoughts to be tools for action.

After delineating these two shifts in the history of pragmatism, I will focus on the narrative offered by Rorty in his book *Contingency, Irony and Solidarity*. In this book he offers an alternative way of conceptualizing society where the values of literature, journalism, and ethnography are fully realized. He does not claim to offer a description of how things really are or even of how things ought to be; rather, his is a description of what could be. So, his picture of a diminished role for science is not a call to do this, rather it is an alternative view of what could be. I will argue that the picture painted by Rorty should be understood as an alternative offered as a defense against claims that we need religion, correspondence, or any other foundationalist or absolutist dogma for society to work, for morality to have teeth, or for descriptions to have meaning.

After looking at Rorty's public/private distinction as a way to separate the questions about justified community beliefs, and justified individual beliefs, I will use the example of behavioral economics and cognitive psychology to show that Rorty's arguments do not imply that science loses its ability to function without the vocabulary of foundationalism, correspondence, and absolutism. I will also use it to show what pragmatic science looks like, and one role for philosophers in Rorty's vision for the discipline.

Chapter 1 – Pragmatism

1.1 Pragmatism in general

Pragmatism began as an empiricist reaction against the metaphysical and foundationalist tenets of rationalism. William James (1995) explains the general thrust of pragmatism,

Pragmatism represents a perfectly familiar attitude in philosophy, the empiricist attitude.... A pragmatist ... turns away from abstraction and insufficiency, from verbal solutions, from bad *a priori* reasons, from fixed principles, closed systems, and pretended absolutes and origins. He turns towards concreteness and adequacy, towards facts, towards action, and towards power. That means the empiricist temper regnant, and the rationalist temper sincerely given up. It means the open air and possibilities of nature, as against dogma, artificiality and the pretence of finality in truth. (p. 20)

Influenced by the emerging scientific theories of evolution and probability, early pragmatists aimed to naturalize and contextualize epistemology. They argued that our beliefs are rules for action and that the meaning of a belief is wholly captured by the possible consequences of holding that belief (James, 1995, p. 18 & Peirce, 1878).

Pragmatism, as described by Peirce and James, is humanistic, rejects a correspondence theory of truth and foundationalism, focuses on practice, and is a method for dissolving metaphysical disputes.⁷ To make their arguments for these tenets Peirce and James focused on belief and doubt. Interested in the process of inquiry, Peirce argued that cessation of doubt is the primary purpose of inquiry *and* thought (Peirce, 1878, Section II). Both Peirce and James considered beliefs, theories, and objects to be tools that we use to accomplish our projects and goals.

⁷ James characterizes pragmatism as a method. He writes, “I wish now to speak of as *the pragmatic method*. The pragmatic method is primarily a method of settling metaphysical disputes that otherwise might be interminable” (James, 1995, p. 18).

Peirce and James relied on talk about our experiences as humans to make these pragmatist points (Rorty, 1992, p. 373). By the time Richard Rorty came to pragmatism, linguistic philosophy was a dominant force, and he used it to further the pragmatist agenda. By focusing on language rather than experience, Rorty almost entirely drops discussion of belief and doubt. Instead, he includes language on the list of things that are tools. Rorty believed that his approach was better at coming to grips with the notion of truth; removing absolutism, foundationalism, and representation from philosophical discourse; and leveling science as a discourse.

1.2 Rorty: Using the linguistic turn in pragmatism

In an essay in *The Linguistic Turn*, Rorty (1992) argues that linguistic philosophy is better suited than empiricism to sever the connection between knowledge or inquiry and representation (p. 373). He takes the connections between representation and knowledge *and* representation and inquiry to be main problems for pragmatism to address. In doing this Rorty moves away from making the pragmatist point about the importance of looking to consequences, ends, and facts; instead, he focuses on the unbridgeable divide between our perceptions, experiences, and language *and* reality. He further contextualizes us as contingent beings, makers of our world.

Rorty (2009) argues that, so far as philosophy sees itself as a foundational discipline, its central problem is finding an adequate theory of representations (Introduction, esp. pp. 3-5). The vision of philosophy as a foundational discipline positions it in such a way to 'adjudicate' claims to knowledge, justice, morality, etc. As adjudicator, philosophy deciphers which claims, and even which disciplines represent

reality, which do not, and which do so only partially (Rorty, 2009, p. 3). If a piece of language counts as knowledge because it accurately represents reality, or corresponds to reality, then we must account for how we come to know what the world is *really* like. If we cannot do this, then how do we compare our bit of language to the world in order to judge it an accurate representation? Traditionally, philosophers have offered accounts of special mental processes like perception to account for how we gain access to the world. This is how we get from needing a theory of knowledge to needing a philosophy of mind. A general theory of representation is also needed to make the bit of language intelligible. This is the “the notion of knowledge as accurate representation, made possible by special mental processes, and intelligible through a general theory of representation” (Rorty, 2009, p. 6). This entire enterprise is misguided according to Rorty.

He does not make the argument that philosophy, as the foundational enterprise it has been taken to be since Kant, must find an adequate theory of representation. Rather, he takes this as a given and attempts to show the reader how traditional philosophical problems, such as the mind-body problem, dissipate when we drop the notions of (1) philosophy as a foundational discipline, (2) the correspondence theory of truth, and (3) the mind “as something about which we should have a ‘philosophical’ view” (Rorty, 2009, p. 7). Rorty provides us with a vision of philosophy without the received jargon from Descartes, Locke, and Kant that gave rise to many traditional philosophical problems.⁸

Many take Rorty’s attempts as calling for an end to philosophy, but this is not what he aims to do. He aims, instead, to convince others to continue philosophy only

⁸ He supplants the received jargon with his own, less metaphysically problematic, jargon.

without the received jargon and problems that usually come along with it.⁹ At various points in his writings Rorty argues that philosophy should drop, entirely, certain subjects (i.e., epistemology), but at other times he suggests that philosophers should at least stop using foundationalist and absolutist language.¹⁰ Rorty would prefer to see philosophy adopt the language of pragmatism. Pragmatism in general calls for us to focus on the consequences or effects of a belief, statement, proposal, or object instead of talking about the ‘essential’, ‘fundamental’, or ‘true’ nature of the thing in question.

Rorty argues for a new kind of philosophy and a new kind of philosopher. His traditionalist critics consider this a radical conclusion. However, this call is not radical within the pragmatist tradition. James (1995) made a similar call when he wrote,

It is astonishing to see how many philosophical disputes collapse into insignificance the moment you subject them to this simple test of tracing a concrete consequence. ... The whole function of philosophy ought to be to find out what definite difference it will make to you and me, at definite instants of our life, if this world-formula or that world-formula be the true one. (p. 20)

Rorty does recognize the importance of studying philosophy in a historical way. There is value in reading the works of the Greats in philosophy, but this is not a value that everyone needs. He hints that only people with certain pathologies will be interested in the kinds of questions tackled by the Greats (Rorty, 2000a). He thinks that other discourses in the humanist tradition can do similar work. He writes, “To give sense to

⁹ Specifically, Rorty is interested in philosophy as edification. I argue in chapter 3 that applied philosophy also fits his vision.

¹⁰ In *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (2009), Rorty describes the traditional philosopher as a foil for the edifying philosopher (pp. 365-366). It is unclear, at that particular moment in his writing, if he thinks that traditional philosophy should end or not, or whether he thinks traditional philosophical discourse just has value as a foil for a different kind of philosophy. Ten years later in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Rorty seems to stick more to the point that traditional philosophy and traditional philosophical problems can disappear completely arguing that the discipline of philosophy would be no worse for it.

such a notion [of education as something which has no goals outside itself] we need a sense of the relativity of descriptive vocabularies to periods, traditions, and historical accidents. This is what the humanist tradition in education does, and what training in the results of natural sciences cannot do” (Rorty, 2009, p. 362).

At this point we have a glimpse of Rorty’s program. He is calling for significant change within philosophy, but, more importantly, he is calling for change in how we, as a linguistic community that extends far beyond philosophical discourse, use language. Rorty as a good pragmatist, however, cannot offer a knockout argument against traditional philosophy because pragmatism endorses ‘what works’ and traditional philosophy might really be working for some people. Instead of offering a strong argument against traditional philosophy, Rorty calls attention to the way that traditional philosophical problems dissolve when one adopts his vocabulary. The general thrust of his point to philosophers working on these problems is, *you are wasting your time*. The early pragmatists indicted the rationalist tradition but did not aim to end all philosophy as such.

In the following section, I will review the ideas of Peirce and James in order to show how Peirce’s commitment to science and his focus on belief and communities was added to and changed by James. James extended Peirce’s pragmatism by describing the importance of beliefs to individuals beyond the function of belief as satisfying doubt. I will use these aspects of both writers to argue that Richard Rorty, though offering a pragmatism unique in its focus on linguistics, is offering a pragmatism that is an extension of the work of William James.

1.3 Peirce: The priority of science

The priority of science as a discourse has been prominent in pragmatism from the beginning. C. S. Peirce argued that science would lead us to a more or less completely true and accurate description of the world at the limit of ideal inquiry. Arguing against the idea that truth is a matter of consensus Peirce writes,

Yet even [complete consensus] would not change the nature of the belief, which alone could be the result of investigation carried sufficiently far; and if, after the extinction of our race, another should arise with faculties and disposition for investigation, that *true opinion* must be the one which they would ultimately come to...[A]nd the opinion which would finally result from investigation does not depend on how anybody may actually think. But the reality of that which is real does depend on the real fact that investigation is destined to lead, at last, if continued long enough, to a belief in it. (Peirce, 1878, Section IV, emphasis added)

By ideal inquiry, he meant first that inquiry would continue. The limit of inquiry would not be the time in which people just decided to stop scientific inquiry because they were bored, ran out of financial support, or could not maintain the creativity necessary for continued investigation. By ideal, Peirce also meant that inquiry would continue along the same path as science and would not deviate into spiritual or metaphysical inquiry. For Peirce, the truth of the matter lies at the limit of ideal inquiry. As we will come to see, this notion is nearly completely opposite of Rorty's. Without the link of William James it is hard to see how Peirce and Rorty are in the same tradition.

Both Peirce and James were heavily influenced by the scientific theories of probability and evolution as well as Alexander Bain's psychology of belief. Bain contended that beliefs are ideas on which one is prepared to act. Calling a belief *that on which a person is prepared to act* is to give a description of the purpose of belief (Menand, 2001, p. 225); we have beliefs because we act, not the other way around.

Peirce contends, “Belief does not make us act at once, but puts us into such a condition that we shall behave in some certain way, when the occasion arises” (Peirce, 1877, Section III). Action, in turn, helps us add to our arsenal of beliefs by serving as a sort of experiment from which we learn how well our beliefs directed our actions toward achieving our intended goal. This, also, suggests an experimental mode of dealing with the world; it is not an argument *for* dealing with the world as an experiment as much as it is a description of *how* we do use our experiences as experiments to achieve better results in our subsequent actions.

Bain’s influence on the development of pragmatism pointed Peirce in the direction of seeing theories, descriptions, and beliefs as tools for certain purposes.

Darwin’s theory of evolution also supported the early pragmatists ideas about belief,

Darwin’s theory is teleological in that it conceives of everything about an organism as designed for a purpose—ultimately, the purpose of survival. That was one of the most revolutionary aspects of Darwin’s thinking, and the source of James and Dewey’s functionalism—their idea that beliefs are instruments for action. (Menand, 2001, p. 364)

The theory of evolution describes a process whereby certain members of a species are better able to thrive because of some adaptation that helps them flourish in their particular environment. The adaptations are tools some plants or animals in a population have to cope with the environment that others lack. By understanding human belief as fitting into this picture, Peirce understood not just that specific beliefs are tools but also that we may, as a species, have developed in certain ways that help or hinder us in discovering truths about our environment. Individuals may also exhibit variation in their belief formation process (i.e., variation). Inquiry, Peirce argued, is solely undertaken by our species to ease the irritation of doubt, and beliefs are the results of inquiry; he wrote, “The irritation

of doubt is the only immediate motive for the struggle to attain belief” (Peirce, 1877, Section IV). Although this claim can be interpreted as fitting into a naturalistic account, it should also be recognized as suggesting an essentialist account of what it is to be human. That is, humans are by nature inquirers, and discovery of truths is our paradigmatic ‘human’ activity.

Inquiry, however, is not the only way to settle on a belief. In “The Fixation of Belief” (1877) Peirce runs through four methods people use for fixing belief: tenacity, authority, *a priori*, and scientific (or more broadly, inquiry). He concludes that the scientific method is the only reliable method of fixing belief, but he acknowledges that certain people might choose to use the other methods for various reasons. Here Peirce makes a characteristically pragmatic move by arguing that the tool (i.e., belief) that one uses is customized to the purpose or goal he or she is pursuing.

Peirce, also, accepted the theory of evolution as the process through which the mind/rationality/thought emerged; by accepting this, Peirce was committed to fallibilism. He explains, “it is probably of more advantage to the animal to have his mind filled with pleasing and encouraging visions, independently of their truth; and thus, upon unpractical subjects, natural selection might occasion a fallacious tendency of thought” (Peirce, 1877, Sect. II). James commits to the same idea, “Biologically considered, our minds are as ready to grind out falsehood as veracity, and he who says, ‘better go without belief forever than believe a lie!’ merely shows his own preponderant private horror of becoming a dupe” (James, 1997, p. 82). The naturalistic view, that everything arrived to what it is today via evolutionary processes, results in fallibilism precisely because our

mental faculties arose in such a way that they cannot be relied upon to always and every time come to true beliefs.

Peirce argues that because we emerged from a process of evolution, which does not have any predetermined goals or direction, we could have evolved to have certain beliefs about the world that are evolutionarily advantageous but that do not accurately represent the world, or we could have evolved to prefer certain kinds of explanations, because the explanations are, for example, comforting, but are ultimately inaccurate. He accepts that human thought processes are not reliably constrained to recognize ‘the truth,’ ‘the best solution,’ or the ‘most accurate approximations of a thing’. This is a device Peirce uses to argue for the priority of science. In “The Fixation of Belief” he accepts that human whims may or may not be related to what really is or is not the case, and he accepts science as superior to other methods of fixing belief because it does not rely wholly on human cognition to make determinations. In short, science is not arbitrarily constrained while the constraints on human cognition are arbitrary.

Peirce relies on the notion of a coherent external reality to make his case for science; he writes,

[The] fundamental hypothesis, restated in more familiar language, is this: There are Real things, whose characters are entirely independent of our opinions about them; those Reals affect our senses according to regular laws, and, though our sensations are as different as are our relations to the objects, yet, by taking advantage of the laws of perception, we can ascertain by reasoning how things really and truly are; and any man, if he have sufficient experience and he reason enough about it, will be led to the one True conclusion. The new conception here involved is that of Reality. (Peirce, 1877, Section V)

By relying on the hypothesis of a coherent external reality and taking the objectivity of science as a given, Peirce maintains that the scientific method for settling doubt is the

most reliable to produce true beliefs. Where James, and Rorty after him, started to move away from the notion of ‘truth as representation,’ Peirce believed in a knowable reality and in truth: “the true conclusion would remain true if we had no impulse to accept it; and the false one would remain false, though we could not resist the tendency to believe in it” (Peirce, 1877, Section II). Also, Peirce’s relies on the ‘laws of perception’ and the implied ability of perception to accurately ‘reflect reality.’ Rorty expressly dismisses this reliance on reflections, perceptions, and representations.

In a second paper, “How to Make Our Ideas Clear” Peirce even contends that the scientific method provides our only access to the truth: “the ideas of truth and falsehood, in their full development, appertain exclusively to the scientific method of settling opinion” (Peirce, 1878, Section IV). The way Peirce emphasizes the importance of scientific inquiry focuses attention on fixing beliefs in communities. The first example of this is his notion of ‘ideal inquiry’, which is not a kind of inquiry that a single person can do; it necessarily involves many other people. The community of scientists and their norms are clearly integral to the success of scientific inquiry. Peirce accepts this because he understands the strength of a community of scientists working together to solve problems.

Peirce also focuses on community by making a moral argument for accurate beliefs. In the following quote he implies the importance of coming to true ideas for civilization,

How to give birth to those vital and procreative ideas which multiply into a thousand forms and diffuse themselves everywhere, advancing civilisation and making the dignity of man, is an art not yet reduced to rules, but of the secret of which the history of science affords some hints. (Peirce, 1878, Section IV)

Peirce here makes a strong statement about the importance of science for the advancement of civilization and the dignity of man. In Peirce's estimation both advancement and dignity are at stake when it comes to holding true beliefs.

Advancement and science clearly go together, but it is not so clear how human dignity and scientific inquiry fit together. Dignity is tied to inquiry for Peirce through his contention that curiosity, or an inquiring nature, is an essential aspect of humanity. If we are by nature inquirers, then our dignity is clearly tied up in our ability and willingness to engage in good inquiry.¹¹ In terms of community he also argues, "Unless we make ourselves hermits, we shall necessarily influence each other's opinions; so that the problem becomes how to fix belief, not in the individual merely, but in the community" (Peirce, 1877, Section V). This quote suggests that Peirce is interested in how our individual beliefs affect our community, but it also relates to his stance on meaning. Because Peirce was only concerned with consequences that could be empirically tested, he did not believe that things that make a difference only to an individual are meaningful. If your belief does not influence how you are willing to act, then it is meaningless to the community at large.

At this point we may be asking: Where is the flexibility typically found in pragmatism? *And* Where is utility? In "The Fixation of Belief" Peirce argued that the scientific method for fixing belief is the only reliable way to gain access to the truth, but he did acknowledge that the other three methods for fixing belief, tenacity, authority and

¹¹ Peirce's contention is quite similar to Matthew Alper's who writes, "Knowledge is power, and it is precisely our species' capacity to reason-to deduce knowledge-that has secured us the title of 'the most powerful creature on Earth.' Human beings reason because we are compelled to do so. Our survival depends on it, for with every new piece of information we acquire, be it as individuals or a species, we become that much better equipped to master our world and therefore to survive" (Alper, 2006, p. 1).

the *a priori*, are valuable for different purposes. This point shows Peirce's flexibility. Although Peirce was interested in 'the truth' and coming to accurate descriptions, he acknowledged that one could have different goals, and the other methods for fixing beliefs might be better suited to those goals. Therefore, the method of authority will likely work better than the method of science if the goal is to gain control over large groups of people in a political system. Although he had this flexibility in his position, Peirce did believe in something along the lines of 'integrity of belief', which consisted, roughly, in adhering to the method of science.¹²

The fact that Peirce uses the scientific explanation of speciation through evolution to argue against rationalist assumptions about human rational faculties is telling. Peirce looks for something that is non-arbitrary, and he believes that science is constrained by a non-arbitrary coherent external reality.¹³ Peirce is interested in finding a non-arbitrary method of fixing belief because he is concerned with the truth-value of the resultant beliefs. So, our beliefs are worthy of being fixed insofar as we have used a reliable method for achieving true beliefs and as long as we try to avoid holding two beliefs that are contradictory. If this is the goal, then we ought to settle on a method of fixing beliefs that produces the most reliable and coherent set of beliefs.

¹² See "The Fixation of Belief" Section V where Peirce (1877) writes, "But, above all, let it be considered that what is more wholesome than any particular belief is integrity of belief, and that to avoid looking into the support of any belief from a fear that it may turn out rotten is quite as immoral as it is disadvantageous. The person who confesses that there is such a thing as truth, which is distinguished from falsehood simply by this, that if acted on it should, on full consideration, carry us to the point we aim at and not astray, and then, though convinced of this, dares not know the truth and seeks to avoid it, is in a sorry state of mind indeed" (Section V).

¹³ He writes, "To satisfy our doubts, therefore, it is necessary that a method should be found by which our beliefs may be determined by nothing human, but by some external permanency—by something upon which our thinking has no effect" (Peirce, 1877, Sect. V).

As the pragmatists starting with Peirce recognized, there is a second way to evaluate beliefs: utility. Evaluating beliefs based on their utility sets aside the question of the truth-value of a belief and focuses on its utility or usefulness.¹⁴ This goal is in line with what Peirce calls the ‘practical difference’ between doubt and belief. Our desires are guided by and we act based on our beliefs (Peirce, 1877, Section III). We are not guided in the same way to act based on our doubts; although we may be guided to refrain from acting based on our doubts, Peirce claims that we are not moved to act based on them. The fact that we are guided by our beliefs and not our doubts is the practical difference between the two (Peirce, 1877, Section III). If we see our beliefs as playing an important role in our decisions to act, then we should not look for a method of fixing belief that necessarily leads to true beliefs. Rather, we should focus on adopting a method that leads to the most fruitful results. This means that the method should help us get what we desire.

Peirce’s contention that the scientific method of fixing belief is not arbitrary addresses the concern of finding a method for fixing beliefs that most consistently points in the direction of truth. Peirce offers additional considerations that appeal to the utility of the method to support it. If we are looking for the method of fixing belief that gives the best results in terms of directing our actions and desires, then the support for the method comes from its results and not from any special facts about the world or our experiences. Even if there were no coherent external reality, the scientific method for fixing beliefs would have support because it is the most fruitful. This is akin to saying

¹⁴ The assumption would be that a useful belief or proposition is useful because it is true, but this is not necessarily the case.

that the assumption of a coherent external reality is warranted because utilization of that assumption provides fruitful results.

Peirce's support for the scientific method of fixing belief based on the utility of the method is robust because his argument is *the method works to achieve our goals*. This shifts the burden of proof to opponents of the method; they must show that the method does not work. Peirce also claims that the method is not arbitrary in the same way that the *a priori* method and the methods of tenacity and authority are. Indeed, the method does avoid relying entirely on arbitrary human thought processes to determine which beliefs ought to be fixed. Even if there is no coherent external reality, the person using the method is at least partially relying on something outside of him or herself to determine whether or not he or she ought to fix a belief.¹⁵

The method of science championed by Peirce is not neutral. Rather, we can say that the method is not arbitrarily constrained by human thought processes. It is not neutral because it is supposed to be good for certain ends—truth and utility—while other methods of fixing belief are useful for other purposes.¹⁶ Insofar as we presuppose a coherent external reality, the method of science is our best bet at finding truths. According to Peirce, the method is also the best at directing us to fix beliefs that are coherent and useful towards our ends.

The important thing to keep in mind from Peirce is his focus on fixation of beliefs in a community. It is not so clear that coherence within an individual's belief system is

¹⁵ The person will, in all cases, be relying on his or her fallible thought processes to assess utility and make utilitarian calculations.

¹⁶ See Peirce's (1877) discussions of the virtues of each method of fixing belief in section V of "The Fixation of Belief."

inherently bad; however, incoherent beliefs in a community make it difficult to get work done. Shifting the focus to utility provides a simple way to measure alternatives in community projects. Peirce' championing of utility is not unique in the pragmatic tradition, but his focus on community and discounting of the effects on the internal lives of individuals is noteworthy. By focusing on beliefs in a community and arguing for 'integrity of belief', Peirce is drifting into the political/moral arena and is drifting away from epistemology. Because he sees us as inherently inquirers, certain political and moral conclusions follow.

William K. Clifford addresses this issue in "The Ethics of Belief" where he argues that an individual has a moral duty to have only justified beliefs. This is because "no one man's belief is in any case a private matter which concerns himself alone" (Clifford, 1877, Section I). Clifford contends that everything down to the words we use is "created by society for social purposes" (Clifford, 1877, Section I).¹⁷ This suggests that everything we do, every belief we have, and every action we take has a social component to it. Because we are social beings who benefit from the structures of our community, we have duties to that community. Clifford sums his point up saying, "it is wrong always, everywhere, and for anyone, to believe anything upon insufficient evidence" (Clifford, 1877, Section III).

¹⁷ Clifford (1877) writes, "Our lives are guided by that general conception of the course of things which has been created by society for social purposes. Our words, our phrases, our forms and processes and modes of thought, are common property, fashioned and perfected from age to age; an heirloom which every succeeding generation inherits as a precious deposit and a sacred trust to be handed on to the next one, not unchanged but enlarged and purified, with some clear marks of its proper handiwork. Into this, for good or ill, is woven every belief of every man who has speech of his fellows. A awful privilege, and an awful responsibility, that we should help to create the world in which posterity will live" (Section I).

1.4 James: Introducing subjectivism

Influenced by the same scientific theories as Peirce, William James moves pragmatism forward by arguing that an individual is justified in holding a belief that is not empirically testable, at least not in Peirce's public, intersubjective way. James's essay, "The Will to Believe", is a direct response to Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief". In it James makes the case for the justifiability of personal faith and corrects two problems in William Clifford's "The Ethics of Belief". First, he corrects Clifford's assertion that to avoid error is always more important than taking the chance to find truth; he also corrects the implicit assumption of Clifford's that refraining from making a judgment is always a distinct choice from choosing one side over the other.

Clifford asserts that to avoid error is always more important than taking a risk for the truth. James considers two kinds of error, the error that results from accepting something as true that is actually false and the error of accepting something as false that is actually true. James argues that science can only tell us what *is* but cannot determine what *is best*. Moral issues, or issues pertaining to *what is good*, are not discoverable through rationality. Emotion, experience, and aspects of our individual dispositions—or our 'passional life' as James describes it—incline us in certain directions. One can make a case that both kinds of error ought to be avoided, and it is a matter of disposition, according to James, which particular kind of error we think is worse. James contends that whichever way we lean, is the result of our passional life (James, 1997, p. 83). Basically, James is contending that it is equally rational to avoid each kind of error.

Because of our individual dispositions, we find that some options are open for us while other options are closed for us (James, 1997, pp. 83-4). A person may be open to

the idea that certain people have psychic powers, as James was, but for other people this belief is simply not an option. If an option is not open for a person, then they are not at risk of holding a belief that may turn out to be false. If on the other hand, a person is open to religious faith, then they may be willing to take the risk of accepting a false belief because the benefits of the possibility of truth are so enticing to them. Some risks, according to this account, are personal and have little to do with the community of believers.

Clifford's contention—that we must avoid, at all costs, accepting as true a false belief—is supported by his understanding of beliefs as things we base actions on; if one acts based on a false belief, then he puts others around him in danger. Although James does not address this point head on, he does handle it by appealing to the triviality or momentousness of a belief or the resultant action. James agrees with Clifford that most beliefs should be backed up with sufficient evidence and that we ought to aim for avoiding error whenever possible. James (1997) writes,

Well, of course, I agree as far as the facts will allow. Wherever the option between losing truth and gaining it is not momentous, we can throw the chance of gaining truth away, and at any rate save ourselves from any chance of believing falsehood, by not making up our minds at all till objective evidence has come. (p. 83)

He even asserts that in non-forced cases this ought to be our “ideal” (James, 1997, p. 85).¹⁸

There are, however, cases where our choices are momentous and/or forced, and in these cases, refraining from belief amounts to acting in accord with one side or the other.

¹⁸ He writes, “Let us agree, however, that wherever there is no forced option, the dispassionately judicial intellect with no pet hypothesis, saving us, as it does, from dupery at any rate, ought to be our ideal” (James, 1997, p. 85).

A momentous choice might be the opportunity to adopt a child. If you have been on a waiting list for a number of years, and it is finally your turn to adopt a child, your choice is momentous. You must make the choice quickly, and if you pass on the opportunity, you might not have another chance again for a number of years. Because the child needs to be placed in a home immediately, refraining from forming a belief about whether or not you should adopt the child amounts to deciding not to adopt. At this point, it is important to note that beliefs and actions are intimately related for both James and Clifford. If you have a belief, it always means that you are ready and willing to act on the belief.

James uses religious belief as an example of a forced choice where refraining from belief amounts to falling on one side over the other. Setting aside the fact that there are many different understandings of what/who God is or the Gods are, you either do or do not believe in at least one God. If you refrain from taking a stand on the side of God, you are essentially choosing to act as if there were no God. This is because by refraining from believing you are not going to partake in worship and other religious activities. This is the same road a non-believer would take. Agnosticism and atheism, accordingly, are the same.

James takes into account the impact a belief will have on the individual believer. This is his major movement away from Peirce. James (1995) writes, "If theological ideas prove to have a value for concrete life, they will be true, for pragmatism, in the sense of being good for so much. For how much more they are true, will depend entirely on their relation to the other truths that also have to be acknowledged" (p. 29). So for James, a belief can make a difference to a person's experience of the world but remain untestable

and still have meaning. He does not allow for personal beliefs to contradict our other knowledge about the world; he writes, “The truth of ‘God’ has to run the gauntlet of all our other truths. It is on trial by them and they on trial by it. Our *final* opinion about God can be settled only after all the truths have straightened themselves out together” (James, 1995, p. 42).

In *Religion and Science: Historical and Contemporary Issues* a book about different ways of seeing the interaction between religion and science, Ian G. Barbour (1997) echoes James’s point,

[R]eligion cannot claim to be scientific or to be able to conform to the standards of science. But it can exemplify some of the same spirit of inquiry found in science. If theology is critical reflection on the life and thought of the religious community, it is always revisable and corrigible. There are no controlled experiments, but there is a process of testing in the life of the community, and there should be a continual demand that our concepts and beliefs be closely related to what we have experienced. There is no proof, but there is a cumulative case from converging lines of argument. Rational argument in theology is not a single sequence of ideas, like a chain that is as weak as its weakest link. Instead, it is woven of many strands, like a cable many times stronger than its strongest strand. Or, to use an analogy introduced earlier, religious beliefs are like an interlocking network that is not floating freely but is connected at many points to the experience of the community. (p. 159)

Barbour suggests something similar to James’s point in pointing out the integral connections some people experience between their personal religious beliefs and their experience of the world. Religion on this view is not limited to a set of true or false beliefs. Here Barbour also points out the communal aspects of religious belief that James largely ignores while he, instead, focuses on individual religious beliefs and how they affect the believer.

James’s version of religious belief, as something that has to run the gauntlet of our other beliefs, is not always the way religious belief works in the world. For certain

believers, all beliefs must run the gauntlet of their religious convictions, not the other way around. James seems to see it working both ways: with religious beliefs and other beliefs influencing and testing each other. This invites questions about what kinds of religious belief actually are justifiable in light of James's arguments. James explicitly rejects the religious argument from design (1995, p. 44), and he accepts naturalism and Darwin's evolutionary theory but uses them to reevaluate justifiable religious positions. Describing the God of 'design' that he rejects, James (1995) writes,

[H]e established the classes, orders, families and genera of plants and animals, and fixed the distances between them. He thought the archetypes of all things, and devised their variations; and when we rediscover any one of these his wondrous institutions, we seize his mind in its very literal intention. (p. 22)

James does not argue that belief in this version of God is justifiable; rather, he argues that one is justified in having faith in a non-interventionist God. James agrees with Peirce that for something to have meaning it must make a sensible difference; however, James allows for that difference to come about in the far distant future—even after the believer is dead—or in the individual's internal life. On this basis, he believes that religious faith is justifiable, but he offers a fairly restricted view of justified religious beliefs because he continues to see naturalism as paramount.

James famously said, 'any difference to be a difference must make a difference,' and in his *Pragmatism* he asserts that,

To attain perfect clearness in our thoughts of an object...we need only consider what conceivable effects of a practical kind the object may involve—what sensations we are to expect from it, and what reactions we must prepare. Our conception of these effects, whether immediate or remote, is then for us the whole of our conception of the object, so far as the conception has positive significance at all. (James, 1995, p. 18)

If we put these two positions together we have James saying that because there is no discernible difference between withholding belief and holding disbelief, the two positions are the same. So when we are forced to make a decision, and we choose instead to refrain from deciding, we are *de facto* making a choice on one side. While Clifford writes as if refraining from belief is always a third option, James contends that in some situations refraining from belief amounts to choosing to believe one way over the other.

James describes non-religious situations where a person's actions based on faith are acceptable. We only need to look at the first, and most widely accepted, situation to see that we are, indeed, sometimes justified in acting based on faith—the scientific hypothesis. According to James, when a scientist proceeds with experimentation to test a hypothesis, her proceeding as if the hypothesis were true is based on faith. The risk she is taking is warranted because it is undertaken in the search for new and fruitful scientific explanations—she is justified in believing based on faith. We take many other things on faith; for example, we take it on faith that our feelings towards our romantic partner are reciprocal. Faith does not obviate the need for evidence. It is expected that the scientist has good evidence to support the hypothesis that she is testing or her reason for testing it; that is, she is not undertaking scientific experimentation in order to test the absurd or untestable. We, also, likely have behavioral evidence that supports our beliefs about our partner's romantic feelings. Religion is an interesting case because the evidence for religious belief is almost entirely subjective or the result of subjective interpretations of available phenomenon. Especially with something so individually important as the possibility of salvation and eternal life, it is hard to see how one would be unjustified in taking the personal risk of being wrong about their religious beliefs. There are, however,

reasons to question the justifiability of religious belief when it creeps into the public sphere.

James's characterization of religion is restricted to the private life of the individual. He characterizes religion as follows:

[R]eligion says essentially two things. First, she says that the best things are the more eternal things, the overlapping things, the things in the universe that throw the last stone, so to speak, and say the final word.... The second affirmation of religion is that we are better off even now if we believe her first affirmation to be true. (James, 1997, p. 88)

This definition of religion is more in line with a definition of the motivation to act morally. The belief that morality and goodness ought to win out in the end fits into James's definition of religion, but this belief seems to have no religious content at all. John Hick a philosopher of religion describes the relationship between naturalism and religion as hope,

Taking the naturalistic and religious positions generically, the basic difference as far as our human interests are concerned is that a naturalistic interpretation of the universe, *if true*, is very bad news for humanity as a whole, whilst a religious interpretation, *if true*, is (with exceptions to be noted presently) very good news for humanity as a whole. (Hick, 2004, p. 19)¹⁹

This sentiment is most likely what James is considering. In *Pragmatism* James (1995) says, "Materialism means simply the denial that the moral order is eternal, and the cutting off of ultimate hopes; spiritualism means the affirmation of an eternal moral order and the letting loose of hope" (p. 41). Here he seems to be suggesting that spirituality is a viable

¹⁹ This sentiment is echoed by Matthew Alper (2006) in *The God Part of the Brain: A Scientific Interpretation of Human Spirituality and God*, "So either God exists, and I'm immortal, or God does not exist, in which case this brief and purposeless stay here on Earth is all I will ever know. With God, as is saved. Without Him, all is lost, including hope. Between His existence and non-existence, there is no gray area. There is no in-between. Nothing lies between the infinite and the finite, between the eternal and the temporal, between ultimate purpose and meaninglessness, between immortality and death. And so, as man finds himself in the world and as he stands facing it, is the problem of God's existence that demands, more than any other, to be solved" (p. 5).

basis for hope that the world will turn out all right in the end. He goes on to say, referring to religious convictions, “This need of an eternal moral order is one of the deepest needs of our breast” (James, 1995, p. 41). This is a huge point of difference between James and Peirce. Peirce considers inquiry the paradigmatic human activity while James brings in the human need for ‘moral order’ as equally as important, at least to the individual.

In “The Will to Believe” James clearly does not justify the kind of fundamentalist religious faith that is common in present day America. This is because James believed people are obliged to maintain a coherent set of beliefs. He did not think that a single individual would be well to have various conflicting beliefs, and he was a strong proponent of science. It seems that these two positions are somehow connected. Because James argued for the general justifiability of faith by drawing a connection between the provisional faith a scientist has in her hypothesis and other kinds of faith, including religious faith, his conclusions are not very strong. His endorsement of coherence remains problematic. I suggest that we offer James a pass. He should not demand coherence because in general he accepts that beliefs may be tools for very specific purposes. When utility is the criterion, we may end up with incommensurability between what has utility in various contexts. Because of this, Rorty ends up disagreeing with James that coherence within an individual is important.

The important points that James makes are 1) the kinds of beliefs a person is willing to accept are greatly influenced by that person’s prior dispositions and 2) religious faith is justifiable for a person to hold because the individual is the one taking on the risk. James moves the discussion away from Peirce’s focus on the content of

beliefs and the public process of acquiring the content (i.e., science!). James is inclusive of the personal motivations that incline people to hold or not hold certain beliefs; in this way, he is contextualizing belief within the lives of believers in a way that Peirce did not. However, James's contention that something can be counted as true if it works for a person points to a continuing problem with the concept of truth within pragmatism.

Rorty is able to use linguistic philosophy to better work out the issue of truth in a pragmatic way and to address with the balance between public and private beliefs. While Peirce's focus on discovery of truth left no room for the effects of beliefs on the inner lives of individuals, James expanded the application of pragmatism to include the importance of the individual believer's dispositions and inner lives. By making the point that certain risks associated with being wrong can only be assessed and undertaken by an individual but continuing to support the notion of coherence, James did not create enough space for individuals to use incommensurable tools (e.g., beliefs) to accomplish different goals. Rorty is a proponent of the private in a much more comprehensive way than James is, and, in fact, does not argue for the importance of coherence within the belief system of an individual. In the following section, I will describe Rorty's public/private distinction in order to argue that he is not an opponent of the public, or science, but is, instead, a proponent of the private.

Chapter 2 – Rorty’s Public/Private Distinction

Richard Feldman writes: “*The Naturalistic View* [in epistemology] ... holds that science should play a much more significant role in epistemology than advocates of *The Standard View* have traditionally given it” (Feldman, 2003, p. 157) Peirce and James used the scientific theory of evolution to illuminate human fallibility; and, by discussing the conditions of human knowledge in light of science, both men, in a way, naturalized epistemology. W.V.O. Quine (1969) argued, more radically, that epistemology could be reduced to psychology (pp. 82-83).²⁰ Rorty accepts naturalism but uses it for a different purpose than Peirce, James, or Quine.

About his own use of naturalism, Rorty (2009) writes:

the wholehearted behaviorism, naturalism, and physicalism I have been commending ... help us avoid the self-deception of thinking that we possess a deep, hidden, metaphysically significant nature which makes us ‘irreducibly’ different from inkwells or atoms. (p. 373)²¹

Rorty accepts a weaker variety of naturalism than Quine but, also, a more pragmatic naturalism than all three of them. Rorty uses naturalism, along with behaviorism and physicalism, to humble us. Using a critique of metaphysics reminiscent of critiques

²⁰ Quine (1969) writes, “Carnap and the other logical positivists of the Vienna Circle had already pressed the term ‘metaphysics’ into pejorative use, as connoting meaninglessness; and the term ‘epistemology’ was next. Wittgenstein and his followers, mainly at Oxford, found a residual philosophical vocation in therapy: in curing philosophers of the delusion that there were epistemological problems.

But I think that at this point it may be more useful to say rather that epistemology still goes on, though in a new setting and a clarified status. Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input—certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance—and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reason that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one’s theory of nature transcends any available evidence” (pp. 82-83).

²¹ Rorty’s behaviorism is not Skinnerian. Rather, it reflects a broad rejection of Cartesian philosophy of mind, in the tradition of Wittgenstein, Ryle, and Sellars.

offered by James, Rorty argues that naturalism suggests we have no immutable 'human nature', nothing that makes us any different than other entities in the world.

Rorty accepts naturalism in the sense that he believes that everything that exists is susceptible to a naturalistic explanation. However, he argues that naturalistic descriptions are just one kind of description. He does not believe that they have inherent priority over other kinds of description. Rorty's naturalism entails that there is no essential human nature or paradigmatic human activity. This position is opposite of Peirce's position because Peirce believed that inquiry was the paradigmatic human activity.

Instead of accepting inquiry as paradigmatic, Rorty contends that there are other human concerns that are just as indicative of humanity. Self-creation is Rorty's example. He talks about self-creation in terms of the language we use to describe our individual projects and ourselves. He writes,

All human beings carry about a set of words which they employ to justify their actions, their beliefs, and their lives. These are the words in which we formulate praise of our friends and contempt for our enemies, our long-term projects, our deepest self-doubts and our highest hopes. They are the words in which we tell, sometimes prospectively and sometimes retrospectively, the story of our lives. I shall call these words a person's 'final vocabulary'. (Rorty, 1986, p. 73)

Language fits into self-creation for several reasons. First, Rorty is talking about identity, and language (including new colloquialisms) goes far to fix the identity of the historical community to which we belong. Second, individual self-creation within a larger community can be understood as a self-creation of one's own identity, or at least re-creation of it. Third, language and practice influence each other, on Rorty's account. So far as our vocabulary influences our actions, behaviors, and choices it can be seen as a

tool of self-creation. In addition to the language component of self-creation, Rorty points to existential urges towards shaping one's own life as urges towards self-creation.

Finally, Rorty describes the pursuit of private perfection, in any area of one's self, be it physical or emotion, or a practical pursuit in the world, as a form of self-creation.

Rorty goes further than James in championing the importance of private self-creation by claiming that certain values are incommensurable. Rorty endeavors to show that not all discourse is reducible to scientific explanation, and that inquiry is not, necessarily, the paradigmatic human activity. By allowing for incommensurability, individuals are left with greater flexibility than James's view allowed, to self-create/develop new vocabulary/engage in certain practices that are on their face inconsistent with other parts of the individual's life. Rorty does not put up self-creation as an alternative 'paradigmatic human activity'; rather, he introduces it to show that inquiry is not the only game in town.

Rorty's naturalism eschews any 'metaphysically significant nature', but inquiry can be understood as a 'naturalistic nature'. That is, we are embedded in a natural situation and born with certain cognitive functions that make inquiry a necessary part of human existence. With this, I do not think Rorty could or would disagree. Rather, he wants to show that, by virtue of our situation, self-creation is just as important, if not more important, to us²² and that self-creation is not reducible to scientific discourse.

²² Rorty (2009) makes the point that the rise of epistemology, and the notion of humans as inquirers that it is married to, is a fairly recent historical event, "It did not become built into the structure of academic institutions, and into the pat, unreflective self-descriptions of philosophy professors, until far into the nineteenth century" (pp. 132). Thus, it is problematic to call inquiry paradigmatic, if by inquiry Peirce and others mean something like what modern scientific inquiry looks like. If, for most of human history, humans have not seen themselves primarily as inquirers then Peirce would have to say either that inquiry is

Rorty is ultimately asking us to re-evaluate the value we place on various human endeavors.

In the same way that self-description and scientific inquiry are not reducible to each other, other human activities may also be irreducible to each other. Within pragmatism this is not such a radical position. Pragmatism, in appealing to utility, makes the claim that we should focus on ‘what works’; if this is the focus, then there is no guarantee that explanations that work for different purposes will be commensurable. The hypothesis of a coherent and reliably consistent external reality seems like it might be the key, but just because something works does not mean that it works because the world is a certain way. Its working may be an accident, or the way we understand its working may be flawed in various ways. Rorty’s point is also that we can use any number of different ways of talking about how and why something works with no way to check the world outside of our descriptions of it to see if our descriptions are accurate nor to see which are more or less accurate. Because they are relativising the solution or description to a particular purpose, pragmatists are circumventing the need for a vocabulary that works for all circumstances. Contextualizing beliefs allows for quite different vocabularies that may or may not be reducible to each other. Thus, irreducibility of self-creation and scientific inquiry is due to the incommensurable nature of the comparison. The goal in each case is so different that there is no unit of comparison to apply.

In the introduction of *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* Rorty (1999) argues that Platonism and Christianity have a similar goal: the goal of ‘fusing’ the public and the

only now, in his particular historical moment, the paradigmatic human activity or he could say that it has always been paradigmatic, previous generations just did not recognize it as such.

private (p. xxiii-xvi). Rorty (1999) contends that such attempts to “hold self-creation and justice, private perfection and human solidarity, in a single vision” are destined to fail (p. xiv); he writes,

[T]here is no way to bring self-creation together with justice at the level of theory. The vocabulary of self-creation is necessarily private, unshared, unsuited to argument. The vocabulary of justice is necessarily public and shared, a medium for argumentative exchange. (Rorty, 1999, p. xiv)

Platonism and Christianity both offer descriptions of how one can live his or her life in such a way that he or she is able to become completely self-actualized *and* be just members of society. Rorty sees these as misguided attempts to discuss the disparate goals of self-creation and justice.

Rorty’s public/private distinction is a distinction between those goals and activities of an individual that are necessarily private and those that are related to public life and public goods. Although Rorty does not address scientific inquiry directly in *Contingency*, it is safe to say that science is understood to be a public activity. Science as a public activity provides a significant about of our public vocabulary, and this is why Rorty (1999) cautions us to remember that, “no description is an accurate representation of the way the world is in itself” (p. 4).

Science has provided useful descriptions of the world time and time again. Rorty takes this as a given and does not feel the need to discuss the overwhelming success of scientific inquiry. His point about ‘no description being an accurate description of the way the world is in itself’ is about representation. All descriptions of the world are descriptions from a certain perspective, at the most basic the perspective of humans, and are descriptions of aspects of the world. The world exists as a whole, and attempts to

break it up into smaller parts are arbitrary. We choose to break the world up in certain ways because it is useful to us, not because the world wants us to break it up that particular way. Rorty wants us to jettison the idea of ‘representation’²³ and to accept that the world is not broken up into “sentence-shaped chunks” (Rorty, 1999, p. 5). Recall that Rorty (1999) contends that “it is easy to run together the fact that the world contains the causes of our being justified in holding a belief with the claim that some non-linguistic state of the world is itself an example of truth, or that some such state ‘makes a belief true’ by ‘corresponding’ to it” (p. 5). So the world may be in a state of affairs that justifies us in saying certain things about it, but the things we choose to say about it are not true because they correspond with the world. Rather, ‘true’ is a designation that we use to talk about justified, or highly justified, statements and descriptions.

As Rorty shifts the discussion about truth and representation from single sentences to whole vocabularies, he believes that the picture gets weaker for representation. He writes,

When the notions of ‘description of the world’ is moved from level of criterion-governed sentences within language games to languages games as wholes, games which we do not choose between by reference to criteria, the idea that the world decides which descriptions are true can no longer be given a clear sense. (Rorty, 1999, p. 5)

Because our vocabulary is a human construction, Rorty contends that it does not make sense to talk about things in a way that implies that the world has an intrinsic nature which justifies us in breaking the world up in one way rather than another. We find the distinctions between different kinds of taste useful for our purposes, so we have descriptions of sweet, sour, salty, and bitter, and other words in our vocabularies to

²³ This is the main theme of *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*.

discuss these properties of foods. Until recently in the English language the community of language users had not adopted words to describe other qualities of taste that other cultures had words for. This way of breaking the world up was not seen as adequate, and we have ended up borrowing, from Japanese, the word ‘umami’ to describe an additional kind of taste often translated as ‘brothy,’ ‘meaty,’ or ‘savory.’ Surely, there are many other ways of breaking our experience of the world into descriptions or categories that we have yet to do.

Rorty thinks ultimately that this process of breaking up the world into describable bits is not a kind of discovery. Rather, he uses the word ‘metaphor’ to describe this ‘breaking up of the world’. New ways of using language, or talking about things, are new metaphors. Established ‘facts’ about the world are just ‘dead metaphors.’ All language, even scientific language, is metaphorical in this way. Metaphor creation, on Rorty’s account, typically happens in the private realm. If others find a new metaphor useful, it will be adopted, used in the public realm, and eventually will become a dead metaphor.

Because Rorty objects to discourses that purport to provide absolute Truth,²⁴ he does not view religion with much enthusiasm, but he does not reject it outright either. He just relegates it to the private domain of discourse. He believes that the public domain should be organized in such a way to allow for individuals to participate in their own ‘experiments in living.’²⁵ He wants individuals to have the latitude and freedom to

²⁴ Capital ‘T’ Truth denotes a universal conception of one final, or ultimate, source of all truth.

²⁵ The term ‘experiments in living’ comes from John Stuart Mill. His idea of an experiment in living is just what Rorty thinks society should allow room for. In *On Liberty* Mill (1956) argues that society should be organized in such a way to allow people the broadest possible range of personal activities and modes of

engage in ‘experiments in living’ because there is no way to know *a priori* what will work. Giving individuals this latitude, also, makes space for people to create new metaphors.

This public/private distinction matches the different foci of Peirce and James. Peirce was focused on fixing belief in communities—public discourse, and James expanded on Peirce to discuss fixing of belief in individuals. Importantly, James argues that people should have the freedom to hold beliefs that are meaningful only to themselves or that have consequences that will not be borne out until far into the future. If one believes that her faith will allow her access to heaven once she is dead, then her faith may be justified for her. *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* can be seen as an extension of James’s point.

James (1995) argued that the felt need for moral order is one of the most fundamental urges humans have (p. 41). Rorty argues for the similar point that self-creation is just as important to humans as inquiry. Self-creation may, in fact, be more important to those of us who reject super-naturalism. Owen Flanagan in *Self Expression: Mind, Morals, and the Meaning of Life* describes his own predicament, and in doing so nicely describes the predicament Rorty is talking about,

My rejection of the idea of an immaterial soul required making sense of the mind, of my embodied self, really, in naturalistic terms. The idea that “if there is no

living. He writes, “If it were felt that the free development of individuality is one of the leading essentials of well-being; that it is not only a co-ordinate element with all that is designated by the terms civilization, instruction, education, culture, but is itself a necessary part and condition of all those things; there would be no danger that liberty should be undervalued, and the adjustment of the boundaries between it and social control would present no extraordinary difficulty” (p. 33). He goes on to say, “It is true that this benefit is not capable of being rendered by everybody alike: there are but few persons, in comparison with the whole of mankind, whose experiments, if adopted by others, would be likely to be any improvement on established practice. But these few are the salt of the earth; without them, human life would become a stagnant pool” (p. 37).

God, then everything is allowed”: worried me at the very same time that the prospect of everything being allowed elated me. But then there was the specter of nihilism. If everything is allowed, and if I am just an animal, and if my existence is just some very temporary cosmic accident, then what makes life worth living? Why does anything matter? (Flanagan, 1996, p. vii)

When pragmatism rejects metaphysics, as it does, traditional ways of understanding oneself are indicted. This invites questions about the meaning of one’s life and about one’s selfhood. Even with metaphysics, people still ‘make themselves’ and are interested in self discovery, learning and personal growth, and the meaning of life. Rorty argues that very few people rely completely on science to achieve these ends.

Rorty uses the first half of *Contingency* to describe the contingency of important parts of human life including language, the self, and community. Rorty’s point about language is a smaller, more digestible, rehashing of his points about language and truth in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*. It is the point that our language is the language that past generations found useful, that there is no intrinsic connection between the language that people in the past found useful and the way the world must be described, and that because there is no absolute connection between our received language and the world, we have the power to create new metaphors and replace dead metaphors that are no longer useful for the purposes we have *now*. The language we use now is contingent in the sense that there is no metaphysical or other force of necessity that ties our language to the world; we could have inherited a very different language, and we can create very different language for future generations. The point is that if we were to rewind the tape of history and re-play it, we would end up with a quite different vocabulary.

The second chapter, about the contingency of selfhood, makes the point that self-creation is important to people and important in a way that cannot be handled by or

described satisfactorily by science. The contingency of self means the possibility of changing who and what one is. Of course the possibility of ‘making oneself’ or of ‘self-creation’ is not absolute; the physical and psychological as well as contextual barriers exist. One might always be able to re-define by changing their own private vocabulary, or as Rorty calls it one’s ‘final vocabulary’, but even in this case one faces practical limits such as time, level of education, and creativity. Finally, Rorty’s point about community is that there is no specific arrangement of social life that is *a priori* best. We can change social institutions; our social institutions are contingent.

When we take the contingency of selfhood and community together, we get a sense of the flexibility in Rorty’s vision. He sketches a picture of a world where the vocabulary of truth as correspondence and language as definite are given up, a world where self-creation and social solidarity are understood to be incommensurable. Rorty (1999) writes, “I shall claim that the vocabulary ... which revolves around notions of metaphor and self-creation rather than around notions of truth, rationality, and moral obligation, is better suited for [the progress of democratic societies]” (p. 44).

Rorty spends the second half of the book making the point that literature, ethnography, and journalism are important for the purposes of self-creation and social solidarity. Among literature, ethnography, and journalism, Rorty’s personal passion is clearly literature. Thus, he uses literature as his example to show how it can be useful for self-creation and solidarity. He does not make this point in a unifying way. He does not try to show how the same pieces of literature can be useful for both problems. Instead he shows us how Nabokov is useful as a tool to help us recognize that we, too, are capable

of cruelty, and how Orwell is useful as a tool to help us recognize cruelty in political systems.

He wants us to see that the products of these enterprises are just as valuable as science, but valuable for different purposes—for example, the purposes of personal growth and community solidarity. Rorty does not use pragmatism to make these claims, so the argument is not about his pragmatism. This argument is an example of what arguments look like in his vision of a pragmatic world. Any who accept the tenets of pragmatism recognize that there is no non-circular way to argue about things like, how should society be organized, or what kinds of dialogues should we prioritize. Rorty shows us that from the pragmatic perspective arguments cannot find a ‘foundation’ nor can they rest on the ‘essential nature’ of something. Rather, arguments start from some perspective, from within a particular context, and proceed by trying to convince others to adopt new vocabulary.

The question about which discipline helps people understand themselves best, be it literature or philosophy, and a description of how this process works is beyond the scope of Rorty’s argument. He aims only to show 1) we have at least one other characteristically human desire (besides easing the irritation of doubt), 2) that the aim of self-creation is an example, and 3) that literature, among other things, is useful as a tool of self-creation. He acknowledges that science is better at prediction and control over the natural world (Rorty, 1999, p. 6). But contends that prediction and control are not the aims of literature, poetry, or ethnography. So, Rorty is not arguing that these things work better than other things; he is just making the point that there is a different set of issues that are important to people. Referring to the creation of one’s own vocabulary, Rorty

(1999) writes, “[W]e need not speak only the language of the tribe, ... we may find our own words, ... we may have a responsibility to ourselves to find them” (p. xiv).

So when Rorty argues, in *Contingency*, that literature is useful for helping us understand how awful cruelty is and how we can be cruel without recognizing it, he is starting from the presupposition that society will be better the more it comes to see cruelty as a negative thing. This presupposition is warranted based on Rorty’s experience, but it cannot be argued for in a non-circular way—nothing can be (Rorty, 1999, p. 197).

Rorty can be interpreted as only offering an example of what an argument looks like in a pragmatic world but not really embracing the conclusion of the argument. However, restricting him in this way would be missing something of his point. It is quite clear from the book that Rorty embraces the argument he is making. He writes, “In what follows I shall be trying to reformulate the hopes of liberal society in a nonrationalist and nonuniversalist way – one which furthers their realization better than older descriptions of them did” (Rorty, 1999, pp. 44-5). So it seems that we should take Rorty’s argument as both an example of a pragmatic argument and as an argument about what kinds of values society should be pursuing.

This second point, about what values society should be pursuing, is somewhat problematic from a pragmatic perspective. The way he argues for the values of liberalism and personal vocabulary creation, or ironism, is theoretical and not a step-by-step account of how to implement his grand view of how the world can be. Instead, he offers an exposition of the kinds of lessons that literature can teach us as individuals and as members of communities.

I think this is the origin of many of the problems that critics have with Rorty. He is offering a grand romantic narrative in the sense that he is not starting from a grounded position. His view is not about how we can get from here to there, but rather it is an appeal to us to value his 'destination'. Rorty thinks, also, that we can use his language to get us there. For a pragmatist Rorty is quite theoretical, grand, and sweeping in his writing. This is one of the very best things about reading Rorty: he pulls you in and takes you for a journey, but it can also be problematic. In addition to charges of offering a grand unifying and romantic narrative, Rorty is also charged with offering a Bourgeoisie picture of the world.

Both of these charges share a common thread. John Hick makes the point that if there is no god then there are dire consequences for humans (2004, p. 21-24).²⁶ This is not an uncommon sentiment.²⁷ The problem is that pragmatism, by getting rid of the

²⁶ Hick (2004) writes specifically, "We see around us the different levels that the human spirit has reached and we know, from our own self-knowledge and observation and reading, that the generality of us have a very long way to go before we can be said to have become fully human. But if the naturalistic picture is correct, this can never happen. For according to naturalism, the evil that has afflicted so much of human life is final and irrevocable as the victims have ceased to exist" (p. 23).

²⁷ In *The God Part of the Brain* Matthew Alper (2006) describes his own thought process when he contemplated religious belief and naturalism, "So either God exists, and I'm immortal, or God does not exist, in which case this brief and purposeless stay here on Earth is all I will ever know. With God, as is saved. Without Him, all is lost, including hope. Between His existence and non-existence, there is no gray area. There is no in-between. Nothing lies between the infinite and the finite, between the eternal and the temporal, between ultimate purpose and meaninglessness, between immortality and death. And so, as man finds himself in the world and as he stands facing it, is the problem of God's existence that demands, more than any other, to be solved" (p. 5).

In a beautiful passage Bertrand Russell (1918) writes, "that Man is the product of causes which had no prevision of the end they were achieving; that his origin, his growth, his hopes and fears, his loves and his beliefs, are but the outcome of the accidental collocations of atoms; that no fire, no heroism, no intensity of thought and feeling, can preserve an individual life beyond the grave; that all the labours of the ages, all the devotion, all the inspiration, all the noonday brightness of human genius, are destined to extinction in the vast death of the solar system, and that the whole temple of Man's achievement must inevitably be buried beneath the debris of a universe in ruins – all these things, if not quite beyond dispute, are yet so nearly certain, that no philosophy that rejects them can hope to stand. Only within the scaffolding of these truths, only on the firm foundation of unyielding despair, can the soul's habitation henceforth be safely built" (p. 47-8).

hope of the eternal, by naturalizing everything, leaves a quite bleak picture of human existence: we are born, we grow old, and then we die—end of story. The charge that Rorty’s view is too grand, sweeping, and romantic is basically a charge that he is not taking this point properly into perspective. The charge that he is offering a bourgeoisie philosophy is a charge that he ignores the bleakness of most human’s existence in order to provide a picture of a bourgeoisie life as a possibility for all human societies. Hick points out, “The optimistic aspect of a naturalistic worldview rings true to those who have been fortunate, but not to those who have been unfortunate in the circumstances of their birth and environment. Humanists or naturalists can only be regarded as realistic when they are ready to acknowledge this” (Hick, 2004, p. 20).

In response to this, Rorty and James make the point that without metaphysics and absolutes, humans are free to make the world as they want. Rorty emphasizes that we are now only bound²⁸ to leave behind the kind of world we want our grandchildren to inherit. This is contingency; this is freedom.

From this perspective, without religion, without truth as representation, without any external entity to which we have a responsibility to get things ‘right’ for, the picture may be bleak for many, but it also means that we are free to make the world the way we want it. This is burdensome in terms of responsibility, but it is only completely bad news if one has a view about the intrinsic nature of humans as bad.²⁹ For those who think that

²⁸ The sense of bound is a moral commitment that we most likely feel but are not obligated to feel.

²⁹ Hick, in making the point that the naturalistic worldview is ultimately bad for us, is clearly someone who thinks that human nature is intrinsically bad. He writes, “We human beings are for so much of the time selfish, narrow-minded, emotionally impoverished, unconcerned about others, often vicious and cruel. But according to the great religions there are wonderfully better possibilities concealed within us” (Hick, 2004,

humans are ultimately good, the picture may be better. Rorty is neutral on this, he does not believe that humans have an 'intrinsic' nature, either good or bad. He thinks that we make our social structures, and ourselves and we, therefore, have the power to continually improve both.

Rorty (2000a) accepts that the picture he paints is bourgeoisie, and this is okay because the luxuries of middle class life in a liberal society are what he thinks we ought to aim to provide for everyone. People, he thinks, would be best off in a system that is sufficiently liberal to both be a government focused on reducing harm to its citizens and also liberal enough to allow people the room to make their own lives.

Heidegger characterizes *being* in terms of death or being-toward-death as the human condition, and then he argues that authenticity includes facing one's own finitude (*Being and Time*). By facing one's death authentically, we are able to self-create. Rorty uses Heidegger as an example of an ironist, a person whose self-creation is the most important thing to him or herself. Heidegger, and ostensibly Rorty too, do not see the fact that this is a bleak picture of human life to be any sort of problem philosophically. Facing finitude is part of our being, so we can either take the opportunity to self-create and to create the social institutions we think are good, or we can wallow in our misfortune at being finite.

Hick levels this charge against the kind of view that Rorty espouses,

I do not suggest that such a message is therefore false; an elitist philosophy could be the truth about our human situation. But will its proponents please face and acknowledge its grim implications. For no form of naturalism can be other than

p. 23). Rorty thinks that our situation is contingent; thus, any attempt to essentialize what we are as humans is making a metaphysical claim which he rejects.

bad news for humankind when we look beyond our own relatively fortunate circumstances. (Hick, 2004, p. 21)

Although Hick acknowledges that the so-called ‘bleak’ naturalistic picture of human existence is not false because it is bleak, he does focus a whole chapter in his book *The Fifth Dimension* to make the point that naturalism is ultimately a bad picture of humanity because of its lack of hope. James thought that because of the indeterminacy inherent in a naturalistic worldview, there should be room for people to have religious faith, a faith he characterized as the belief that humanity would converge with goodness in the end or would end up ‘alright.’ He thought that when the possible future consequences are indeterminate one could try to avoid error in either way, to withhold belief in ultimate goodness, or to have faith that it will all work out in the end.

Rorty would largely agree with James, but he also largely ignores the value of religious faith in helping people to self-create. This is likely because Rorty wants us to get out of the trap of comparison between our finite situations, and our contingent language, with any ultimate metaphysical state of things. Instead, Rorty focuses on the desire for self-creation, and he argues that this desire is just as important as our desire to understand our physical surroundings, just as important as our urges for justice.

Here we see a difference between Rorty’s reliance on language and James and Peirce’s reliance on experience. The latter two focused much more on practice than Rorty does. So while James describes religious practice as a way of alleviating the anxiety of facing finitude, Rorty shows us how we can use language, rather than metaphysical hopes, to self-create as a way of handling our finitude.

Although Rorty does address our public concerns for justice and social solidarity, his strongest point, and a point he seems to belabor most, is the importance for beings like us to self-create and the irreconcilability of public pursuits and this private pursuit of self-creation.³⁰ Rorty's focus on the private and argument for the importance of it is clearly in line with James but is strikingly different from Peirce's in its omission of discussion about science.

For Peircian pragmatists, the force that science has globally cannot be diminished. The ability of methods of science to apply to a quite large subset of human desires with tangible results is unparalleled by any other discourse. Methods of science can even be applied to test how well literature meets the goal of helping people to realize that cruelty is wrong or that they themselves are capable of cruelty even when they are not intending to be cruel. Literature can be employed to help get the results of science disseminated to the community, but it cannot be applied to see if science works to achieve its results.

There is something asymmetrical about the relationship between science and other kinds of discourse that is not captured by Rorty. Seemingly science has 'forced' itself on many areas of human life that were previously thought to be the domain of other disciplines³¹ because of its utility in problem solving. Perhaps Rorty takes this point as a given and is just offering a soft nudge in the direction of accepting other discourses as publicly useful. Rorty's nudge, however, is not so soft; he is trying to draw our attention

³⁰ It is important to note that Rorty's public/private distinction is not an absolute split. Rather, he sees certain kinds of self-creation and certain pursuits for justice as opposite extremes on a continuum. So there will be times when one's public and private concerns converge, and for some people there may be a convergence most of the time. Rorty's point is that this is not always the case, and for some people it will rarely be the case, that people's public and private concerns converge.

to the idea that being human in a finite world involves the importance of self-creation and social solidarity. And he likely thinks that these things are more important to us as individuals than technological advances produced by science.

Rorty accepts the power of science at prediction and control, but he can be understood as arguing that its ability to produce tools for us is not nearly as important to us as finite individuals as the quests for self-creation and solidarity. By contending that solidarity and the urges for justice are the important aspects of public discourse, Rorty implies that science is not the kind of enterprise that can address these public goods which have little, or nothing, to do with prediction and control.

So Rorty does not ignore the public; rather, he tries to help us see the public differently than Peirce did. Peirce and Clifford argue for the importance of our individual beliefs on the community, what we believe affects the community. We have an obligation to hold true beliefs. This obligation to the truth is important, but what the real value is, the value that upholds Peirce's and Clifford's contention that truth is important, is a commitment to solidarity. Seeing these as valuable will incline us towards taking care of our neighbors. Science, according to Rorty, cannot make us want to take care of our neighbors; technological advances can help us to take care of them but cannot produce the urge in us. Literature can. Literature is more likely to convince us, to care for others, by helping us identify with their suffering.

One might argue that Rorty misses some of the power of science to create solidarity. Peirce thought that the motivation towards inquiry was a fundamental part of the human experience. The motivation to understand is not included in Rorty's picture of public discourse. Perhaps science has the power to convince us of our contingency

through a proper science education. An education into the actualities of science practice may help people realize that science is not absolute. Alper, in his book *The God Part of the Brain* explains that,

[N]o matter how much faith one places in science, he must realize that at no time can it ever represent anything more than just another belief system, just another way by which humans can choose to interpret reality. I say this not out of any lack of conviction but only because not even science can guarantee anything with absolute certainty. Nothing can! (Alper, 2006, p. 15-6)

Although Rorty says science cannot teach us about our contingency, a proper education can. Rorty is a proponent of edifying philosophy and might be supportive of using science education to convince people of their contingency or about the importance of solidarity.

Rorty is not anti-science, but he does largely leave science out of the picture. The most favorable way to interpret this is that he accepts naturalism but does not consider naturalistic explanations the ‘most accurate’ or the ‘most important’. Philosophy can go on, but in a different way. He does want to get rid of certain kinds of ways of talking about things, and these ways of talking about things are popular in philosophy. The example is an application of both science and philosophy.

We must realize, however, that inquiry is not the only value in human life. Rorty contends that it may not even be the most important thing we do. What Rorty wants is not an end to science, but the beginning of a dialogue.³² A dialogue that addresses the ability of science to create solidarity, or help other disciplines find out which practices of theirs have good results in this area.

³² See “Response to Jacques Bouveresse” in *Rorty and His Critics* where Rorty (2000b) once again stresses the difference between public and private pursuits. He acknowledges the public virtues that science engenders, specifically, objective discussions that do not result in personal attacks.

Many pragmatists and non-pragmatists alike are enthralled with science because of its power. Rorty does not want us to ignore this power, but wants us to question whether or not it ought to be as important to us as it is. He prompts us to ask the following questions: Does the focus on science prevent us from giving due value to issues of private self-creation? Within the public realm is inquiry more motivating and more important to us than justice? Is understanding the world really more important than creating just social institutions? Can technological advances create in us the desire to expand the circle of people we feel solidarity with?

If we separate Rorty's argument about what we should value more in society from his arguments about truth and representation, then we can apply his stance on truth and representation to scientific practice. By doing this it should become clear that a Rortyan position has something to add to ongoing scientific dialogues. This is a less radical way to interpret Rorty than merely taking him as being anti-science. Interpretations of Rorty that see him as not properly valuing science and the objectivity of it are, I think, missing his point. He sees science as good at meeting its goals, but wants us to reconsider the goals we have, namely, are the purposes of science really that important in the long run. Rorty's position on truth and representation can help us avoid the temptation to believe that science needs absolute and context-free yardsticks of rationality or truth as correspondence to work.

Chapter 3 – Cognitive Psychology and Behavioral Economics as an Illustration

From about the early 1970s there has been a renewed interest in bounded rationality, a concept pioneered by Herbert Simon in the late 1930s. Simon’s model of rationality suggests that people, rather than optimizing their choices, actually make decisions by finding a choice that satisfies the important criteria the person has. The model takes into account the practical limits we face as embedded and embodied beings. The renewed interest in rationality in cognitive psychology and behavioral economics has focused on finding and illustrating how and when people deviate from the ideal of superhuman rationality. As noted earlier, W.V.O Quine (1969) argued that epistemology should dissolve into psychology (pp. 82-3). This research in behavioral economics and cognitive psychology is along the lines of what Quine (1969) argued for when he wrote,

Epistemology, or something like it, simply falls into place as a chapter of psychology and hence of natural science. It studies a natural phenomenon, viz., a physical human subject. This human subject is accorded a certain experimentally controlled input—certain patterns of irradiation in assorted frequencies, for instance—and in the fullness of time the subject delivers as output a description of the three-dimensional external world and its history. The relation between the meager input and the torrential output is a relation that we are prompted to study for somewhat the same reason that always prompted epistemology; namely, in order to see how evidence relates to theory, and in what ways one’s theory of nature transcends any available evidence. (pp. 82-83)

Quine suggests that understanding the causal mechanisms associated with belief and the neurophysiology of human cognition will provide satisfactory answers to epistemological concerns over the relation between evidence and theory.³³

³³ When Quine argues that epistemology can dissolve into psychology, a scientific discipline, I am interpreting him as espousing the underlying assumption that epistemology has only a descriptive function. The descriptive function would be to “see how evidence relates to theory ...” (Quine, 1969, p. 83). This ignores the normative function of epistemology, a function that Rorty recognizes. My interpretation of Quine is shared by Rorty (2009, pp. 221-223), Richard Feldman (2003, p. 168), and Larry Laudan (1990, p. 45); however, it has been suggested that Rorty can also be interpreted as saying “scientific norms are norms

According to Rorty, Quine's answer is an insufficient response to epistemological problems, because it maintains that there are epistemological questions to answer. Rorty (2009) writes, "We may talk about irradiated patches on a two-dimensional retina or pulses in the optic nerve, but this will be a matter of choosing a black box, not of discovering touchstones for inquiry" (p. 225). His point, that a single psychological or neurophysiological explanation of vision is just one among many ways of describing vision, is that discussion about which theory best matches the evidence is no replacement for the quest for a standard by which to judge the results of inquiry. Rorty wants, instead of letting epistemology dissolve into psychology, to convince people to jettison, altogether, the quest for 'touchstones of inquiry'.³⁴

To jettison the quest for universal standards of inquiry, or touchstones of inquiry, is a goal that is equally applicable to philosophy and psychology. In philosophy it means dropping the epistemologist's quest for certain foundations for knowledge. In economics and psychology it means using appropriate standards to judge beliefs. The work of behavioral economists and cognitive psychologists provides an interesting case study to

enough" (T. Nickles, personal communication, May 5, 2009). Quine (1966) famously wrote, "philosophy of science is philosophy enough" (p. 151), and by extending this sentiment to the current issue we might understand Quine as saying something along the lines of "scientific norms are norms enough." If Quine is interpreted this way, then his position is nearly the same as Rorty's. One difference would remain; Rorty would not restrict us to scientific norms. His point is that domain, or content and context, specific norms are norms enough.

³⁴ This is not to say that Rorty thinks that warranting a claim is unimportant. In fact, another point of disagreement with Quine is that this sort of warrant belongs to the logical space of reasons, not the space of physiological causes. This point differentiates Rorty's broad sort of naturalism from Quine's reductive, scientific naturalism. So what does Rorty mean by a "touchstone of inquiry"? This denotes a *universal* standard by which all inquiry is judged. The alternative to this, which Rorty endorses, is that norms emerge from practice and are specific to the particular practice. A norm of inquiry should be relative to the content and context of inquiry. Contextualizing epistemology alone is a significant departure from traditional, universal-reason centered, epistemology. However, arguing that rationality is also content specific may call into question some fallibilist epistemologies that have been popular since the writings of Peirce, James, and John Dewey.

which to apply Rorty's pragmatism because in these fields experimentation, necessarily, compares particular judgments against certain norms of 'good' judgment chosen by the experimenters.

Behavioral economists and cognitive psychologists seem to be working with or towards naturalized epistemology in Quine's sense, but the norms they use to compare reasoning strategies and outcomes remain an important topic of discussion. Rorty's philosophical stance on truth and representation and his arguments for rejecting absolutism and foundationalism entail that because there is no absolute answer to what constitutes 'good reasoning', the standards we choose to use are up for debate. Programs of research about rationality and irrationality have focused on how and when people are rational and irrational, but their writings suggest that the question of which norms to judge human reasoning against is not as prominent as it ought to be. Which reasoning strategies and results we label rational or irrational are dictated by the normative standards we use as yardsticks of rationality.

In light of Rorty's critique of philosophy, we should not expect that standards of rationality will be able to be defended in non-circular ways. Just as Rorty's example of a pragmatic argument in *Contingency, Irony, and Solidarity* is a jumping off point for discussions about what values we should value most for ourselves or for our communities, an argument for using a particular standard of rationality will necessarily start from within the discipline.³⁵ Non-circularity from a Rortyan perspective means that

³⁵ Rorty, by endorsing this hermeneutical or conversational approach generating or constructing norms, dodges an objection some social constructionists make against pragmatism. The objection he dodges is that 'what works' is itself a social construction and not a direct appeal to nature. Rorty's approach may be historicist enough to dodge this objection by appealing to continued dialogue. The appeal to continued dialogue suggests that norms are historically relative and can continue to be debated in each era. Rorty gets

there is no point outside of the discussion from which we can adjudicate the argument. The norms we use will develop out of our practice, with norms and practice mutually influencing each other. These kinds of discussions revolve around which values we should hold, how we should prioritize them, and what norms should be used for which purposes.

Rorty cannot argue, using utility, that absolutist and foundationalist premises are wrong because they do not work. Whether or not absolutist and foundationalist premises work in scientific inquiry is an empirical question—a matter of consequences. Although Rorty calls for philosophers to cease using absolutist and foundationalist language because he thinks the language is not useful for philosophical purposes, regarding scientific practice, he can only suggest that research will likely not suffer if absolutist and foundationalist assumptions are discarded. The argument that science needs foundationalist premises in order to be productive is similar to arguments that society needs religious foundations in order to keep moral order. History has shown time and again that foundationalism has not been necessary for many enterprises; Rorty suspects that this is the case with science, too.

Three *New York Times* best sellers of the past three years disseminate the findings of behavioral economics and cognitive psychology. The three books are *Nudge: Improving Decisions About Health, Wealth, and Happiness* by Richard Thaler and Cass Sunstein, *Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions* by Dan Ariely, and *Sway: The Irresistible Pull of Irrational Behavior* by Ori and Rom Brafman.

away with this because his naturalistic approach is weak in that it does not suppose that naturalistic explanation is the paragon.

All five authors describe the intentions of their writing as largely humanistic. Ariely (2009) writes,

[T]his book is about human irrationality—about our distance from perfection. I believe that recognizing where we depart from the ideal is an important part of the quest to truly understand ourselves, and one that promises many practical benefits. Understanding irrationality is important for our everyday actions and decisions, and for understanding how we design our environments and the choices it presents to us. (p. xxxix)

Brafman and Brafman (2008) write,

In this book we'll explore several of the psychological forces that derail rational thinking. Wherever we looked—across different sectors, countries, and cultures—we saw different people being swayed in very similar ways. We're all susceptible to the sway of irrational behaviors. But by better understanding the seductive pull of these forces, we'll be less likely to fall victim to them in the future. (p. 7)

And, finally Thaler and Sunstein (2009) write,

[W]e welcome you to our new movement: *libertarian paternalism*. ...The libertarian aspects of our strategies lies in the straightforward insistence that, in general, people should be free to do what they like—and to opt out of undesirable arrangements if they want to do so. ... The paternalistic aspect lies in the claim that it is legitimate for choice architects to try to influence people's behaviors in order to make their lives longer, healthier, and better. In our understanding a policy is 'paternalistic' if it tries to influence choices in a way that will make choosers better off, *as judged by themselves*. Drawing on well-established findings in social science, we show that in many cases, individuals make pretty bad decisions—decisions that they would not have made if they had paid full attention and possessed complete information, unlimited cognitive abilities, and complete self-control. (p. 5)

Clearly, these books are humanistic in their stated goals of helping us make better decisions and to better understand the effects of unconscious psychological forces on our behavior. The focus on how we 'design our environments', also, suggests a contextualized evaluation of human reasoning and decision-making. For these reasons, these books can be favorably viewed as pragmatic in nature. The research can apply to

whole populations (designing a voting system), to sub-populations (physicians or nurses), to people with peculiar mental functioning (autism), or to individuals.

If we pay close attention to the books' titles and their statements of purpose, we see something more interesting from the perspective of a Rortyan pragmatist.

Immediately the word 'irrational' jumps out from the titles and statements of purpose of two of the three books. Brafman, Brafman and Ariely apparently retain the pre-pragmatic conception of rationality, characteristic of modern philosophy since Descartes.³⁶ When theorists argue that certain 'reasoning errors' show that we are indeed 'irrational' we should be suspicious. Statements about our apparent 'irrationality' may belie a comparison between our actual thinking and 'ideal' processing. To a Rortyan pragmatist this comparison is unwarranted.³⁷

Two of the three books do, indeed, use perfect rationality as a standard against which to judge particular human reasoning. Ariely explicitly states that he wants to show that the model of superhuman rationality, which is often still used in economics, is wrong, but he continues to use it in comparisons with actual reasoning. Brafman and Brafman also suggest that their purpose is to show the ideal of super-human cognitive functioning to be false; like Ariely, they too use super-human cognitive functioning to compare to actual human reasoning. The third book, however, contains no references to

³⁶ To be fair, Ariely does recognize the problems with this conception of rationality and is explicitly working to supplant it with a more accurate conception of rationality. However, he still uses it as the standard to which to compare actual human reasoning.

³⁷ Rorty writes that in order to fend off suspicion that he is a relativist and an irrationalist he needs to, "argue that the distinctions between absolutism and relativism, between rationality and irrationality, and between morality and expediency are obsolete and clumsy tools – remnants of a vocabulary we should try to replace. But 'argument' is not the right word. For on my account of intellectual progress as the literalization of selected metaphors, rebutting objections to one's redescrptions of some things will be largely a matter of redescrbing other things, trying to outflank the objections by enlarging the scope of one's favorite metaphors" (Rorty, 1999, p. 44).

perfect rationality as a yardstick. Its authors do not classify as irrational human judgment that fails to meet certain externally imposed standards of rationality. Instead, Thaler and Sunstein use a person's subjective standard for him- or herself to compare the subject's actual judgments. This approach is strikingly close to James's and Rorty's subjectivism.

The similarity of the topics discussed by these three books suggests that alternative descriptions of human rationality are workable in the disciplines of cognitive psychology and behavioral economics. These books, however, do not, for the most part, debate the premises of the research they report. They are, basically, written to disseminate the findings of research and not to argue the merits of what an appropriate research question or result is. From the fact that a set of authors can offer a description of the results that does not rely on super-human rationality as the yardstick to which particular judgments are compared, it does not follow that the actual research can be done without the concept of super-human rationality. In order for cognitive psychology and behavioral economics to be an illustration of a particular scientific field that is able to function without the absolutist conceptions of rationality, it still needs to be demonstrated that the actual research in these fields can be done without this concept.

Two camps of researchers in cognitive psychology have debated each other in the psychology literature about how and when it is proper to use 'perfect rationality' as a yardstick. Gerd Gigerenzer and his colleagues at the Max Plank Institute for Human Development argue that norms of rationality need to be made with both content and context in mind. Gigerenzer is highly critical of the research methodology of and the interpretations of research findings done by Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky. Kahneman and Tversky admittedly used "rational-agent models as their starting point"

(Kahneman, 2003, p. 1449).³⁸ Gigerenzer is not only critical of this starting point; he also conducts his own research without using the rational-agent model as the standard of rational human judgment.

In the article, “On Narrow Norms and Vague Heuristics: A Reply to Kahneman and Tversky” Gigerenzer takes issue with Kahneman and Tversky’s use of superhuman rationality as a yardstick to compare the experimental result to in order to determine if the participants’ decisions are rational. The article is a direct response to “On the Reality of Cognitive Illusions” by Kahneman and Tversky published in the same issue of the *Psychological Review* where Kahneman and Tversky (1996) lay out their major research project, which finds that “intuitive predictions and judgments are often mediated by a small number of distinctive mental operations, which we call *judgmental heuristics*” (p. 582). Throughout their article Kahneman and Tversky characterize the results of the cognitive processes they study to be ‘errors’ of human rationality, and they use acontextual logical and statistical norms as the basis of ‘rationality’. In one example³⁹ they judge people’s reasoning against the logical conjunction rule and a ‘controversial’ theory of probability that allows probability to be assessed regarding singular events (Gigerenzer, 1996, p. 593, and Kahneman & Tversky, 1996, p. 582).⁴⁰

³⁸ “Our research attempted to obtain a map of bounded rationality, by exploring the systematic biases that separate the beliefs that people have and the choices they make from the optimal beliefs and choices assumed in rational-agent models. The rational-agent model was our starting point and the main source of our null hypotheses” (Kahneman, 2003, p. 1449).

³⁹ They use the popular ‘Linda’ example where participants are asked what they think the probability that Linda is (a) a bank teller or (b) a bank teller and a feminist after being given a description of her that suggests she is someone who is interested in social activism.

⁴⁰ “Kahneman and Tversky ... have subscribed to a controversial doctrine that indiscriminately evaluates all statements about single events by the laws of probability. I do not object to their philosophy, everyone is free to have one. But I do object to imposing it as a norm of sound reasoning on the participants in

Gigerenzer argues first that the heuristics and biases discussed by Kahneman and Tversky are too broad. This is a point about how accurate the heuristics and biases explanation of human cognition actually is. The question of which, if any, models of cognition discussed by either group accurately 'reflect' how our brains actually processes data is beyond the scope of the issue at hand. Gigerenzer also charges that the interpretations of experimental results offered by Kahneman and Tversky explain too little to be appropriate accounts of cognition. Gigerenzer writes, "Too little because we do not know when these heuristics work and how; too much, because, post hoc, one of them can be fitted to almost any experimental result" (Gigerenzer, 1996, p. 592). Most importantly, for this discussion, Gigerenzer argues that Kahneman and Tversky use an inappropriate standard against which they judge particular experimental results. The standard used by Kahneman and Tversky neglects the content and the context of the cognitive 'errors' they study, according to Gigerenzer. He writes, "The content of the problem is not analyzed in building a normative model, nor are the specific assumptions people make about the situation" (Gigerenzer, 1996, p. 592). When it comes to choosing norms from which to judge reasoning strategies, Gigerenzer argues, the content *and* the context of the problem must be taken into account. So, Gigerenzer is arguing that reason is not a faculty that is independent of the content it is applied to as has been generally accepted since Descartes.

psychological experiments and as a criterion by which to diagnose cognitive illusions" (Gigerenzer, 1996, p. 593).

Gigerenzer holds that context and content are extremely important in coming up with a norm to use in research about human cognition and decision-making.⁴¹ Chapters in Gigerenzer's book *Calculated Risk* (2002) focus on breast cancer screening, informed consent in medical settings, AIDS counseling, DNA Fingerprinting, and understanding statistics about violence. Gigerenzer discusses norms in these very specific content areas. Tversky and Kahneman, on the other hand, use vague allusions about how their explanations can be applied to specific content/contexts, "People are sometimes called upon to make such numerical prediction as the future value of a stock, the demand for a commodity, or the outcome of a football game. Such predictions are often made by representativeness" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1974, p. 1127).

Only after focusing on the context of the problem can one develop meaningful normative standards for reasoning, according to Gigerenzer. These standards will be different for doctors and nurses in similar settings because of the different roles each has. This argument can also be applied to groups of people who, for whatever reason, function differently than the majority of the population. Temple Grandin, an engineer with autism, discusses in her book *Thinking in Pictures* the specific kinds of tasks at which she is successful because of her particular 'autistic' way of thinking. She describes her thinking as 'thinking in pictures.' She contends that because she 'thinks in pictures' instead of language, she is successful in designing and engineering animal control systems for slaughter houses, feed lots, and zoos (Grandin, 1996). Ignoring the content and context, which include peculiarities of cognitive function, of the reasoning problems

⁴¹ Gigerenzer writes, "Content-blind norms are appropriate for textbook problems in probability theory, where the content is only decorative, but they are not appropriate either for evaluating human judgment or as a research tool to uncover the underlying processes" (Gigerenzer, 1996, p. 593).

Grandin faces is problematic. She is able to function quite well at certain kinds of tasks, and it would be wrong to judge her by a standard that did not take this into account.

Likewise, Gigerenzer believes that an acceptable account of human judgment ought to be able to explain when and why people's reasoning fails to meet the standards against which they are being judged. This would include discussions about what changes in content and context eliminate and exacerbate the particular cognitive failing that is under scrutiny. It is not only the neglect of content and context that Gigerenzer finds troubling about Kahneman and Tversky's research program; he also objects to their use of certain norms as standards for 'rational' judgment.

In *Calculated Risk* Gigerenzer (2002) explains how probability norms are used arbitrarily in the area of paternity testing,⁴²

In order to estimate the probability that a man is the father of a particular child, one needs a prior probability, or base rate, as in medical diagnoses. But what could that prior probability be? Many laboratories deal with this problem simply by assuming that the nongenetic evidence in every paternity case indicates that there is a prior probability of .5 that the defendant in a paternity case is the father. The laboratories defend this arbitrary value by citing the *principle of indifference*: either the alleged father is the father or he is not, therefore the prior probability is .5 for each possibility. This practice is controversial because it implies that, in every paternity case, the defendant is as likely to be the father as all other men put together. The principle of indifference has a long history in the law. (pp. 177-8)

It is obviously false that any one man is just as likely to be the father in any given paternity test as all other men *put together*. This leads to the paradoxical result that any man at random who is selected for testing will be assumed to have base-rate probability of one out of two of fathering the child meaning that all other men together are counted as one. The choice of norm is not something that science can 'ground'; rather, it is

⁴² Please note that Gigerenzer's example is not directed specifically at Kahneman and Tversky. It is just a critical example of the way norms are selected and utilized in scientific testing.

something that is open to discussion and argumentation. I see this as an area where philosophers might have something to add, and I think Rorty might agree. After all, Rorty seems most interested in people offering interpretations and igniting discussion. There will be no 'right' answer in terms of correspondence with how things 'ought' to be, but, from the Rortyan perspective, dialogue is apt to produce more and more useful answers.

Kahneman (2003) seems to understand that "rational models are psychologically unrealistic" (p. 1450), but he does not seem to accept the criticism that the norms he employs are inappropriate because they are content blind. He and Tversky do, however, accept that, "[w]hen framing influences the experience of consequences, the adoption of a decision frame is an ethically significant act" (Tversky & Kahneman, 1981, p. 458). They do not apply this finding to their own construction of norms to judge people's decision making by; rather, they believe that the guidance of logic and statistics can universally be applied to ferret out irrational judgments regardless of the content or context of the judgment.

One of the ways I have suggested that we can interpret Rorty's stance regarding the need for foundations, correspondence, and representation between our tools and the unknowable world, is to see him as offering a challenge to us. He wants us to see whether or not we can get along with our activities, including science, without using these problematic concepts. This is analogous to the challenge by religious folks that religion is necessary as the basis for morality, and that without it society would deteriorate.

Modern secular democracies in Scandinavia and Western Europe have secularized, both institutionally and among individual citizens, far beyond where many religious leaders believed that society would have begun deteriorating. Yet, despite the secularization, these countries have among the highest human development rankings in the world.⁴³ It seems that secularization has not led to the deterioration of societies, and is, perhaps, correlated with higher national human development.

I am suggesting that Rorty be interpreted as imploring us to continue without the unnecessary foundationalist vocabularies. Only after this happens can we make a judgment about whether or not these vocabularies, ‘work better’, or are ‘needed’ by the scientific community, or any other discipline now utilizing foundationalist concepts.

Applying this challenge to eliminate foundationalist vocabularies to cognitive psychology and behavioral economics, we find an interesting connection between the researchers and authors already mentioned from this field. Kahneman and Tversky, who insisted on using a rational-man standard to judge reasoning by, are/were frequent collaborators with Cass Sunstein and Richard Thaler in various combinations.⁴⁴ Yet,

⁴³ Norway was ranked by the United Nations number one in terms of human development in 2009 (United Nations Development Programme, 2009).

⁴⁴ In various combinations the four men have collaborated on the following research/journal articles, “Anomalies: Utility Maximization and Experienced Utility” (Kahneman & Thaler, 2006); “The Effect of Myopia and Loss Aversion on Risk Taking: An Experimental Test” (Thaler, et al, 1997); “Anomalies: The Endowment Effect, Loss Aversion, and Status Quo Bias” (Kahneman, et al, 1991); “Economic Analysis and the Psychology of Utility: Applications to Compensation Policy” (Kahneman & Thaler, 1991); “Experimental Tests of the Endowment Effect and the Coase Theorem” (Kahneman, et al, 1990); “Fairness and the Assumptions of Economics” (Kahneman, et al, 1986a); “Fairness as a Constraint on Profit Seeking: Entitlements in the Market” (Kahneman, et al, 1986b); “Predictably Incoherent Judgments” (Sunstein, et al, 2002); “Do People Want Optimal Deterrence?” (Sunstein, et al, 2000); “Deliberating About Dollars: The Severity Shift” (Sunstein, et al, 2000); “Shared Outrage and Erratic Awards: The Psychology of Punitive Damages” (Kahneman, et al, 1998); “Assessing Punitive Damages” (Sunstein, et al, 1998); “Probabilistic Insurance” (Thaler, et al, 1997); “Preference Reversals” (Thaler & Tversky, 1990).

when Sunstein and Thaler published *Nudge* together, they did not invoke the rational-man standard.

Instead of the rational-man standard as the yardstick for rational judgments, Thaler and Sunstein shifted away from designations of rationality and irrationality and towards self-established norms. By invoking ‘that which you would want after reflecting on the problem’ as the norm by which they judge actual decision Thaler and Sunstein avoid the issue of rationality and are able to focus on offering practical advice for people to use in guiding their own practice. By focusing on our own reflective desires as the yardstick of rationality Thaler and Sunstein are not suggesting a model of rationality that is, like the rational-man standard, unrealistic about our mental resources and the amount of time we have to solve problems. Instead, they suggest that norms of rationality are quite self-evident when one is somewhat removed from the situation. There will certainly be times when our intuitions are wrong about the outcomes or consequences of certain decisions, but if shown the empirical evidence that undercuts our intuitions we will, in most cases according to the Thaler/Sunstein model, recognize our own decisions to be problematic. Emotions and other factors play important roles in our decision-making, thus it may be necessary to judge ourselves only after we have a bit of distance from the situation.

Thaler and Sunstein’s discussion of research results without reliance on the concepts of rationality and irrationality suggest that it is possible to articulate results without these problematic concepts. Gigerenzer and his colleagues, on the other hand, have taken the notion of god-like rationality out of the theoretical and experimental side of the science. Together these examples illustrate several things about the relationship

between Rorty's philosophy and science. First, it suggests that Rorty's political arguments about which values we should hold as a society can be separated from his arguments about truth and representation; the latter can then be utilized within scientific investigation to criticize current practices and propel scientific investigation forward. This is what, I argue, Gigerenzer is doing in cognitive psychology.⁴⁵ Second, these examples illustrate that the call to rid society of the vocabulary of absolutism and foundationalism may not be so radical. After all, scientific practice seems like the kind of practice that most needs foundationalist and absolutist premises to function well, and if science can function well without these premises, it might signal of what is to come in society in general.

This research undercuts the traditional model of human rationality used in epistemology because traditional epistemology rides piggyback on the idea of a universal context-free reasoning ability. More recent fallibilist epistemologies might also be undercut by research, such as Gigerenzer's, that suggests our reasoning ability is both context and *content* dependent. Fallibilist epistemologies will be undercut so long as they fail to recognize the content-dependent nature of human reasoning. Finally, these examples suggest that, even without foundationalism, there is still philosophical work to be done. Philosophers are in prime positions to contribute to conversations about which norms we should be using to compare to human cognition provided that they are

⁴⁵ Ultimately, the work of Gigerenzer, Tversky and Kahneman ended up in quite similar spots. Tversky and Kahneman developed an approach called prospect theory that models decision-making under uncertain conditions. Prospect theory brought Tversky and Kahneman closer to Gigerenzer than any of the three would probably want to admit. My use of the dispute between the two groups of researchers was to illustrate the point that scientists might be able to move away from using absolutist and foundationalist research assumption.

equipped to understand the specific contexts and content of the case at hand. This is the idea of applied philosophy.

Conclusion

In this thesis, I have argued that Rorty is questioning the value and priority we place on science, rather than condemning it. The previous chapter illustrates how scientists can use a Rortyan critique of foundationalism and absolutism to evaluate the norms they utilize in judging human cognition. Rorty's argument to value literature and justice more than we currently can be separated from his philosophical condemnation of truth as correspondence. By separating these two arguments that Rorty makes, it is easier to see his philosophical stance as less radical than some suggest it to be.

By looking at Rorty's public/private distinction as something that allows him to focus on the importance of self-creation, we were able to see Rorty as a proponent of the private rather than an opponent of the public. Rorty continued James's work of recognizing the importance of personal pursuits as often differing from the inquiry that Peirce focused on. So, although Rorty does give us a picture of a public vocabulary that does not fully recognize the ability of science to give us tools for self-creation and solidarity, we can dismiss this oversight as an over-correction on his part. Surely science is valuable, but perhaps we, as individuals and as members of a society, have failed to adequately value other aspects of our human experience.

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